

Cross-Cultural Trends in the Development of Contemporary Illustration Design

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Abstract

Illustration design has evolved, moving beyond traditional drawing to emphasize decoration, flexibility, and diverse elements. It serves as a key information medium, expressing emotions and inner desires. Integrating high-tech and traditional forms, contemporary cutting-edge illustration is subversive, catering to modern consumption needs. Blending traditional Chinese essence with modern visuals, it boasts urban vitality and aesthetic appeal, driving innovation in Chinese and global illustration.

Keywords: illustration, illustration characteristics, cutting-edge illustrations, artistic illustrations, applied research

1. Introduction

Globalization drives illustration artists to integrate traditional Chinese cultural elements into works, spreading Chinese charm. Contemporary illustration features diversification and cross-border integration, with the Internet and social media enabling its global dissemination. Cross-cultural cooperation between Chinese and international artists boosts mutual learning and China's cultural influence, endowing illustration with vitality.

As a time-honored art, illustration is widely applied in e-commerce, film posters, packaging, etc., thanks to its functionality, artistic charm, and appeal. A representative of popular culture, it uses color as a key emotional communication tool—color evokes varied perceptions based on audience backgrounds, enhancing visual appeal and helping create personalized works.

Studying color-based emotional expression enriches illustration theory and practice. Color, a core artistic language, conveys inner emotions, as traditional paintings do. By analyzing color's traits and integrating multiple disciplines, this research explores its emotional role in illustrations, summarizing application methods. Illustrations bridge artists and audiences, with emotional resonance central to their value, facilitating cultural, educational, and commercial communication.

1.1 Research Background

Technological advancement has made digital media and the Internet key channels for illustration dissemination, enabling real-time global interaction between artists and audiences. Contemporary illustration exhibits diversity and globalization, with artists blending cultural backgrounds with global trends to create cross-cultural works that resonate universally. Art exhibitions and international exchanges further support its dissemination, fostering an open, inclusive landscape for global art cooperation.

Since the 21st century, economic and digital development has enriched illustration's carriers, forms, and functions—extending beyond simple explanation to cultural communication and commercial applications. As a core visual communication art, it spans cultural, social, and film/television fields, with color as a pivotal emotional language. Colors evoke specific feelings (e.g., red for excitement, blue for calm), helping audiences

grasp creative content.

Integrating design and painting, modern illustration pursues profound emotional expression. Color emotion, uniting art and technology, is vital for audience resonance and artistic value. However, research on color-based emotional expression in illustration remains scarce, forming the core focus of this thesis.

1.2 Research Current Situation

Contemporary illustration design presents multi-level and diversified cross-cultural communication trends, with digital media and online platforms expanding its global dissemination channels. Cross-cultural cooperation enables artists to integrate local elements with international trends, promoting cultural exchange, while art institutions and exhibitions provide vital display platforms, fostering an open and inclusive artistic landscape.

China's illustration development has advanced but lags behind other industries, with scarce systematic research on color emotional expression—most studies are foreign translations or focus on form analysis. In contrast, foreign illustration (e.g., in the UK, US, Japan) is mature, integrated into daily life, and offers creators ample creative freedom.

Domestic research covers diverse technical and application areas but lacks depth in color and emotion. Relevant theories from Chinese painting, art culture, and other design fields provide partial references, highlighting the need for targeted exploration of color's emotional role in illustration.

1.3 Research Significance

Art touches people because creators infuse sincere emotions—emotional connotation is art's core. Excellent illustrations satisfy spiritual needs and resonate with audiences. Color, a vital emotional expression tool, builds immersive atmospheres, enhancing works' appeal and enabling soulful communication between creators and audiences.

Contemporary illustration's cross-cultural spread is significant: it fosters cultural exchange by blending local elements with global trends, expands art dissemination via digital media, and drives creative innovation through international cooperation. As material living improves, public spiritual and cultural demands grow, making illustration a key medium for cultural transmission and spiritual enrichment.

2. General Description of the Research

Keywords: illustration, illustration characteristics, cutting-edge illustrations, artistic illustrations, applied research

Purpose: to explicate cross-cultural trends in the development of contemporary illustration design.

Objectives of the research:

- 1) to delineate key stages in the development of contemporary illustration design;
- 2) to characterize major artistic ideals of contemporary illustration design and their interdependence;
- 3) to outline the main cross-cultural trends in the evolution of contemporary illustration design;
- 4) to give practical recommendations on the professional expertise of illustration design artists in the 21st century.

Research object — Chinese-Belarusian illustration artwork.

Research subject — Cross-cultural trends in the development of contemporary illustration design.

Research methods: literature research method, comparative analysis, artwork comparative analysis method, and functional analysis.

Researchers' individual contributions:

Ethical analysis shows the illustration market's segmentation and cultural heritage in design. Continuous accumulation, learning and practice deepen understanding of its cultural exchange. Empirical research highlights life elements and commercial techniques—commercial application best facilitates public acceptance and cultural dissemination.

Description of the work structure:

The master's thesis consists of an abstract, an introduction, an overview of the work, three chapters, a conclusion and references. The full text of the paper has a total of 23 pages, including 22 pages of main text, 1 pages of references, including 15 English materials, 18 Chinese materials, and 40 illustrations (40 pictures), which are used for the practical application of the results of the paper.

3. Defining Contemporary Illustration Design

Illustration is an art form with a long history, and it occupies an extremely important position in the field of art.

Times are constantly progressing and developing, and illustration is also constantly seeking new opportunities.

3.1 Concept of Modern Illustration

The Western term “illustration” derives from Latin “illustratio”, meaning “to illuminate” — adding interest to dull text to make content vivid (Melard N., 2010, p. 5). The “Chuan Dictionary of Illustration” narrowly defines it as pictures in booklets for supplementary explanation or appreciation (XING Qinghua, 2011, p. 42; FU Ren, 2016, p. 14).

With diverse modern media, illustration carriers have expanded to posters, packaging, films, and mobile interfaces, evolving into an independent art form that emphasizes medium-carrier harmony, rich visuals, and information.

Digital and Internet technologies, along with cultural and creative industry growth, have broadened its definition. Modern illustration is an active artistic language—transforming content into visualized images with aesthetic individuality, combining practicality and artistic appeal while conveying emotional connotations (Zhang Xiaoxi, 2015, p. 44–46).

A cross-border art, it shares painting techniques with pure art but is purposeful and printable. The two can overlap: Van Gogh’s “Wheat Field” can function as an illustration when paired with relevant text (Ibernathy Martin, 2000, p. 78).

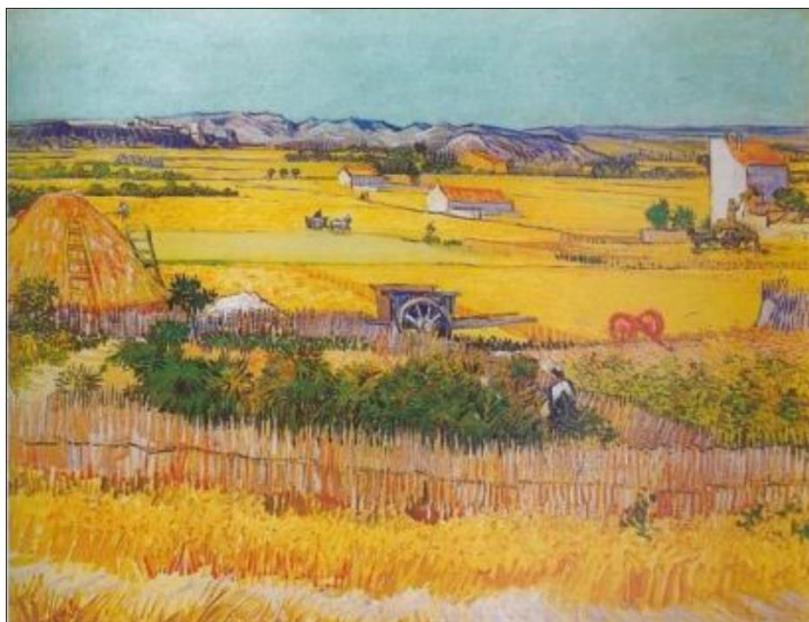


Figure 1. The Harvest oil painting

Source: <https://www.amazon.ca/Oil-Painting-Canvas-landscape-Glendening/dp/B0CQW35VXT>

To summarize, in contemporary times, illustration is broadly defined as a relatively independent image that expresses the information and connotation it wants to express in the form of digital technology, painting, photography, graphic symbols and so on, with information dissemination, enhancement and auxiliary illustration as its main functions.

3.2 The Origin, Development and Transformation of Chinese Illustrations

Illustration’s roots trace to primitive rock paintings—intertwined with drawing and writing’s origins (LISK, 2016, p. 20). China’s 7,000-year-old General Cliff petroglyphs (Figure 2) served religious sacrifices (Ke Shanshan, 2012, p. 62), reflecting primitive reverence for nature.



Figure 2. Petroglyphs of General Cliffs in Lianyungang City, Jiangsu Province

Source: https://www.bradshawfoundation.com/china/vanishing_civilization/index.php

As society developed, text took shape—though pictures and text remained closely linked, forming China's "picture-text" book tradition. Illustrations emerged early on silk documents, complementing text (Lian Yang, 2012, p. 17). The Qin Dynasty "Ri Shu" (1975 Yunmeng unearthed) has divination illustrations (Ogle TV., 2013, p. 22), while Changsha's pre-Qin silk painting (earliest found) features 12 vivid divine figures, showing early illustration styles (Figure 4).



Figure 3. The Book of Days

Source: "History of Ancient Chinese Illustrations" p. 13.

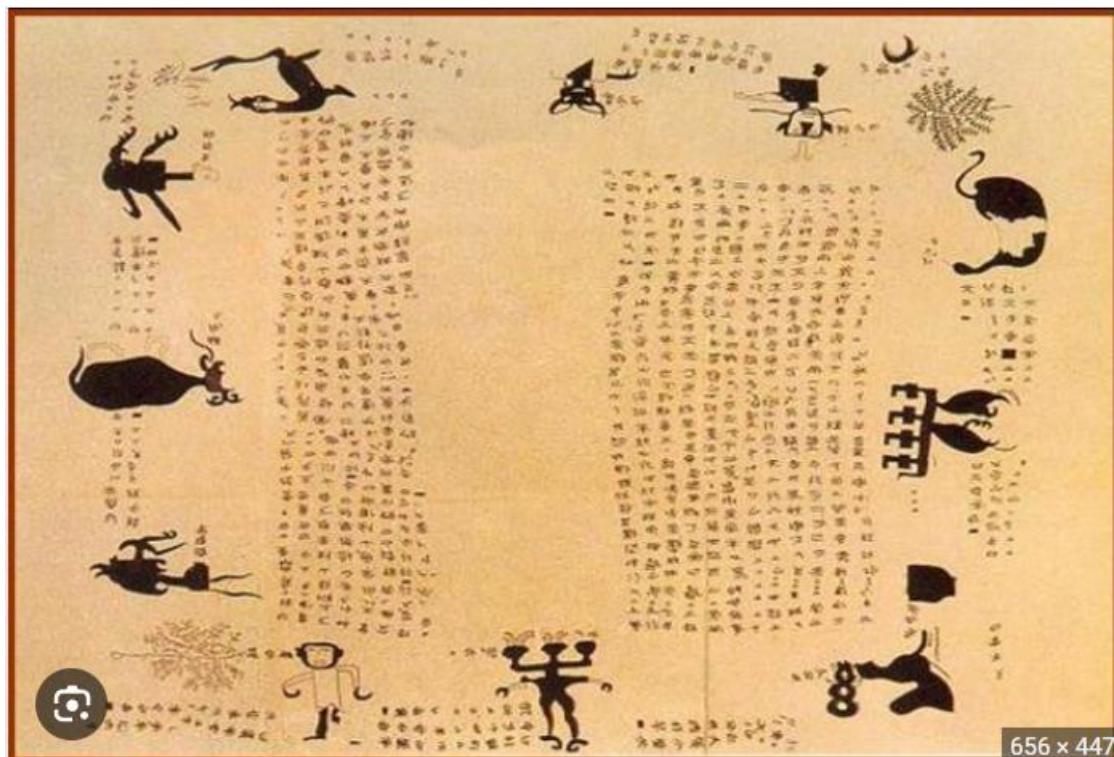


Figure 4. Portrait on Palau

Source: <http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/>

The 1st century B.C. saw paper's emergence, facilitating writing and drawing and ushering in paper books. Buddhist scripture illustrations, preserving to this day, intuitively propagated Buddhist ideas. Buddhism's spread also fostered Tang Dynasty engraved illustrations (Feng Zikai, 2010, p. 22).

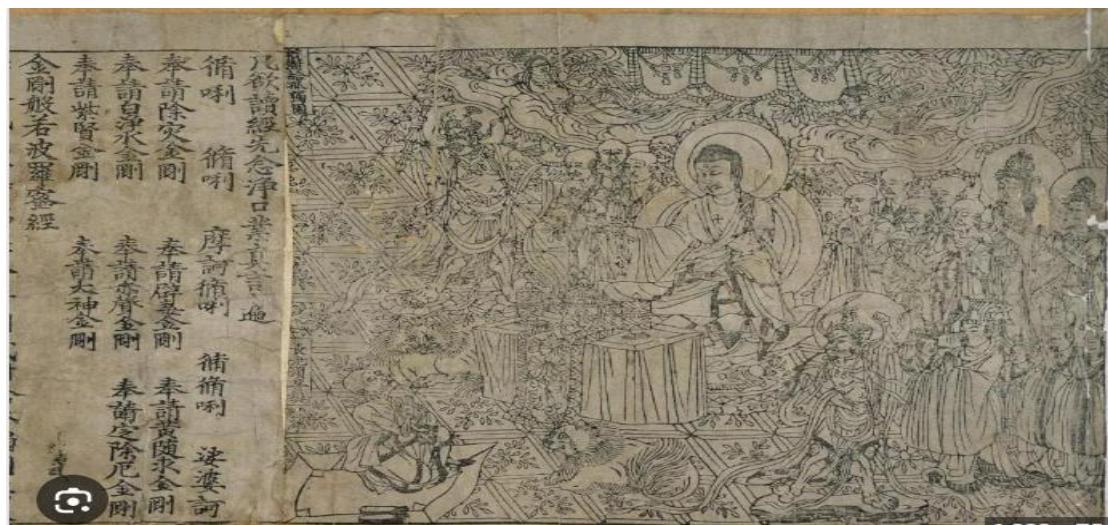
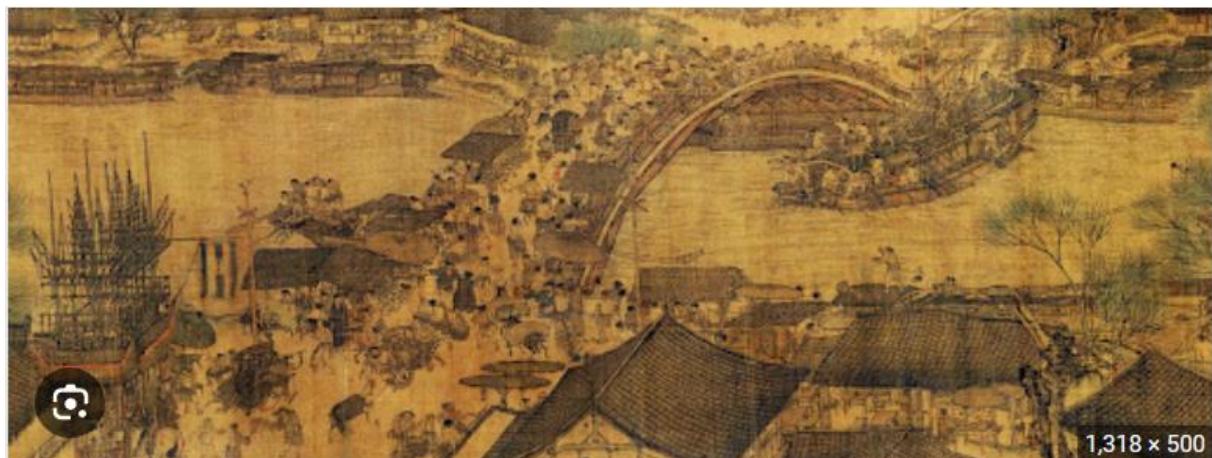


Figure 5. Title Page Painting "The Garden of Giving Solitude in Gion" from Vajra Prajnaparamita

Source: <http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/>

The title page of the Vajrayana Paramita, "The Garden of Giving Loneliness in Gion" (Figure 5), is the earliest known engraved illustration, which has a grand layout and sparse lines, which shows that the engraving and printing technology was already very maturely used in illustration at that time (Li Jie, 2014, p. 60).

Figure 6. *Qingming Shanghe Tu*

Source: <http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/>



Figure 7. The white rabbit pounding medicine on the copper plate of a printed advertisement for the Liu Family Kung Fu Needle Shop

Source: <http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/>

Beyond religious themes, Song-Yuan illustrations were widely used in history, medical, novel and opera books, reflecting social culture (e.g., *Qingming Shanghe Tu*, Figure 6). Northern Song commercial illustrations emerged, such as the Liu Family Kung Fu Needle Shop's copperplate ad with a rabbit pounding medicine (Figure 7), fulfilling information dissemination functions.

Ming's mid-to-late commercial boom brought illustration to its peak, with regional schools like the grand Jinling School (Figure 8) and delicate Weipai School (Figure 9). Late Qing saw Western copperplate/lithography (enhancing reproduction and color) and Japanese "korobo" printing (achieving halo/reality effects, e.g., "Qing Palace Treasures Face Beauty", Figure 10), aligning Chinese illustration with international standards (B&T, p. 72; Abe Yoro, 2013, p. 57].



Figure 8. Illustration of the Jinling School



Figure 9. Illustration of the Hui School

Source: <http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/>



Figure 10. Qing Palace Treasures Face Beauty

Source:

<https://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-cn/%E6%B9%96%E5%8C%97%E7%9C%81%E5%8D%9A%E7%89%A9%E9%A6%86>

In modern times, post-WWI China saw a brief boom in national industry, deepening illustration's ties to commerce. Trading ports introduced Western paintings and art education, with illustration influenced by Art Deco—featuring strong decoration and commercial colors. Representative were Shanghai's early-20th-century monthly billboard ads by Zheng Mantuo (e.g., *Evening Makeup*, Figure 11), Hang Chih-Ying, etc., depicting beauties and scenic spots via Western-integrated techniques. Used to promote cigarettes, cosmetics, etc. (e.g., Shanghai Sino-French Pharmacy, Figure 12), these illustrations drove a thriving commercial art scene.



Figure 11. Evening Makeup illustration Figure 12. Republican advertising illustration

Source: https://cul.jschina.com.cn/tpgs/202307/t20230719_3251393.shtml

Influenced by Western advanced ideas, progressive youth explored artistic possibilities, with woodcut paintings becoming a key medium for progressive/revolutionary thought. Featuring strong ethnic traits, simple bold colors, and text integration, they were widely used in revolutionary literary works, boosting idea dissemination.



Figure 13. Illustration of *The Real Story of Ah-Q* Figure 14. Illustration of *The Diary of a Madman*
Source: https://cul.jschina.com.cn/tpgs/202307/t20230719_3251393.shtml

Lu Xun, leader of the emerging woodcut movement, promoted print illustrations in his books. Works like *The Real Story of Ah-Q* (Figure 13) and *The Diary of a Madman* (Figure 14) use woodblocks vividly, complementing literature to shape images and convey ideas.

Figure 15. *Lights in Yan'an*

Source: https://cul.jschina.com.cn/tpgs/202307/t20230719_3251393.shtml

Figure 16. Illustration of *Water Margin*

Source: https://cul.jschina.com.cn/tpgs/202307/t20230719_3251393.shtml

Post-WWII, illustration entered a new phase as painters responded to the “serve politics, workers, peasants, and soldiers” policy, creating works with strong political overtones and revolutionary educational significance. Comic strips, a popular illustration form, were widely embraced—featuring diverse themes from folk tales to revolutionary deeds. Zhao Hongben’s works like *Lights of Yan'an* (Figure 15) and *Water Margin* (Figure 16) exemplified this, enriching spiritual life while inheriting traditional painting and theater techniques for vivid expression, which can better serve the storyline (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Traditional Drama Comic Strip

Source: https://cul.jschina.com.cn/tpgs/202307/t20230719_3251393.shtml

Contemporary Chinese illustration boasts new characteristics and wide application. Evolving with society, it carries era-specific traits in theme, style and technique, balancing interpretive function with high artistry while reflecting social life, artistic trends and printing technology. Creators should explore more possibilities amid modern development.

3.3 The Development History of Foreign Illustration Art

Foreign illustrations originated in Europe, initially used in religious books—e.g., the 13th-century “Clay and Gold Decorated Codex” (Figure 18) with exquisite borders. The 15th-century Gutenberg Bible (Figure 19) advanced book illustration via metal type printing. The 16th-century Renaissance popularized Classical style, exemplified by Albrecht Dürer. 17th-century Japan’s ukiyo-e (Figure 20) uses five colors, while Belarusian nesting dolls (Figure 21) symbolize happiness and peace.



Figure 18. Clay and gold decorated Manuscript

Source: <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/books/rarebooks/beginners-guide-to-medieval-manuscripts>



Figure 19. Gutenberg Bible

Source: <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/books/rarebooks/beginners-guide-to-medieval-manuscripts>



Figure 20. Ukiyo-e Prints “Edo Customs

Source: Scroll <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/128211920630133945/>



Figure 21. Typical Belarusian nesting dolls

Source: <https://matryoshkaby.com/5201>

From the mid-late 19th century to the 1950s, U.S. illustration entered a golden age, with outstanding artists like Thomas Nast (social critique) and Maxfield Parrish (romantic, pure works). America's diversity enriched illustration themes, laying a cultural foundation for its prosperity. Japanese illustration later integrated Western modern techniques with ukiyo-e aesthetics, forming a stylish, oriental-influenced art style.

3.4 Summary

Illustration's historical evolution ties to social, economic, cultural and technological progress. Now widely used, it broadens horizons, enriches knowledge and inspires creativity. Modern illustration inherits and develops traditional meanings, with creators breaking old constraints to innovate and thrive.

4. The Role of Cross-Cultural Communication in Contemporary Illustration Design

China's time-honored illustration art boasts era-specific styles, with advantages of popular representation, modern decoration and nationalized connotation. Similar to art packaging (with special aesthetic needs), this chapter explores its application status, value, design language and solutions in art packaging.

4.1 Current Application Status of Contemporary Chinese Style Illustrations in Cultural Packaging

With the development of the country's political economy, Chinese people have become more culturally confident and are more and more respected for designs related to Chinese style. Currently, using contemporary Chinese style illustrations as design elements has become a popular trend in the art packaging design market.



Figure 22. Illustrations of Baiguangchao Sanshenghua three-color leather oil control series

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Domestic old art brands now showcase their history and cultural heritage instead of imitating foreign packaging. Pechoin's Sanshenghua series uses Shanghai-style girl illustrations, blending Republic of China calendar ads with modern tech to reflect timeless brand charm.

4.2 The Application Value of Contemporary Chinese Style Illustrations in Cultural Packaging

Art packaging, as a close brand touchpoint, must prioritize emotional resonance with consumers—contemporary Chinese-style illustrations are key to this connection. They stimulate national emotions by aligning with the cultural psychological structure of new-generation consumers, who favor their modern, diverse expressions over traditional illustrations, fostering emotional affinity and purchase desire.

These illustrations also cater to younger women's pursuit of novelty and individuality, matching their diverse social identities and self-pleasing consumption needs. With material abundance, consumers now value spiritual satisfaction and unique identity, making cultural connotation a core purchase factor. Drawing on China's 5,000-year cultural heritage, these illustrations enrich packaging connotation and elevate brand value, as seen in Kating's "Spring River Flowers on a Moonlit Night" inspired packaging (Figures 23–24), which stands out with

unique personality.

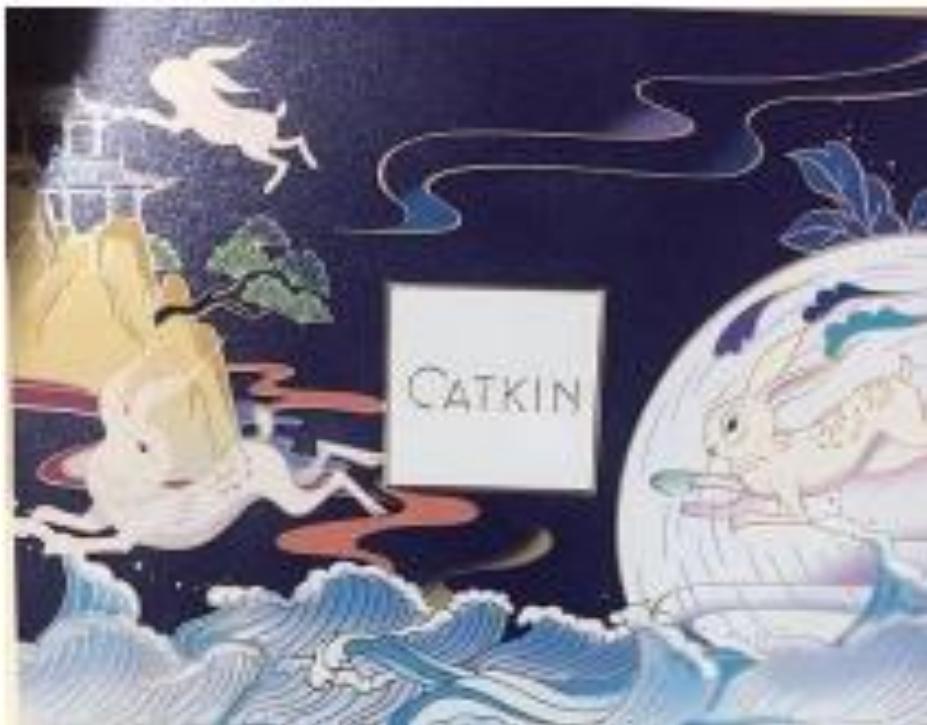


Figure 23. Kating Ting Sha White Eyeshadow Palette

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>



Figure 24. Kating Yulongyue Eyeshadow Palette

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations, with inherent artistic and aesthetic value, effectively enhance art packaging's aesthetic appeal by bringing emotional pleasure—defined as aesthetic value (Jeffrey Veen, 2003, p. 28). They inherit and innovate traditional painting styles, embodying Confucianism-Buddhism-Taoism-influenced Chinese aesthetics that pursue “unity of nature and man”, harmony,

simplicity, and implicit artistic conception. Meanwhile, their popularity, interestingness, and diverse expressions cater to market-oriented public aesthetics. For example, the Forbidden City's "Bamboo Forest Qingyin" hand cream (Figure 25) integrates the traditional "Bamboo Crane Picture" (Figure 26) with modern computer painting, balancing tradition and modernity to meet contemporary aesthetic needs.



Figure 25. Illustration of Forbidden City Bamboo Forest Hand Cream

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>



Figure 26. Bamboo Crane Picture

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

4.3 The Design Language of Contemporary Chinese Style Illustrations in Cultural Packaging

Artwork packaging design reflects the aesthetic needs and emotional values of different eras, with contemporary Chinese-style illustrations holding unique application significance. This section analyzes their design language in three aspects: subject matter, composition, and color, using case studies.

For theme selection, designers should draw from Chinese cultural resources to balance cultural dissemination and brand value enhancement. Based on Cheng Yong and Ruoyin's "Chinese Elements" classification, seven themes are summarized: traditional calligraphy and painting, architecture, literature, auspicious mascots, folk customs, characters, and contemporary Chinese life. Traditional calligraphy and painting, as a core theme, is applied in two ways: modern retouching and subtle adjustments of original works, or modern re-creation for packaging.



Figure 27. Forbidden City Eye Shadow Palette

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>



Figure 28. Kesi Sui Chao Figure Scroll

The Forbidden City Hexi Jue Color Eyeshadow Palette (Figure 27), inspired by the ancient "Scroll of Silk Sui Dynasty" (Figure 28), simplifies visuals for modern packaging. It inherits the original's artistic value to enhance classical appeal, enabling wider dissemination of the artwork and balancing brand and cultural communication.



Figure 29. Yunshan Shenxiu set box

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>



Figure 30. Yunshan Shenxiu gift box

Another way to refine traditional calligraphy and painting themes is original creation—e.g., Yunshan Shenxiu Series Box Set, which draws on traditional green landscape techniques, integrates computer painting and gold/silver hot stamping to show mountain continuity (Figures 29–30). Traditional architecture, a cultural treasure, is applied as whole attractions (e.g., Kating’s “Dream Chang’an” with Daming Palace) or partial elements (e.g., Rudixia’s Forbidden City red walls, peonies), using flat style for rich, orderly visuals (Figure 31).



Figure 31. Door and window illustration box

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

China’s time-honored literary works feature abstract descriptions of creatures, landscapes and characters—these provide eternal creative space for contemporary Chinese-style illustrations, which sublimate artwork packaging connotation through concrete re-creation. For example, Dai Chunlin integrates *Classic of Mountains and Seas*’s fantasy elements into mask packaging (Figure 32), while Guyu visualizes *A Dream of Red Mansions*’ Twelve Hairpins (Figure 33), both deepening cultural connotations.



Figure 32. Illustrations from *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Left)

Figure 33. The Twelve Golden Hairpins in *A Dream of Red Mansions* (Right)

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Auspicious mascot themes in art packaging blend decorative beauty with strong symbolism, uniting visual appeal with profound Chinese cultural connotations. They carry blessings and deepen packaging's cultural depth—dragons/phoenixes for auspiciousness, peonies for wealth, clouds/water for good luck, cranes for longevity, all familiar from generational inheritance. Kating's Summer Palace series uses “a hundred birds paying homage to the phoenix” (phoenix as main, surrounded by butterflies, peonies, auspicious clouds), embodying tradition and elegance (Figure 34).



Figure 34. Illustration of auspicious birds and phoenix

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations share composition aesthetic standards with traditional Chinese painting. Xie He's “operating position” (from “Six Methods”) emphasizes composition's significance, with its diverse methods aligning with Western formal beauty, guiding vivid art packaging composition.

(1) Guest of honor

In art, the subject is the core content/idea, and the object sets it off—Wang Wei emphasized this in “Landscape Theory”. Contemporary Chinese-style packaging illustrations also need this layout to highlight the focus. For example, Pechoin's mask packaging centers a Republic of China cheongsam woman, with flowers/architecture as the object, ensuring clear visual communication.



Figure 35. Pechoin Sanshenghua series illustrations

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes density contrast — “sparse enough for horses to run, dense enough for no air to pass”. Kating’s Summer Palace oil-controlling powder packaging illustrates this: dense peacock feathers, trunks and flowers contrast with left-side blank space, creating rhythmic, relaxing visuals (Figure 36).



Figure 36. Kating Summer Palace series oil control powder packaging

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

The virtual and real, a unity of opposites, complement each other as “Hua Tsuen” notes—this unique Chinese painting aesthetic enhances picture artistic conception by contrasting obscurity (virtual) and prominence (real). Kating’s isolation makeup primer packaging uses it: detailed close/middle shots contrast with ethereal distant sky/mountains, infusing traditional beauty.

Symmetry, a primal visual experience, embodies Chinese yin-yang balance and pursuit of perfection. Flexible symmetrical composition in art packaging ensures visual balance and cultural dissemination. Kating’s Qingpingle gift box symmetrically places contemporary Q-version ancient figures along the central axis with varied decorations, blending stability, interest and packaging structure (Figure 37).

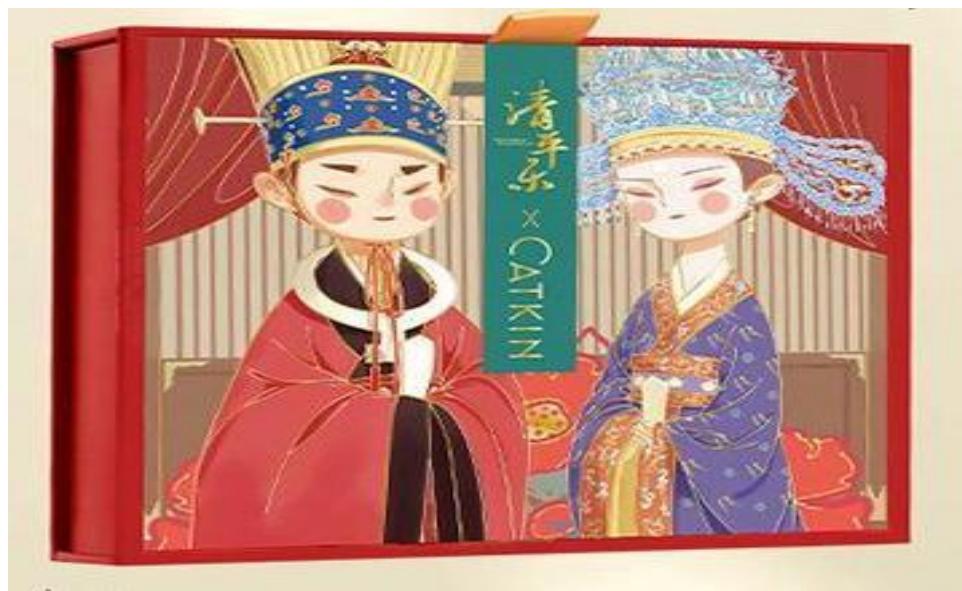


Figure 37. Illustration of symmetrical structure

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Symmetry, a natural primitive visual experience, is a core Chinese aesthetic rooted in architecture, utensils and paintings. It embodies yin-yang balance philosophy and the pursuit of perfection, as noted by Vienna School's Li Geer. Flexible symmetrical composition in art packaging ensures visual balance and cultural dissemination — Kating's Qingpingle gift box symmetrically places contemporary Q-version ancient figures with varied decorations, blending stability, interest and packaging structure (Figure 38).



Figure 38. Chinese illustration of blank space

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Contemporary Chinese-style art packaging illustrations select colors by two core means: first, fully utilize the traditional five colors (red, yellow, green, black, white) with profound cultural connotations and symbolic meanings, inheriting five-thousand-year cultural accumulation. Second, combine modern color concepts—based on RGB/CMYK systems and HSB elements, adjust hue, brightness, and purity on traditional color foundations. Meanwhile, leverage color contrast and brightness to cater to collective psychological feelings, balancing tradition and modern aesthetics.

4.4 Application Problems and Solution Strategies of Contemporary Chinese Style Illustrations in Cultural Packaging

Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations in art packaging face problems like serious homogenization (blind imitation of classic elements leading to consumer fatigue), disorderly element stacking, lack of brand visual integrity (inconsistent styles/colors in series), and outdated designs.

Solutions: First, create distinctive illustrations by digging deep into diverse Chinese cultural themes beyond common elements, combining brand features for innovation. Second, simplify designs to highlight core themes, aligning with traditional “simplicity conveys richness” aesthetics. Third, build a systematic illustration system, unifying style and color to form a complete brand image, avoiding short-term “national trend” gimmicks.

4.5 New Trends in the Application and Development of Contemporary Chinese Style Illustrations in Cultural Packaging

In recent years, the art market has become saturated in traditional functional areas while expanding its user base via emerging media, driving demand for personalized, detailed artworks and market segmentation. Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations must adapt accordingly.

For functional breakdown, artworks now have refined functions (e.g., skin-type-specific or whitening/repairing masks). Illustrations need to align with product functions, with subtle design differences. Nature Hall's Himalayan masks, for instance, use distinct Tibetan female illustrations for four functions under a unified Chinese theme, enhancing visual richness.



Figure 39. Himalaya series illustrations

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

This thesis investigates cross-cultural trends in contemporary illustration design, centering on Chinese-Belarusian works. It outlines illustration's definition, development, and application in cultural packaging—including design language, homogenization issues, and solutions. Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations enhance emotional resonance, packaging connotation, and aesthetics, with new trends in functional, crowd, and situational segmentation. The study analyzes cross-cultural illustration characteristics and aesthetics, identifies Sino-foreign development gaps, and suggests talent cultivation to advance cultural communication and brand value.



Figure 40. Perfect Diary Taojin Siheyuan Eyeshadow Palette

Source: <http://www.zcool.com/>

Perfect Diary's Taojin Siheyuan New Year eye shadow palette (Figure 40) uses symmetrical overhead composition. Its front features red walls, yellow lights and white snow (echoing the product's reddish brown tone), while the back shows family reunion, embodying a prosperous and peaceful New Year atmosphere.

4.6 Summary

Both China and Belarus have a long history of illustration art, with commercial illustration concepts and auctioned artist works. Driven by social economy, commercial illustrations integrate artistry and commerciality. Designers should follow market segmentation, accumulate art, and match Chinese-style illustrations with art

packaging.

5. Cross-Cultural Development of Artistic Ideals in Contemporary Illustration Design

5.1 Characteristics of Chinese Contemporary Cross-Cultural Illustration Design Art

(1) Contemporaneity and compatibility

Contemporary Chinese commercial illustrations feature distinct contemporaneity and compatibility. Contemporaneity is reflected in two aspects: technologically, digital tech and advanced printing have replaced labor-intensive traditional woodcuts, expanding communication channels; content-wise, they cover daily scenes, literary adaptations, and abstract futuristic works, mirroring and guiding eras' aesthetic trends. Compatibility lies in material selection—integrating traditional graphics and photos via digital processing—and coexistence with other art forms. Digital tools simulate oil painting, Chinese painting, and even surpass photography's realism, enabling unique artistic expression while adapting to the public.

(2) The unity of freedom and restriction

Contemporary commercial illustration features the unity of expressive freedom and thematic restriction. Unlike traditional pure painting—unrestricted and subjective—it is purposeful, mass-reproduced, and subordinate to specific objects, with utilitarian value as the core. Designers must balance “what to draw” (theme accuracy for customers/audiences) and “how to draw” (free expression via realistic/abstract/decorative styles, mixed art forms, or technologies like computer graphics). For example, “Blueberry Night” juice packaging, restricted to conveying freshness/health, uses hyper-realistic digital fruit portraits instead of banal photos. Success lies in balancing restrictions and creative breakthroughs, making it a dynamic field for diverse expression.

(3) Imagery and intuitiveness

Beyond freedom and restriction, contemporary commercial illustrations feature the unity of imagery and intuitiveness. Graphics—encompassing realistic, abstract, deformed forms, charts, and even text as supplements—excel at information dissemination, outperforming text. They visually explain abstract internal product features or complex content, saving lengthy textual descriptions. For example, sci-fi illustrations vividly convey “Star Wars” grandeur, letting audiences intuit the scenes. HP’s photo printer illustration shows black-and-white images turning into lifelike color photos via digital synthesis, enabling viewers to directly perceive product quality. This imagery-intuitiveness unity makes information clear and convincing.

(4) Combination of aesthetics and practicality

Contemporary commercial illustrations, a form of applied art, embody the unity of aesthetics (artistry) and practicality (commerce). Rooted in Stanler Jones' 1870 limit utility theory, they gain value through utility—conveying business information, stimulating consumption, and achieving publicity goals like corporate image-building. Mass production demands easy copying and concise content to control costs and meet popular needs, but aesthetics cannot be ignored.

Business restricts artistic expression yet hones designers' skills. Art and commerce are interdependent, not antagonistic—exemplified by Feng Xiaogang's films and Ding Shaoguang's paintings. Excellent commercial illustrations balance creativity (aligning with public aesthetics) and clarity (conveying product info), using intuitive graphic language to serve advertising themes while retaining artistic appeal.

(5) Make full use of modern technology and media

Historically, traditional illustrations were heavily restricted by printing/reproduction technologies (e.g., etching engravings), limiting detailed depictions and expression. Modern tech has freed contemporary Chinese commercial illustrations from such constraints. They've evolved from flat/static to dynamic, 3D, and integrated media forms, leveraging new technologies like multimedia and digital film. As a cross-disciplinary carrier, they reach the public via diverse media, boosting their development significantly.

(6) Connections and differences with traditional culture

Eastern and Western traditional cultural differences shape distinct illustration styles: Western works emphasize visual impact and fashion, while Chinese ones focus on cultural connotation, visual aesthetics, and tradition inheritance, rooted in Confucianism-Buddhism-Taoism philosophy.

Contemporary Chinese commercial illustrations, as digital art, differ from traditional art in three aspects: mass reproduction vs. unique originals, mechanical digital expression lacking affinity vs. vivid traditional techniques, and weak cultural roots vs. profound traditional heritage. Designers must explore traditional origins to enhance cultural connotation.

5.2 Aesthetic Characteristics of Contemporary Chinese Cross-Cultural Illustration Design Art

(1) Contemporary Chinese commercial illustrations prioritize public aesthetic taste as their core value, rooted in

studying consumer and aesthetic psychology to stand out in advertising. The public seeks spiritual and sensory pleasure, demanding novelty that drives faster style/tech updates than “serious art.” Beyond catering to public tastes, these illustrations also guide aesthetic trends through a cyclic “adaptation-guidance” process—adapting to evolving preferences (e.g., slim beauty ideals) and reinforcing new aesthetics. Timely due to media/creative tools, they emphasize dynamic public aesthetic shifts over eternal norms.

(2) Reflection of social aesthetic psychology

Public aesthetic orientation determines the content of contemporary Chinese commercial illustrations, which align with public aesthetic standards. These illustrations exhibit diverse aesthetic forms—eclectically integrating historical art styles like Art Deco and Surrealism, driven by an era advocating individuality and diverse public tastes. Audience differences in age, gender, and culture further enrich this diversity, requiring designers to study target groups.

Emphasizing sensory stimulation is crucial for attracting attention. Following William Bernbach’s insight, illustrations use vivid, intuitive visuals with bright colors and exaggerated shapes to stand out, prioritizing timeliness and commercial value over profound spiritual exploration.

They also reflect popular aesthetic psychology: the “beauty economy” dominates, with numerous female images catering to male aesthetics and women’s subconscious recognition of such standards. Additionally, illustrations depict idealized “surreal” middle-class lifestyles, offering audiences an imaginary escape from daily pressures and linking products to desired life concepts.

5.3 The Culture and Development of Commercial Illustrations

China lags behind countries like the US, Japan, and South Korea in contemporary commercial illustrations due to economic gaps, artists’ attitudes, low social awareness, and insufficient talent reserves.

Both China and Belarus have a long illustration history, evolving from religious print origins to integrating artistry and commerce, boosting publishing, postal, and packaging industries.

China’s contemporary commercial illustrations now thrive, driven by social-cultural shifts, economic growth, and digital tech. They balance formal freedom with commercial constraints, emphasizing intuitive expression, aesthetics, and practicality. Rooted in traditional art, they interact with public aesthetics, reflect social psychology, and focus on visual stimulation, catering to modern life and consumption needs.

5.4 Summary

Driven by the picture-reading era and digital tech, China’s contemporary commercial illustrations will evolve more diversely, professionally, and artistically through art-tech interaction. Talent cultivation is key for global competitiveness. Despite weak current illustration education, solutions include: colleges offering “commercial illustration” courses, introducing foreign professionals, hiring domestic teachers and veteran artists, and reforming traditional teaching to inspire creativity—all boosting talent development.

6. Conclusions

Chinese illustration art boasts a long history, with the ancient concept of “every book has pictures” deeply rooted. Evolving through centuries from the 15th-16th centuries to modern times, it originated from religious print illustrations, boosting publishing, postal, and packaging industries, and integrating artistry with commerciality amid social and economic development.

Contemporary Chinese-style illustrations feature diverse themes, expression methods, and styles. Their popularity stems from popular expression, decorative contemporaneity, and localized cultural connotations, holding great development potential in design. As a key element in art packaging, they significantly enhance packaging’s emotional resonance, connotation, and aesthetics, making their combination with art packaging an innovative and valuable practice.

This thesis analyzes the design language (theme, composition, color) and summarizes strategies (distinctiveness, systematicness) of contemporary Chinese-style illustrations in art packaging, enriching relevant theories and enhancing packaging’s cultural and brand value. Driven by contemporary social culture, commercial economy, and information technology, Chinese commercial illustrations now thrive, with growing market demand fueled by economic growth and advertising expansion, forming a mutually reinforcing relationship with commercial activities.

The integration of contemporary Chinese-style illustrations with art packaging is an inevitable trend, of profound significance for cultural dissemination and artwork branding. It is anticipated that they will be applied more widely in the future, evolving new styles and trends to further promote Chinese culture.

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