



## A Comparative Study of Traditional Chinese and Malaysian Auspicious Motifs

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### Abstract

In order to make a comparative analysis of the common traditional cultural phenomena of the two countries, improve the understanding of the traditional pattern culture of the two countries, so as to conduct a cross-cultural perspective study, this paper collects, analyzes and compares the auspicious patterns of China and Malaysia through the method of literature research and observation. In the research, it is found that the traditional auspicious patterns of the two countries have cultural exchanges and commonalities in their modeling characteristics and aesthetics, and there are differences in the inheritance and utilization of each other. It has deep development value in the future era.

Keywords: Auspicious motifs, China, Malaysia

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### 1.0 Introduction

China and Malaysia belong to the same pluralistic countries, and there are frequently political, economic, trade, and cultural exchanges between the two countries. The close affinity between the two countries is also reflected in the motifs.

Auspiciousness is the most prominent theme in Chinese motifs. It expresses the Chinese people's desire for a better life, and they look forward to decorating all parts of their lives with things that foretell a better future. The Chinese are an important part of the Malaysian population, so they are no strangers to the cultural concept of auspiciousness. The art of Malaysian Chinese decoration has also taken on a new dimension as it has been gradually integrated into the Malaysian cultural matrix through ethnic intermingling. In addition, other ethnic groups in Malaysia also have a rich culture and beautiful patterns, such as the Islamic patterns, which also shine in multi-cultural Malaysia, and so on. The world is developing and interconnected at an unimaginable speed, and the development and utilization of traditional auspicious patterns is rooted in the traditional cultural genes of the two countries. On the way to the future development, the excavation of the traditional auspicious pattern culture, one of the traditional cultures, can enhance the cultural understanding and mutual trust between the two countries, and provide reference for future development and utilization.

### 2.0 Literature review

In China, research on motifs, especially auspicious motifs, has shown an upward trend between 1990 and 2022, with the majority of research on localized motifs, single motifs, and applications of motifs. The Malaysian academic community has also conducted multi-dimensional and multi-faceted research into the field of motifs, much of which has focused on the study and application of Islamic motifs and less on the study of other ethnic and content motifs. Such as *A Content Analysis of Malay Clothing in Malaysia* written by Hasma Ahmad & Rosita Mahd Tajuddin (2022). In the literature of Chinese traditional patterns, the relevant research on the use of traditional patterns is an important part of the research, such as Zhang Mengmeng's *The Application of Dong Traditional Dress Pattern in Shoes Design* (2023) and Feng Yixuan's *Cultural Symbols and Application Ideas of Li Ethnic Clothing Patterns: Taking Human and Animal*

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*Patterns as Examples* (2023). However, there are few discussions on Chinese traditional patterns in the study of cultural exchange and comparison. And to explore what can be learned from each other in terms of the preservation and use of traditional auspicious motifs to provide clues for the future development of traditional auspicious motifs. However, there is no research on the protection and utilization of traditional auspicious patterns from a cross-cultural perspective. See Fig. 1.

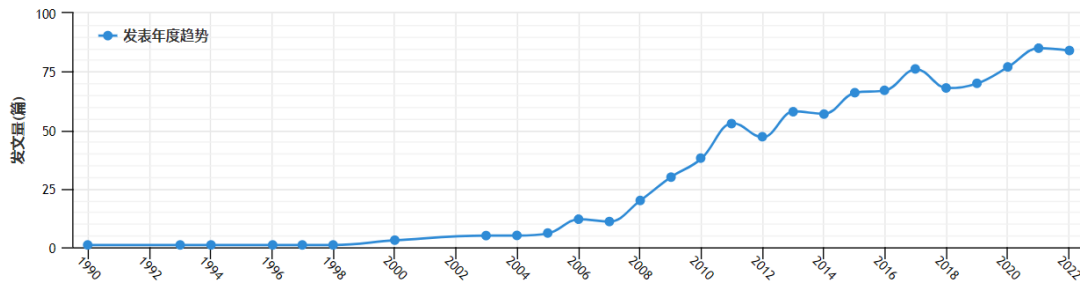


Fig. 1: Annual Publishing Trends in China  
(Source: CNKI)

### 3.0 Methodology

This paper mainly uses the literature method to sort out and compare the relevant literature of auspicious patterns in the two countries, and finds that the study of traditional auspicious patterns in the two countries lacks a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, with the corresponding research questions, field observation and collection of relevant materials of auspicious patterns were carried out in the local and museum of Kuala Lumpur and the local and museum of Shandong and Jilin provinces of China. Then it is sorted out and then compared and analyzed. This paper makes a comparative analysis of China and Malaysia from the aspects of cultural inheritance, protection path and cultural connotation, and finally makes a summary.

### 4.0 Findings

#### 4.1 An analysis of the similarities and differences between traditional Chinese and Malaysian motifs

##### 4.1.1 The all-encompassing pattern form of traditional Chinese motifs

The carriers to which traditional Chinese motifs are attached include architecture, horticulture, clothing, furniture, funerary objects, and almost everywhere else, so the stylistic characteristics of traditional Chinese motifs are naturally varied. Take, for example, the fish motifs. The fish motifs on the fish-patterned painted earthenware pots excavated from the Banpo site in Xi'an, China, show that the fish motifs on the painted earthenware were abstract summaries of real fish images using simple geometric figures. It reflects simplicity and naive interest due to the influence of people's low-production technology and simple tools at the time. During the Song dynasty, when fish-painted vessels became popular and were produced in large quantities, the patterns became vivid and graceful, with smooth and elegant curves and fuller shapes, reflecting the aesthetic level of the people of the time. By the time of the Ming and Qing dynasties in China, a wide variety of fish motifs can be seen on some porcelain, ranging from the bold and bold interweaving of dots and lines in Chinese ink painting to the delicate and dynamic forms found on exquisite royal porcelain.



Fig. 1: Fish patterns on China's Shandong Province porcelain and Jilin Province porcelain  
(Source: photoed by Pan Xiao)

In addition to being a symbol of good fortune in the life of the Han Chinese, Chinese fish motifs are also found in various forms among China's ethnic minorities. For example, the fish is the totem worshipped by the Chinese ethnic minorities, who live in a region rich in

water resources and where fish is the daily diet of the Shui people (An ethnic minority in China), who have an extraordinary affection and understanding of fish. The shape of the fish is not complex, but the Shui fish pattern shapes are sometimes exaggerated, abstract and refined, but sometimes quiet, forming a pattern around the centre. The evolution of the fish shape in traditional Chinese motifs can be seen to have been in a slow process of evolution over the long history of Chinese traditional motifs. The many different forms that emerge are a microcosm of the Chinese people's historical changes and aesthetic changes. The following figure shows the different examples of fish patterns in different regional periods through field observation in Shandong Province and Jilin Province. As shown in the Figure 2.

#### 4.1.2 Traditional Chinese motifs as a testimony to ethnic and religious integration

China is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, and this characteristic is also reflected in Chinese motifs.

In Shaolin Temple there is a picture called "The Three Religions", also known as "The Harmony", which reads: "Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are the same. The three religions have always been one ancestral style. The red lotus, the white root, and the green lotus leaf, the three religions are originally one." This figure and this poem illustrate the relationship between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in China. Later, because of their auspicious meaning and conformity to the spiritual core of Chinese family style, the three religions were also widely used in folklore, becoming a typical representative of traditional Chinese auspicious motifs of religious fusion and cultural fusion.

Uneven regional development facilitated population and cultural mobility. Many large-scale migrations have also contributed profoundly to cultural integration in China.

For example, from 1644, when the Qing government issued the Regulations on Recruiting and Reclamation of the People of Liaodong, to the following 200 years, the population of some provinces, mainly Shandong, went to the northeast in search of a new life due to the government's need to stabilize the frontier, the reduction of agricultural production in the Central Plains in successive years due to disasters, and the war, etc. They brought the culture and technology of the Central Plains to the northeast, inhabited by the Korean, Mongolian, and Manchu peoples. Some of the typical representatives of the Han patterns of the Central Plains, such as the lingzhi, dragon and phoenix, longevity, and fortune patterns, were widely used in the production and life of the Han and ethnic minorities in northeast China. The beautiful shapes of the Korean, Mongolian and Manchu costumes are embroidered with a mix of patterns that reflect the aesthetic characteristics of Han Chinese culture, such as "plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum".

There is also a clear cross-fertilization of ethnic motifs characteristic of the ethnic group. For example, the Korean Jindal-flower motif is mixed with representative motifs of other ethnic groups and the techniques and styles have changed due to this ethnic fusion.

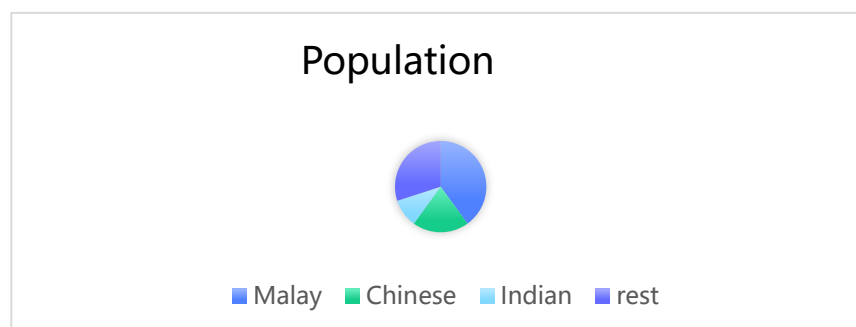
#### 4.1.3 The strong 'auspicious' meaning of traditional Chinese motifs

One of the origins of auspicious motifs is said to be the cult of fertility and the cult of gods. During the feudal period, divination became popular. During the Qin and Han dynasties, totems and paintings symbolizing good fortune were transformed into exquisite auspicious motifs, which can be found on silk, bronze and ceramic objects. Bats, deer, tigers, dragons and birds, especially the four sacred beasts: Green Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird and Xuanwu (In ancient Chinese legend, the four gods in charge of the four directions), are considered to be guardians who can bring good luck and bless peace, and are very common in lives. During the Wei and Jin dynasties, painting was incorporated into creating auspicious motifs. After the Han dynasty, cultural exchanges were facilitated by the interchange with foreign lands such as the West. Buddhism was introduced, bringing more creativity and novel shapes to the form of Chinese auspicious motifs. Works containing Buddhist teachings proliferated. The Sui and Tang dynasties were a high point in Chinese feudal culture and art development. As the ceramics and silk trade developed and porcelain and silk goods painted in bright colours and richness circulated the world, adding many exotic elements to the motifs to meet other countries' interests and aesthetics. By the Song dynasty, auspicious motifs were the most common theme in decorative work, and many religious elements were retired in favour of more realistic depictions of life scenes. The use and creation of auspicious motifs was at its height during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

### 4.2 Features of traditional Malaysian auspicious motifs

#### 4.2.1 The strong Islamic style of traditional Malaysian motifs

#### 4.2.2 A fusion of diverse motifs



Pie Chart1: Distribution of population in Malaysia

The Malay population is the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, with the Chinese accounting for 20%, the Indians for less than 10% and the rest for 30%. As the pie chart<sup>1</sup> shows. The majority of the population in Malaysia is of the Islamic faith, while others are of the Christian, Catholic, Hindu and Buddhist faiths. Malaysia is therefore a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. The Islamic style of motifs has survived and developed in a pluralistic environment for a long time, resulting in a fusion phenomenon. Because of the Chinese culture in Malaysia, traditional Chinese motifs can also be found in areas with a sizeable Chinese population. Because of the influence of Islamic culture, some Hindu forms of architectural decorations can be seen in the Islamic style.

#### 4.2.3 Botanical calligraphy and geometric figures

Allah is omnipresent and invisible is also reflected in the creation of motifs, as there are no figures or animals in the strict use of Islamic motifs, as there are no other idols to be worshipped in Islam but Allah. This article will briefly list the three typical types: botanical, calligraphic, and geometric patterns.

**Botanical motifs.** Islamic motifs in Malaysia will often see some use of local plants and, of course, some exotic plant styles, and there are also instances of both local and exotic styles being blended. Botanical motifs decorate various parts of life, including rice, lotus, curly grass, and flower head motifs.

**Calligraphic motifs.** Islamic calligraphy is one of the most essential forms of Islamic art. In the olden days, these texts were combined with botanical and sometimes geometric images, sometimes even converging with geometric patterns until they were indistinguishable. In contrast, the flora and fauna of plants were often combined with the texts to form free forms that imitated them in a beautiful and communicative way. The art of Islamic calligraphy has taken on various forms in different regions and historical periods. However, these scripts are relatively common in Malaysia: Kufic Script, Naskh Script, and Thuluth Script.

**Geometric patterns.** Islamic geometric patterns are full of the intersection of reason and sensuality, a beauty where imagination and the exploration of nature intersect. The beauty of Islamic art is a harmonious blend of inner and outer reflections. Each area is carefully decorated in a rounded way, without leaving any space untouched, giving a sense of continuity without clutter.

The auspicious motifs are undoubtedly the central theme of Chinese motifs. Because the Chinese have played a large role in the cultural integration of the cultural communities in Malaysia, the auspicious motifs have their own historical development track in Malaysia, with a Malaysian flavor. Moreover, it is worth noting that some of the botanical motifs that have symbolic significance in the overall Islamic style also have imagery that holds the aspirations of the Islamic faithful for a happy life and good fortune. Examples include the sacred tree, which is associated with the primitive belief in the abundance of sky and precipitation, or the idealized paradise (a hunting ground associated with the Persian culture of Payridze, later transformed into the Garden of Eden, the 'paradise on earth'). It shows that, despite the differences in expression and context, the desire for happiness and beauty is a common theme in the culture and art of both peoples.

## 5.0 Discussion

### 5.1 A comparative study of the current state of conservation of traditional auspicious motifs in China and Malaysia

Some phenomena were also found in the field observation. Nowadays, the importance attached to preserving traditional culture in China has increased considerably. There are various ways to register and collect endangered traditional motifs, combine modern technology to record specimens of motifs, and have relevant intangible cultural heritage systems and laws and regulations in place to protect them. Specific and innovative ways include revitalizing the cultural and creative industries, establishing key laboratories and key research and development projects in art disciplines, setting up new technology and technology majors, and enrolment catering to the needs of art development in the new era. Etc. All these initiatives have given the development of traditional auspicious motifs more room to survive and move forward. However, there are still many problems, such as the training of inheritors and the docking and utilization of future technologies.

Malaysia has always excelled in the conservation and use of motifs, as Islamic motifs themselves are one of the most important representatives of Islamic art. The overwhelming predominance of Islamic beliefs among the Malaysian population has allowed for the excellent circulation and use of Islamic motifs in Malaysia, allowing for the continued vitality and widespread use of this art form. Malaysia is a country of many ethnicities and religions, but its harmonious culture and national character have led to the integration and further development of the pattern. The use and flow of patterns in Malaysia is more prominent than in China and is used more intensively in various fields such as fabrics, architecture, and industrial design.

### 5.2 Exploring areas where traditional auspicious motifs can be further exploited

The inheritance and utilization of traditional patterns is still a crude exploitation of cultural resources, and many problems have arisen. Although auspicious patterns are widely used in various fields, their misuse affects the direction of cultural inheritance. Chinese traditional auspicious patterns are relatively prominent in this respect, but because of the firm belief in Islam, this phenomenon is obviously better in Malaysia, but in the penetration of modern culture and Western culture, Islamic patterns have also appeared some simplification or cultural integration. Patterns change slowly and slightly, but times change rapidly.

With the rapid development of digital art today, the creation space of digital art is an opportunity to develop decorative pattern art. Although human society is in a process of continuous development, the psychological theory of human reflection holds that human beings always have the behavior and desire to find their own origin, and the origin of human cultural attributes is an important topic for

human exploration. Therefore, the digitalization of traditional auspicious patterns and related creativity have broad space for development in the future digital space.

## 6.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

As can be seen from the comparison, due to the limited time and space for observation, this paper cannot see the whole picture of development. However, by comparing the collected information in the limited space, it can be seen that in the current period, Chinese traditional auspicious patterns show strong integration and diversity, while Malaysian auspicious patterns, mainly Islamic patterns, also show integration and diversity. The patterns of the two countries are standing among many cultures and times in the world with a more open and inclusive attitude. Traditional auspicious patterns are of great value in the future development of the two countries, and the protection and utilization of traditional auspicious patterns can be learned from and improved. In the new media of the future, it is also expected that there will be a new look that is more suitable for the future.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Through the cross-cultural study of patterns to promote the cultural exchanges between the two countries for reference. It provides ideas for the development and protection of pattern culture in the current era.

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