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Analysis of the Evolution of Chinese Buddhist Pattern Decoration Style

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Abstract: Buddhism has a history of thousands of years in China, and its emergence has influenced various aspects of Chinese society, including politics, history, art, and education. Buddhist decorations have evolved alongside the spread of Buddhism. However, Indian Buddhist decorative arts differ significantly from Chinese artistic conventions and aesthetic preferences. Therefore, during different periods, Chinese artisans have integrated traditional Chinese imagery and aesthetics to create unique Chinese Buddhist styles. Over time, Buddhist patterns have evolved, eventually becoming a part of traditional Chinese decorative motifs and blending with modern design, reflecting contemporary and artistic sensibilities.

1. Introduction

During its development, Buddhist art has featured decorative patterns in various areas of temples, most commonly found in architecture, paintings, and scriptures. These patterns highlight the mystique of Buddhism. The earliest Buddhist patterns were the first versions introduced from India to China. Over time, these patterns evolved with the aesthetic preferences and life experiences of Chinese craftsmen, eventually forming the current Buddhist styles.

2. The relationship between the development of Buddhism and Buddhist decoration

A form of artistic expression in belief system dissemination, belonging to the materialized manifestation of belief system, is an art form created for the purpose of religious propagation. This art form can shroud belief system in a veil of mystery and promote the development of belief system art. Buddhism has exerted a significant influence on the evolution of art. After its introduction to China, Buddhism added vibrancy to Chinese art and facilitated gradual transformations in artistic forms. Buddhist art itself has distinct colors, including interior decoration, Buddhist-related utensils, Buddhist architecture, etc. Among them, decoration is regarded as the beautification produced to attract people's attention, but decoration can also endow profound connotations and cultural significance. After Buddhism was introduced to China, Buddhist decoration was used to enhance the environmental atmosphere and shape the objects of Buddhist worship, creating a mysterious ambience. However, not all of these decorations carry Buddhist

implications; some patterns merely serve a decorative purpose. But promoting the development of decoration can advance the development of Buddhism, and the two complement each other [1].

3. The evolution of Chinese Buddhist decorative style

The evolution of the decorative style of Chinese Buddhist patterns is shown in Figure 1.

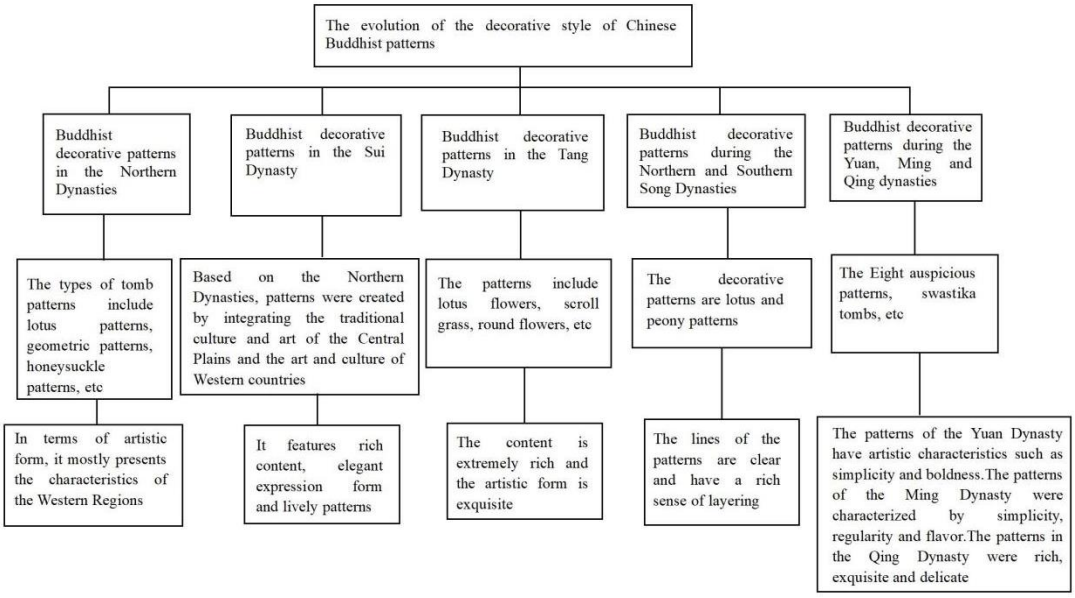


Figure 1: The evolution of Chinese Buddhist decorative style

3.1 Buddhist decorative patterns of the Northern Dynasties

The Northern Dynasties, including the Northern Qi, Northern Wei, and Northern Zhou periods, saw the rise of numerous Buddhist grottoes. Among these, the Mogao Grottoes, the largest and best-preserved in China, stand out. The Northern Dynasties marked the beginning of grotto art development and hold a significant place in the study of Buddhist art. As exchanges with the Western Regions intensified, the number of decorative motifs increased, reflecting the influence of the Western Regions. The Buddhist motifs of the Northern Dynasties were relatively simple and distinctive, often featuring combinations of basic elements. The same motif would recur, and the types included lotus patterns, geometric designs, and honeysuckle motifs.

From ancient times to the present, there has been a tradition of appreciating lotus flowers. During the Spring and Autumn period, many bronze artifacts were decorated with lotus motifs, and the lotus motif appeared in various art forms. The development of Buddhism also advanced the evolution of lotus patterns, which hold significant importance in Buddhist art, particularly in Buddhism, highlighting the purity and sanctity of the faith. In the Northern Dynasties grottoes, honeysuckle patterns are one of the most common Buddhist motifs. During the Northern Wei period, these patterns were widely found in most buildings and textiles. Some believe that honeysuckle patterns are another form of the lotus, while others think they evolved from the branches and leaves of honeysuckle. Honeysuckle patterns and lotus patterns hold significant importance in Chinese decorative history, indicating that plant-shaped decorative motifs gradually became part of daily life. This process led to the gradual integration of lotus and honeysuckle patterns, which carry Buddhist symbolism and reflect the characteristics of their time, into Chinese decorative art.

Geometric patterns are most commonly found in the colored pottery of China, but they are less frequently depicted in grotto art. In grottoes, a few geometric patterns are present, while the

Dunhuang grottoes feature a relatively diverse and rich variety of geometric patterns. Among these, the cloud pattern is a traditional motif, widely used in Warring States lacquerware and Han dynasty brocades. In the Northern Dynasties grottoes, the cloud pattern is most commonly found in the Dunhuang grottoes. Additionally, the Northern Dynasties grottoes also feature patterns that combine plants and animals, such as dragon and tiger motifs.

3.2 Buddhist decorative patterns in Sui Dynasty

The Sui Dynasty, after enduring prolonged turmoil and division, eventually established a unified dynasty. This unification facilitated the integration and development of cultural arts between the north and south. During this period, the development of the Silk Road promoted cultural exchanges and integration between the Sui Dynasty and the West, leading to the continuous evolution of patterns through these interactions. The development of Sui Dynasty patterns built upon the foundation of the Northern Dynasties, incorporating elements from traditional Chinese culture and Western art. The resulting patterns were characterized by their rich content, elegant forms, and lively designs. When painting patterns in various grottoes, artists broke away from traditional patterns, incorporating life experiences, cultural elements, and imagination to innovate.

The linked pearl border pattern, a new decorative motif that emerged during the Sui Dynasty, gradually spread to China through the cultural exchanges of the Silk Road. By the Northern Dynasties, this pattern had gained widespread popularity, with artists often using it to decorate fabrics and grottoes. Regardless of the style, the circular linked pearl motif remained consistent, and artists would add small flowers like lotuses and four-leaf clovers within the circles, blending Western motifs with Buddhist cave art to create a unique decorative style of the Sui Dynasty. Although the Sui Dynasty's decorative motifs were diverse, their development was relatively short-lived. As the next era began, grotto decorations entered a new phase of development[2].

3.3 Buddhist decorative patterns in the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty was the most prosperous period in Chinese history, marked by political unity and economic prosperity. This era was characterized by an open and rugged spirit. During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism experienced significant growth, influencing people with its teachings of equality among all beings, the immortality of the spirit, and the cycle of birth and death. These teachings gradually permeated Buddhist culture and thought, enriching Buddhist art and increasing the variety of decorative patterns. For example, lotus motifs and treasure flowers became increasingly common. The development of Buddhist art in China reached its peak during the Tang Dynasty, characterized by rich content and exquisite artistic forms. These patterns included round halos, mural decorations, decorative motifs on objects, and clothing designs, featuring lotus, scrolling grass, and floral motifs.

The Baoxiang floral motif was most prevalent during the Tang Dynasty, representing the freshest and most Buddhist-symbolic floral pattern that blended the aesthetic beauty of multiple flowers. It not only embodied the elegance of lotus but also incorporated elements such as honeysuckle and peony. This design is plump and dignified, and its formation was closely tied to cultural exchanges between China and the West, brimming with both realism and romanticism.

The scroll grass pattern, as one of the patterns of the Tang Dynasty, gradually evolved from the honeysuckle pattern of Greece and Rome. The form of this pattern is mainly wavy and continuous, with a grand and imposing momentum and rich vitality. Originating in the Tang Dynasty, this pattern is referred to as "karakusa" (Tang grass) in Japan. When combined with mythical beasts and rare creatures, it forms a graceful and unrestrained composition—such as phoenixes chasing each other in flight or celestial beings soaring in circles—exuding exuberance, liveliness, and joy. The

scroll grass motif was most commonly seen in Buddhist decorations of the Tang Dynasty, particularly reaching its zenith in the Dunhuang Mogao Caves. The Tang Dynasty was characterized by its strong national power, economic prosperity, and open-mindedness. It also had a romantic lifestyle, all of which were reflected in Buddhist decorations, creating a grand and vibrant atmosphere. Among these, the Baoxiang flower (a traditional Chinese floral pattern) is a typical motif, and it is also evident in the human figures, such as the side patterns on the stele of Master Dazhi Chan, which feature peonies, scrolling grass, and children, vividly depicting vitality and grandeur. During this period, the murals in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang also bore the influence of Tang Dynasty patterns, fully reflecting the spirit of the Tang Dynasty.

The patterns of the Tang Dynasty were rich but also simple. The richness of the patterns was reflected in the Tang Dynasty grottoes and Tang Dynasty pagoda buildings. Each pattern was quite different, and the variations of the patterns were also quite rich, providing people with a rich sensory experience and making it difficult to distinguish the styles of the patterns. Simplicity refers to the basic motifs being simple. Although there are many types of motifs, their structures and patterns remain largely unchanged, evolving from a common foundation. The basic motifs form the foundation of the patterns, such as honeysuckle, leaf-shaped, and bead motifs. Honeysuckle, a classic motif, underwent significant changes after entering the Tang Dynasty. Leaf-shaped motifs emerged gradually during the early Tang period, featuring round and long leaves. The earliest bead motifs appeared in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, including string beads and ring beads. These motifs evolved from basic motifs, forming unit motifs that are harmonious and unified. Unit motifs are composite motifs formed by the basic motifs, including peach-shaped lotus petal motifs and leaf-shaped lotus petal motifs. Due to the differences in periods, the images of these motifs vary, reflecting a process of evolution from simplicity to complexity and back to simplicity. Additionally, the combination of unit motifs follows certain rules and can be categorized into four types: circular suitable motifs, continuous band motifs, square continuous motifs, and combined continuous motifs.The Tang Dynasty was powerful, with open-minded concepts and attitudes, and people generally exhibited a positive and upward attitude. This spirit was reflected in the patterns, allowing the people to fully experience the positive mindset of the Tang Dynasty.

3.4 Buddhist decorative patterns in the Song Dynasty

During the Song Dynasty, the development of handicrafts and agriculture significantly boosted economic growth. In the realm of art, the craftsmanship of lacquerware, silk weaving, and ceramics saw notable advancements. Notably, kilns, including official and civilian ones, developed unique characteristics. During this period, decorative patterns in silk weaving and ceramics also saw significant improvements. In the Song Dynasty, Buddhist decorative patterns gradually lost their religious influence, becoming less associated with Buddhist ornaments and more integrated into secular life. These patterns developed with ethnic characteristics and textual charm. The most common decorative patterns during the Song Dynasty were lotus and peony motifs, characterized by clear lines, rich layers, and smooth, vibrant designs that vividly integrated decoration with reality. In terms of artistic value, the Song Dynasty and subsequent periods emphasized the 'flower within a flower' technique, enriching the composition of patterns and introducing new motifs to enhance overall decorative effects. These patterns were rich in content, incorporating elements such as leaves, flowers, and animals within the flowers or leaves. The Song Dynasty's interpretation of beauty placed greater emphasis on static and rational qualities, influenced by rational concepts and the needs of manufacturing, leading to a wide range of pattern combinations that were widely recognized. Among these, the' swastika' pattern was the most representative, symbolizing auspiciousness and other positive meanings[3].

3.5 Buddhist decorative patterns in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties

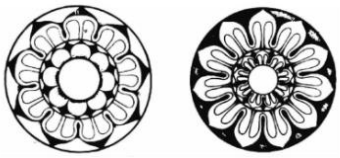
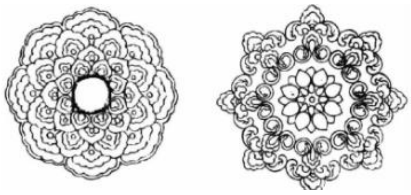
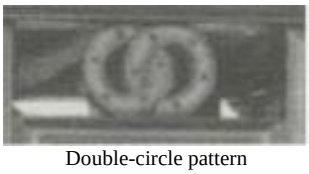
After the Yuan Dynasty took power, the country achieved great unification, gradually changing the long-standing weakness and decline. Economic development promoted transportation and coastal areas, and cultural progress was advanced. During this period, blue and white porcelain and underglaze red porcelain were significant products of the era, contributing to the advancement of ceramic art. However, due to the Yuan Dynasty's military focus, the development of decorative patterns was limited. Historical research indicates that patterns could only be referenced through Yuan porcelain and temple murals. The Yuan Dynasty introduced innovations in decorative items, with patterns that diverged from the refined aesthetics of the Song Dynasty, establishing a more down-to-earth and free-spirited aesthetic style. Cultural analysis of the Yuan Dynasty primarily drew from Song and Jin cultures, rooted in Mongolian grassland culture, and incorporated a wealth of excellent elements from Central Asia and the Arab region, enriching the cultural appeal of Yuan decorative arts. Additionally, Yuan patterns exhibited artistic characteristics such as simplicity and boldness, aligning with the development of the era and evolving aesthetic concepts. Elements such as the Eight Auspicious Symbols and the Swastika, derived from Chinese Buddhism, were widely used in decorative patterns, especially the Swastika, which, as a continuous pattern in all four directions, enhanced the depth and complexity of the patterns.

The Ming and Qing dynasties marked the late period of China's feudal society, during which the seeds of capitalism began to sprout, and a significant increase in commodity production. This growth was closely linked to the development of arts and crafts, particularly in terms of their structure and decoration. Unlike the Yuan Dynasty, the Ming Dynasty placed a strong emphasis on preserving national culture, leading to a renewed focus on traditional crafts. Efforts were made to revive and enhance traditional crafts. During this period, the achievements in arts and crafts were remarkable, exemplified by Jingdezhen ceramics, embroidery, cloisonne, and Ming-style furniture. The decorative motifs used in these crafts were rooted in traditional patterns, which were refined and standardized to highlight a rich decorative beauty. The decorative styles of the Ming Dynasty integrated the characteristics of previous dynasties, incorporating symbolic elements to convey auspicious meanings through patterns, known as' auspicious motifs.' This resulted in a unique national style that was characterized by simplicity, neatness, and aesthetic appeal.

The Qing Dynasty, a unified state established by ethnic minorities in Chinese history, gradually stabilized and placed significant emphasis on national rest and development. This period, known as the 'Prosperous Era of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong,' saw the implementation of a series of policies aimed at promoting economic and social stability, such as the introduction of the land tax reform and the encouragement of reclamation. These measures significantly enhanced political, economic, and cultural aspects, leading to a peak in national strength. Compared to the Ming Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty achieved significant advancements in technology and craftsmanship, encompassing both folk and court crafts. Folk craft techniques continued to innovate within traditional culture, with artisans using their creativity and exceptional skills to elevate traditional crafts to new heights. For instance, in the folk silk weaving industry, not only did manufacturing techniques become highly skilled, but a wide range of complex patterns and a rich variety of products, such as Suzhou embroidery and Shu brocade, were also produced. In the realm of court crafts, the Qing Dynasty leveraged its substantial financial and human resources to continuously innovate in technology and craftsmanship, conducting detailed analyses and producing a variety of styles in jade carving and porcelain firing within the palace. During this period, patterns were applied to various crafts, including silk weaving, jade carving, and porcelain, with expressions becoming more intricate. Silk weaving patterns, for example, evolved from simple designs to vivid and lifelike designs through color coordination and variations in line density. Moreover, during this

period, a variety of floral patterns with multiple forms and intricate designs emerged[4], as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Representative Patterns of each period

Representative patterns of each period	
The Northern Dynasties	 Lotus pattern Honeysuckle pattern
The Sui Dynasty	Linked bead pattern
The Tang Dynasty	 The pattern of the Baoxiang flower
The Northern and Southern Song Dynasties	
The Yuan Dynasty	Swastika pattern
The Ming Dynasty	Auspicious patterns
The Qing Dynasty	 Double-circle pattern

4. The application of Buddhist pattern decoration in modern design

4.1 The decorative patterns of Buddhist temples are applied in the logo design

The forms of symbols are diverse, typically using graphic and textual elements to create symbolic visual symbols. These symbols are presented in a concise manner to convey their content and information, thereby establishing a brand image. Buddhist decorative patterns, rich in historical depth and aesthetic appeal, embody rich cultural and spiritual symbolism, reflecting the inheritance and development of Buddhism. Integrating these patterns into modern logo design can breathe new life into logos, endowing them with cultural charm and artistic value, and promoting the integration of traditional culture with contemporary design. When conveying information, the patterns in logos can inspire faith in Buddhist culture, allowing people to appreciate the deeper meaning beyond surface information and serving as a cultural carrier, thus enhancing the cultural depth of the logo. Moreover, Buddhist patterns are uniquely shaped, beautifully designed, and feature distinct colors, which enhance the logo's recognizability and deepen people's memory of it[5]. As shown in Table 2, this illustrates the application of Buddhist temple decorative patterns in logo design.

Table 2: Application of Buddhist temple decorative patterns in logo design

field of design	Name of the logo	Application forms of Buddhist decorative patterns	Graphic meaning
Decorative patterns of Buddhist temples are applied in logo design	Logo design of Zhongtai Mountain Comprehensive Resort in Laoliang	Pattern decoration	Located between Shanxi and Hebei provinces, it faces wutai Mountain in the distance. The logo uses the traditional Buddhist pattern of Ruyi cloud, which means good luck.
	Yilahsu Autonomous Prefecture Museum logo design	Pattern decoration	The Buddhist pattern of the Ruyi is transformed and encircled to fit in with the exhibits in the museum.
	Logo design of Tianwang Industrial Company	Symmetrical design of pattern decoration	The dragon pattern of Buddhism is transformed to reflect the style of the royal family.
	Linyi Museum logo design	Chinese characters combined with Buddhist patterns	The ruyi pattern and the Chinese character "lin" are used to form an image of the character "lin", whose shape fits with the text and echoes each other, giving people a deep impression.

4.2 The decorative patterns of Buddhist temples are applied in packaging design

In a market economy, packaging design can enhance the added value of products and influence their sales. The use of Buddhist decorative patterns in packaging design can effectively enhance the cultural significance of products and align with their positioning. In terms of application, the traditional cultural characteristics of Buddhist temple decorations can enhance visual experiences. Design elements can be categorized, and suitable pattern types that match the packaging can be selected. For example, designers can choose appropriate patterns to reflect the Buddhist connotations of the packaging by integrating brand content and product features, such as the 'Ruyi Pattern.' Additionally, a variety of patterns can be selected, combined with brand content for recombination, and modern symbols can be added to effectively innovate packaging design. This

approach integrates modern design with Buddhist patterns, meeting contemporary aesthetic standards. The use of Buddhist classic patterns in modern packaging design can fully incorporate traditional cultural connotations, highlighting the national cultural spirit, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Application of Buddhist temple decorative patterns in packaging design

field of design	Name of the logo	Application forms of Buddhist decorative patterns	Graphic meaning
Decorative patterns of Buddhist temples are applied in packaging design	Xinyang tea brand packaging design	Pattern decoration	Using the Buddhist decorative pattern "Ruyi pattern" as accessories, it conforms to the history of tea culture and contains the meaning of good luck and good fortune,
	Red River cigarette packaging design	Pattern decoration	Buddhist patterns such as cloud patterns and ribbon patterns are used to conform to the form of smoke, and the color is vivid.
	Yunnan Baiyao white packaging design	Pattern decoration	The packaging will be composed of Buddhist patterns such as dragon, treasure flower, treasure gourd and fairy pill, which represent saving lives and healing the wounded.
	Rice Fragrance Village pastry packaging design	Pattern decoration	The same is true of the colors as well as the traditional Chinese Buddhist patterns.

5. Conclusion

Buddhist patterns, a vital component of Buddhist art, are used to decorate buildings, murals, and textiles. These patterns have their own distinct forms and carry rich cultural significance. Throughout history, representative motifs of Buddhist decorative patterns have emerged, evolving over time into cultural traditions. These patterns not only reflect the aesthetic consciousness and characteristics of different historical periods but also serve as a part of Buddhist culture. As Buddhist decorative patterns have evolved, they have found significant applications in modern art design.

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