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SYMBOLIC EVOLUTION MODELS OF CHINESE AUSPICIOUS SIGNS “FU” AND “XI” IN CONTEMPORARY BOOK DESIGN

Chinese auspicious symbols are not merely decorative motifs; rather, they serve as folkloric emblems that embody aspirations, emotional sentiments, and cultural identity. In the realm of contemporary book design, these symbols have emerged as vital visual resources for shaping cultural themes and establishing emotional atmospheres; however, their folkloric functions, symbolic logic, and evolutionary divergences have yet to be fully elucidated. Against this backdrop, this study aims to identify – and theoretically substantiate – two distinct evolutionary patterns within the spectrum of Chinese auspicious symbols: "Fu" and "Xi". Furthermore, it seeks to articulate the implications of these patterns for contemporary book design practice. Situated within a theoretical framework of folklore studies, this research employs comparative analysis to examine functional divergences between these two symbolic types; structural analysis to dissect their visual characteristics; semiotic analysis to uncover the mechanisms by which they convey meaning; and case-based visual analysis to interpret the specific operational dynamics of these symbolic patterns within the context of contemporary book design. The findings indicate that "Fu" exhibits characteristics of "symbolic expansion," wherein its semantic scope expands – through homophony, visual substitution, and stylistic patterning – into non-textual visual mediums. Conversely, "Xi" demonstrates characteristics of "symbolic cohesion," wherein its symbolic efficacy relies primarily on the repetition, symmetry, and reinforcement of its textual structure – culminating, particularly within the context of wedding customs and rituals, in the formation of stable, ritualistic symbols. These two evolutionary patterns directly influence the strategies of visual translation employed in book design: the former lends itself more readily to abstract, symbolic, and non-textual forms of expression, whereas the latter necessitates the preservation of the core calligraphic structure and symmetrical order. The innovative contribution of this paper lies in its proposal of the "symbolic expansion" and "symbolic cohesion" models for the evolution of auspicious symbols, thereby revealing the direct correlation between these evolutionary dynamics and the strategic approaches adopted in contemporary book design.

Key words: Chinese Folk Symbols; Symbolic Evolution, Symbolic Expansion, Symbolic Cohesion, Visual Semiotics, Book Design, Cultural Translation, Auspicious Imagery, Graphic Design, Folk Culture.

Рен Юшіян, Дубрівна Антоніна. МОДЕЛІ СИМВОЛІЧНОЇ ЕВОЛЮЦІЇ КИТАЙСЬКИХ СПРИЯТЛИВИХ ЗНАКІВ «ФУ» ТА «СІ» У СУЧАСНОМУ ДИЗАЙНІ КНИГ

Китайські сприятливі символи – це не просто декоративні мотиви; радше вони служать фольклорними емблемами, що втілюють прагнення, емоційні почуття та культурну ідентичність. У сфері сучасного книжкового дизайну ці символи стали життєво важливими візуальними ресурсами для формування культурних тем та створення емоційної атмосфери; однак їхні фольклорні функції, символічна логіка та еволюційні розбіжності ще не повністю з'ясовані. На цьому тлі це дослідження має на меті виявити та теоретично обґрунтувати дві різні еволюційні моделі в спектрі китайських сприятливих символів – «Фу» та «Сі». Крім того, воно прагне сформулювати значення цих моделей для сучасної практики книжкового дизайну. Розташоване в теоретичних рамках фольклористики, це дослідження використовує порівняльний аналіз для вивчення функціональних розбіжностей між цими двома типами символів; структурний аналіз для аналізу їхніх візуальних характеристик; семіотичний аналіз для розкриття механізмів, за допомогою яких вони передають значення; та візуальний аналіз на основі конкретних випадків для інтерпретації

специфічної операційної динаміки цих символічних моделей у контексті сучасного книжкового дизайну. Результати дослідження показують, що «Фу» демонструє характеристики «символічного розширення», де його семантичний обсяг розширюється через омофонію, візуальну заміну та стилістичне структурування у нетекстові візуальні середовища. І навпаки, «Сі» демонструє характеристики «символічної згуртованості», де його символічна ефективність спирається насамперед на повторення, симетрію та посилення його текстової структури, що кульмінацією є, зокрема, в контексті весільних звичаїв та ритуалів, формування стабільних, ритуалістичних символів. Ці дві еволюційні моделі безпосередньо впливають на стратегії візуального перекладу, що використовуються в дизайні книг, де перша легше піддається абстрактним, символічним та нетекстовим формам вираження, тоді як друга вимагає збереження основної каліграфічної структури та симетричного порядку. Інноваційний внесок цієї статті полягає в пропозиції «екстенціональної» та «конденсованої» моделей еволюції сприятливих символів, тим самим виявляючи прямий зв'язок між цією еволюційною динамікою та стратегічними підходами, прийнятими в сучасному дизайні книг.

Ключові слова: китайські народні символи, еволюція символів, символічне розширення, символічна згуртованість, візуальна семіотика, дизайн книги, трансляція культури, сприятливі образи, графічний дизайн, народна культура.

Introduction. In recent years, traditional Chinese auspicious signs have received increasing attention in visual culture and contemporary design research. Their significance lies not only in their decorative value, but also in their role as carriers of blessing, emotional expectation, and collective cultural memory. In contemporary design, therefore, the key issue is not the simple repetition of traditional forms, but the translation of symbolic meaning into visual language that remains effective in a modern context [1, p. 2640–2649]. At the same time, studies on the graphitization of Chinese characters show that Chinese characters function not only as linguistic signs, but also as visual forms with structural and semantic properties, which makes them especially adaptable to reinterpretation in design practice [2, p. 2187–2197].

This issue becomes particularly important in book design. Unlike isolated graphic application, book design requires traditional elements to interact with text, layout, rhythm, and the overall atmosphere of reading. Traditional motifs should therefore not be treated as detachable decoration, but as meaningful visual components that participate in the expression of a book's subject and cultural tone [3, p. 4–7; 4, p. 111–113].

However, auspicious signs are often discussed as a unified symbolic category, which obscures the differences between specific symbols. This problem is especially evident in the cases of "Fu" and "Xi". Although both belong to the broader system of Chinese auspicious

culture, their modes of symbolic operation are not identical. The meaning of "Fu" tends to extend beyond the written character into broader visual forms, whereas "Xi" remains more closely tied to ritual structure, symmetry, and textual recognizability. Research on the character "Fu" indicates that its vitality lies in processes of semantic expansion and cultural reinterpretation [5, p. 11–29]. By contrast, existing research suggests that the effectiveness of "Xi" is closely tied to stable ritual context and continued visual recognition [6, p. 37]. On this basis, this study argues that "Fu" and "Xi" should not be treated as equivalent symbolic phenomena. Instead, they represent two distinct modes of development, defined here as symbolic expansion and symbolic cohesion. The article examines how these modes are reflected in contemporary book design and how they shape different strategies for the visual translation of traditional auspicious signs.

Materials and Methods. This study employs comparative analysis, structural analysis, semi-otic analysis, and case study in order to examine the symbolic development of the auspicious signs "Fu" and "Xi" and their visual translation in contemporary book design.

Comparative analysis is used to identify differences in cultural function, usage context, and visual transmission between the two signs. The comparison focuses on whether meaning depends on the direct visibility of the written character and on the extent to which it can be transferred into other visual forms. This makes

it possible to establish that, although both signs belong to the same cultural system, they do not operate according to the same symbolic logic.

Structural analysis is applied to the visual forms of "Fu" and "Xi" in both traditional folk imagery and selected contemporary book covers. The analysis considers composition, symmetry, repetition, centrality, decorative transformation, and the degree to which the original character remains recognizable after stylization. This approach helps explain why "Fu" can generate more visual variations, while "Xi" relies more strongly on structural stability.

Semiotic analysis is used to examine how symbolic meaning is preserved, extended, or recontextualized when these signs move from folk culture into contemporary design. Particular attention is given to the relationship between signifier and signified, especially in cases where "Fu" extends into image-based forms, while "Xi" remains dependent on textual recognizability. In this way, visual change is understood as a process of symbolic transformation rather than mere decoration.

Case study is applied to selected book covers related to auspicious culture and wedding culture. These cases are analyzed as concrete instances of visual translation, with attention to the interaction of title, ornament, imagery, and composition. Through the combination of these methods, the study connects cultural interpretation with visual evidence and demonstrates how different symbolic mechanisms operate in contemporary book design.

Discussion. The analysis shows that although "Fu" and "Xi" both belong to the system of Chinese auspicious signs; they do not follow the same symbolic logic. Their differences are reflected not only in cultural function, but also in the ways their meanings are visually transmitted and transformed in contemporary book design. This distinction is related to the dual nature of Chinese characters as both linguistic and graphic forms, since visual translation depends on the relationship between semantic content and structural recognizability [2, p. 2187–2197]. As a result, although both signs originate in recognizable character forms, they develop in different directions.

This divergence can already be observed in folk visual materials. Fig. 1, a and Fig. 1, b show "Xi" and "Fu" in folk use as basic character-based signs. At this level, both still rely on recognizable textual structure as the primary carrier of meaning. At the same time, Fig. 1, c and Fig. 1, d reveal different tendencies in visual treatment. "Xi" reinforces its own structure through simplification and repetition, whereas "Fu", while retaining recognizable traces of the original character, shows a stronger tendency toward ornament, deformation, and visual extension. In other words, the difference between symbolic cohesion and symbolic expansion is already visible in folk visual practice. "Fu" demonstrates the characteristics of symbolic expansion. Its auspicious meaning is not confined to the direct presentation of the written character, but can enter patterned, image-based, and stylized visual systems. Research on the character "Fu" indicates that its cultural significance is not limited to lexical meaning, but develops through broader processes of semantic association and symbolic extension [5, p. 11–29]. This tendency is clearly illustrated by Fig. 2, a. In a decorative pattern system, the meaning of "Fu" is not conveyed through a single isolated and standard character form. Instead, it is integrated into a larger ornamental structure through graphic transformation, while its auspicious meaning remains intact. Formal change, in this case, does not weaken meaning. On the contrary, it enables "Fu" to enter a wider field of visual expression. The same mechanism continues in contemporary book design. Fig. 2, c and Fig. 2, d show how "Fu" is translated into modern cover design through decorative motifs, patterned systems, and combinations of text and image. In *Fujian's Traditional Fu Culture* [Fig. 2, c], "Fu" no longer appears as the only standard visual center, but is transformed into a decorative graphic structure. In *Chinese Auspicious Patterns: An Illustrated Guide to the Five Blessings "Fu"* [Fig. 2, d], the "Five Bats" image and the written character work together to reinforce auspicious meaning through both textual and visual channels. This is consistent with earlier research indicating that traditional auspicious imagery

can continue to function in contemporary design through transformed visual application rather than literal repetition [1, p. 2640–2649].

By contrast, "Xi" demonstrates the characteristics of symbolic cohesion. Its symbolic force depends more strongly on the preservation of structural form, especially symmetry, repetition, and centrality. Existing research indicates that the effectiveness of "Xi" in wedding culture is closely related to stable ritual use and continued visual recognition [6, p. 37]. This can be clearly seen in the visual materials. In Fig. 1, c, the sign is simplified, but its structural framework is visibly reinforced. Fig. 2, b further shows that even in a complex ceremonial environment, "Xi" is not displaced by surrounding visual elements, but functions as the central marker of ritual meaning. Unlike "Fu", its visual effectiveness does not derive from outward extension, but from the continued strengthening of its own structural and semantic core. The same mechanism is preserved in contemporary book design. The three cases in Fig. 3 show that the visual translation of "Xi" is based not on semantic expansion, but on structural preservation and formal concentration. In *A Match Made in Heaven: Anecdotes of Ancient Chinese Weddings* [Fig. 3, a], the double-character structure remains the central visual framework. In *Chinese-Style Marriage* [Fig. 3, b], decorative treatment is applied, but the sign remains immediately recognizable because its symmetry is preserved. In *Hanzhong Wedding Customs and Culture* [Fig. 3, c], "Xi" is incorporated into a broader ornamental system while still maintaining graphic centrality. These examples show that the translation of "Xi" relies less on substitution than on the continued concentration of meaning within a stable formal structure.

Taken together, the results indicate that contemporary book design should not approach traditional auspicious signs through a single visual method. "Fu" is more adaptable to image-based, decorative, and composite forms of translation, whereas "Xi" requires stronger preservation of structural identity, ritual centrality, and recognizability. Two different symbolic mechanisms therefore correspond to two different design paths.

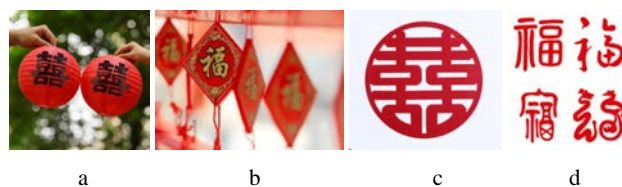


Fig. 1. Folk uses and visual divergence of "Xi" and "Fu". a-"Xi" lantern ornament; b-"Fu" folk ornaments; c-simplified "Xi" decoration; d-simplified "Fu" decoration

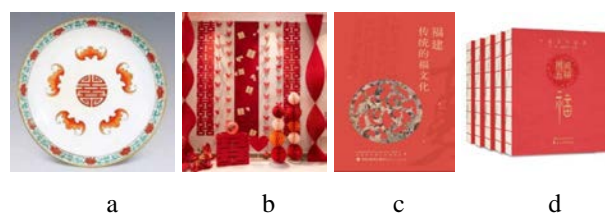


Fig. 2. Symbolic expansion of "Fu" and symbolic cohesion of "Xi". a-"Fu and Shou" pattern plate; b-wedding ceremony scene; c-Fujian's Traditional Fu Culture; d-Chinese Auspicious Patterns: An Illustrated Guide to the Five Blessings "Fu"

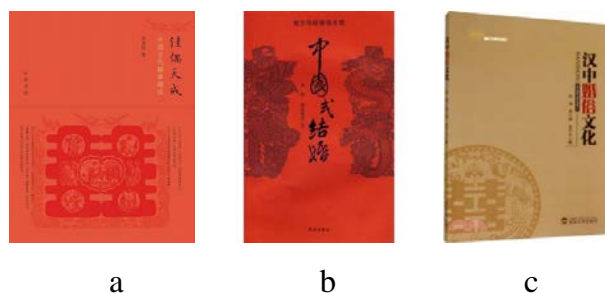


Fig. 3. Symbolic cohesion of "Xi" in contemporary book design. a-A Match Made in Heaven: Anecdotes of Ancient Chinese Weddings; b-Chinese-Style Marriage; c-Hanzhong Wedding Customs and Culture

The concepts of symbolic expansion and symbolic cohesion help explain why traditional auspicious signs should not be treated as homogeneous visual resources in contemporary book design. Although "Fu" and "Xi" both express auspiciousness and blessing, they differ in the way meaning is generated and visually organized. As a result, they cannot be translated through the same design strategy.

The visual materials used in this study do not form a simple linear sequence. Rather, they reveal different levels of symbolic operation. Fig. 1 shows that both "Fu" and "Xi" are rooted in character-based forms within folk visual

culture, while already indicating different tendencies of development. Fig. 2 demonstrates how this difference becomes more pronounced in different visual types. On the one hand, "Fu" can enter patterned and graphitized systems while preserving continuity of meaning. On the other hand, "Xi", even within a complex ceremonial scene, continues to emphasize its structural and semantic center. Fig. 2, c and Fig. 2, d, together with Fig. 3, further show how these two mechanisms are translated into contemporary book design.

The case of "Fu" suggests that some traditional symbols possess a relatively open symbolic structure. Their meanings are not fixed within the original character form, but can continue to operate through decoration, association, imagery, and pattern. What matters in such cases is not whether the standard character is preserved in full, but whether auspicious meaning remains continuous across different visual carriers. For this reason, the design translation of "Fu" permits a higher degree of deformation and ornament. Fig. 1, d, Fig. 2, a, and Fig. 2, c and Fig. 2, d together support this mechanism of expansion from textual form into a broader visual field. This interpretation is consistent with earlier studies on the way traditional auspicious imagery continues to function in contemporary design through transformation rather than direct repetition [1, p. 2640–2649]. By contrast, the case of "Xi" suggests that some traditional symbols preserve meaning primarily through structural stability. Its effectiveness does not come from outward expansion, but from the continued reinforcement of symmetry, repetition, and ritual centrality. Fig. 1, c, Fig. 2, b, and Fig. 3 all show that even when "Xi" enters decorative, spatial, or design-oriented environments, its structural core must remain clear and recognizable. In this sense, symbolic cohesion does not imply formal rigidity. Rather, it refers to the sustained concentration of meaning within a stable and recognizable formal framework [6, p. 37]. This mechanism explains why the design translation of "Xi" cannot rely heavily on image substitution, but must preserve continuity of structure and recognition. From a methodological perspective,

this distinction has direct implications for book design. If all traditional auspicious signs are treated as interchangeable decorative elements, the result may be superficial borrowing or symbolic distortion. Previous studies have shown that the value of traditional elements in book design lies not in surface ornament, but in the way, they connect with theme, visual structure, and reading experience [3, p. 4–7; 4, p. 111–113]. The present analysis further suggests that different symbols require different visual strategies. Signs such as "Fu" may be translated through motif, ornament, pattern, and indirect imagery, whereas signs such as "Xi" are more effectively translated through the reinforcement of symmetry, structural order, and textual identity. This conclusion is also compatible with studies emphasizing the coordination of visual structure, thematic expression, and design logic in high-quality book design [7, p. 32–41]. As Lv Jingren argues, book design is not a matter of piling up decoration, but of organizing visual form on the basis of textual meaning and reading experience [8, p. 224–237].

The significance of this study therefore lies not in describing visual materials one by one, but in using them as evidence to identify two different symbolic mechanisms and to show how these mechanisms shape the translation of traditional culture in contemporary book design. Symbolic expansion and symbolic cohesion provide a more precise framework for understanding the modern application of traditional auspicious signs, and they offer a theoretical basis for more targeted design practice in the future.

Results. This study has shown that although the Chinese auspicious signs "Fu" and "Xi" both belong to the broader system of auspicious culture; they do not follow the same symbolic logic. On this basis, the study defines two distinct modes: symbolic expansion and symbolic cohesion. The analysis demonstrates that "Fu" operates through symbolic expansion. Its auspicious meaning can move beyond the direct visibility of the written character and continue to function through decoration, imagery, and associative visual forms. By contrast, "Xi" operates through symbolic cohesion. Its symbolic force depends more strongly on the preservation of

structural recognizability, particularly symmetry, repetition, and ritual centrality. These differences lead to distinct design strategies. The former is more open to indirect and image-based translation, whereas the latter requires stronger retention of textual structure and visual order. The contribution of this study lies in clarifying the internal distinction between two frequently used auspicious signs and in linking this distinction to concrete visual strategies in book design. Rather than treating traditional symbols as interchangeable decorative elements, the study demonstrates that effective design depends on

understanding the specific symbolic mechanism of each sign and translating it accordingly.

More broadly, the concepts of symbolic expansion and symbolic cohesion provide a useful framework for analyzing how traditional cultural elements can be transformed in contemporary visual practice. They suggest that the relationship between cultural meaning and visual form is not uniform, but depends on the internal logic of each symbol. This perspective may offer a basis for more precise and context-sensitive applications of traditional culture in design.

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