

# A Morris Semiotic Perspective on the Characteristics and Cultural Significance of Traditional Guangdong Furniture Patterns

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## Abstract

*Based on Morris's semiotic theory, this paper systematically analyzes the symbolic features of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns and their cultural symbolism from the three dimensions of semiotics (syntax, semantics, and pragmatics). The study focuses on typical patterns such as dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum in Guangdong traditional furniture, and explores their historical origins, social functions, and close links with Confucianism, family concepts, and social hierarchies in the context of Lingnan culture. By analyzing these symbols, the paper reveals their special symbolic meanings in different social classes and ritual cultures, as well as how they convey the values and lifestyles of the Guangdong region through visual forms. The study further explores the potential application of these traditional symbols in modern design, especially through simplification and abstraction, combining traditional cultural symbols with modern design concepts, materials and techniques to realize the fusion of cultural heritage and innovative design. This paper provides a new theoretical framework for the study of the patterns of traditional furniture in Guangdong, and practical suggestions for modern designers on how to effectively inherit and innovate the cultural heritage symbols, and to promote the synergistic development of cultural heritage preservation and design industry.*

**Keywords:** *Guangdong Traditional Furniture, Semiotic, Cultural Symbolism, Design Innovation, Modern Application.*

## Introduction

In the context of globalization, the preservation and innovation of traditional cultural symbols have become significant topics in both academic and design fields. Traditional Guangdong furniture, as an essential material representation of Lingnan culture, carries profound historical, cultural, and social meanings through its distinctive pattern designs. These patterns not only reflect the region's exceptional craftsmanship and aesthetic preferences but also convey Confucian values, family concepts, and symbols of social hierarchy (Yang, 2012). Typical patterns such as the dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, and the "Four Gentlemen" (plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum) historically symbolize power, nobility, and harmonious well-being (Ye, 2007; Wu, 2013). With increasing efforts in cultural heritage preservation and cross-cultural exchange, the cultural value and artistic characteristics of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns have gradually become focal points of academic and design research, providing a rich source of inspiration for cultural innovation in modern design (Li, 2024).

Semiotics, as a theoretical tool for analyzing symbol systems and their cultural meanings, has been widely applied in cultural heritage research (Li, 2017). The three dimensions of Morris's semiotic theory—syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics—offer a systematic framework for understanding the complex cultural connotations of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns (Morris, 1938). In recent years, researchers have explored the cultural symbols of traditional Guangdong furniture and their modern applications from a semiotic perspective (Liu, 2021; Yu, 2009; Jiang, 2019). However, existing research primarily focuses on cultural heritage and craftsmanship preservation, lacking systematic analysis of the deep cultural symbolism of these patterns and their integration with modern design innovation (Li, 2021).

To address this gap, this study applies the three dimensions of Morris's semiotic theory to systematically analyze the symbolic features and cultural connotations of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns, with a focus on their inheritance and innovative applications in modern design. This research not only fills the

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theoretical gap in the semiotic study of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns but also provides new theoretical perspectives and practical guidance for cultural integration and innovation in modern design.

### *Research Questions*

What are the typical representative pattern symbols and their cultural connotations in Guangdong traditional furniture?

How have these tattoo symbols changed over time?

What are the inheritance and innovation paths of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns in modern design?

## **Literature Review**

### *Development and Cultural Value of Guangdong Traditional Furniture*

#### *Development of Guangdong Traditional Furniture*

As a representative of Lingnan region furniture, Guangdong traditional furniture (Cantonese furniture) has gradually formed a unique style due to its distinctive regional cultural background and advantageous geographical location. The development of Guangdong traditional furniture can be traced back to the pre-Qin period, when the woodworking craftsmanship in the Lingnan region was relatively simple and mainly relied on local timber resources. With the development of the Lingnan region and deepening interactions with the Central Plains culture during the Han Dynasty, Lingnan furniture began to incorporate more elements from the Central Plains, leading to a gradual fusion of craftsmanship styles. By the mid-Ming Dynasty, Cantonese furniture experienced rapid growth as Guangzhou became a pivotal hub for national trade. The flourishing maritime trade not only brought high-quality timber but also infused new cultural elements into Cantonese furniture, making its style increasingly unique.

Particularly during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Cantonese furniture became renowned for its clean lines, intricate carvings, and elegant forms. It gained immense popularity in domestic markets and, via the Maritime Silk Road, was exported to Southeast Asia and Western countries. The period from the reigns of Emperor Kangxi to Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty marked the golden age of Cantonese furniture. During this time, craftsmen assimilated the essence of Jiangnan and Northern Chinese furniture while adapting to the humid and hot climate of Lingnan, thereby creating a distinctive furniture style. Cantonese furniture became not only a functional product but also an important symbol of Lingnan culture and the commercial spirit of Guangdong merchants.

Craftsmen skillfully blended traditional Chinese cultural elements with foreign influences, especially incorporating styles from Southeast Asia and Europe into the decorative techniques of Cantonese furniture, forming an artistic style with multicultural characteristics. During the Republican period, as society underwent significant transformations, Cantonese furniture gradually shifted towards industrialized production, posing challenges to the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. However, Lingnan craftsmen maintained the market position of Cantonese furniture through design innovation, introducing furniture styles that adapted to modern lifestyles.

Since the 21st century, Cantonese furniture has experienced a revival. Designers have successfully integrated traditional symbols with modern design, allowing Cantonese furniture to regain its cultural and economic value in the context of globalization, and transforming it into a crucial vehicle for the transmission and innovation of Lingnan culture.

#### *Cultural Value and Artistic Characteristics of Guangdong Traditional Furniture*

As a typical symbol of Lingnan culture, Cantonese furniture possesses not only excellent practicality but

also profound cultural connotations rooted in the Lingnan region. Due to its unique geographical location, Lingnan culture has always been characterized by diversity, inclusiveness, and openness. These cultural attributes are vividly reflected in the patterns, forms, and craftsmanship of Cantonese furniture, which, through its unique artistic design, embodies the social ethos, lifestyle, and cultural identity of the Guangdong region.

The pattern designs of Cantonese furniture contain rich cultural symbolism. For instance, the dragon and phoenix patterns represent imperial power and nobility, while the plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum symbolize integrity and the Confucian pursuit of ethical ideals. The pine and crane patterns, on the other hand, signify longevity and well-being. These symbolic motifs not only convey the spiritual pursuits and aspirations of the people in Lingnan but also serve as visual representations of Cantonese cultural identity and local pride. The extensive use of Cantonese furniture in households, ancestral halls, and temples highlights its role not only in daily life but also in important ceremonial activities, where it functions as a representation of specific cultural symbols. For example, altar tables and large cabinets with their dignified forms and intricate decorative patterns symbolize family honor and status, reflecting the strong clan consciousness and familial values prevalent in the Lingnan region.

Given Lingnan's historical role as a frontier for Sino-Western cultural exchange, Cantonese furniture has integrated diverse influences while maintaining the elegant style of traditional Chinese furniture. It incorporates elements from both Southeast Asian and Western cultures, enhancing its domestic influence and, through the Maritime Silk Road, promoting Lingnan culture overseas. This cultural fusion and innovation have not only strengthened the impact of Cantonese furniture within China but have also made it an important vehicle for cultural dissemination abroad, thereby contributing to its role as a significant medium for cultural export.

In terms of social function, Cantonese furniture not only possesses strong daily practicality but also assumes profound symbolic roles in ceremonial contexts. For instance, furniture pieces such as the Eight Immortals table, official's hat armchair, and cooling bed not only serve functional purposes but also enhance the cultural atmosphere of the household through exquisite carving and lacquer techniques, showcasing the cultural refinement and aesthetic taste of the user. In clan worship ceremonies and family gatherings, Cantonese furniture, with its solemn and majestic forms, symbolizes family honor and status, profoundly reflecting the clan consciousness and family responsibilities embedded in Lingnan culture.

Cantonese furniture is renowned for its splendid, intricate, and ornate decorative style. The carving techniques employed include relief, openwork, and round carving, and common patterns such as the dragon and phoenix, cloud motifs, and fretwork not only convey rich cultural meanings but also elevate the furniture's decorative appeal through delicate craftsmanship and artistic expression. The forms of Cantonese furniture are elegant and fluid, combining the robust solidity of Northern Chinese furniture with the lightness and grace of Southern Chinese styles. The color schemes predominantly use deep reds and golds, complemented by fine inlay work, creating a resplendent artistic style that has become a quintessential representation of Lingnan aesthetics. Compared to furniture from other regions in China, Cantonese furniture incorporates foreign cultural elements while retaining its regional characteristics, resulting in a unique style that is both inclusive and distinctive.

Through its rich cultural connotations and unique artistic forms, Cantonese furniture is not only a form of tangible cultural heritage but also embodies the spiritual symbolism and value system of Lingnan culture, making it an indispensable component of Chinese traditional furniture art.

#### *Research Status of Guangdong Traditional Furniture Patterns*

In recent years, Guangdong traditional furniture, especially the pattern design of Guangzhou furniture, has gradually become a hot spot in academic research. Researchers have systematically discussed the historical evolution, cultural symbols, semiotic analysis, application in modern design, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

In the study of the historical evolution of patterns, scholars generally agree that the pattern design of Guangzhou-made furniture, as a material carrier of Lingnan culture, profoundly reflects the unique historical background and cultural tradition of the region (Guo, 2021). By analyzing samples of Guangzhou furniture from the Ming and Qing dynasties, researchers have revealed the evolution of typical patterns such as dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum in different historical periods and their socio-cultural significance (Zhou, 2020). These patterns not only existed as decorative symbols but also carried the social class, religious beliefs, and cultural values of specific eras, especially among the royal and clan classes, which demonstrated their deep cultural connotations and social functions.

Semiotic theory provides a powerful tool for studying the cultural symbolism of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns. Through semantic and pragmatic analyses of semiotics, scholars have revealed that dragon and phoenix motifs symbolize power and auspiciousness, and that plum, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums symbolize purity and perseverance (Cai et al., 2021). These patterns hold an important cultural status in Lingnan culture and occupy a pivotal position in traditional Chinese furniture design (Zhang, 2021). The multidimensional analytical framework of semiotics enables researchers to explore in-depth the social functions, cultural connotations, and historical background behind these symbols.

In recent years, with the combination of traditional craftsmanship and modern design concepts, the application and innovation of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns in modern design have gradually become a focus of attention in both the academic and design communities. Li (2024) points out that by simplifying and abstracting the patterns of Cantonese furniture and combining them with modern materials and techniques, these traditional symbols can become cultural symbols in contemporary society. This innovation not only promotes cultural heritage and regeneration but also provides new possibilities for the application of traditional Guangdong patterns in the global design market (Chen, 2024).

In terms of intangible cultural heritage protection, after Guangdong traditional furniture was included in the protection list, researchers have paid more attention to the protection and inheritance of these precious cultural symbols through policy and technological means. The introduction of digital conservation technology provides a new solution for the preservation of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns (Duan, 2023). Through digital scanning and 3D modeling technology, traditional patterns can be recorded and archived with high precision, ensuring they are not damaged or eroded over time. Meanwhile, educational promotion and exhibition displays are also seen as important ways to promote the regeneration of these cultural symbols (Zhang, 2022).

Although research on traditional Guangdong furniture patterns has achieved numerous results, the following limitations still exist: first, most research focuses on the historical evolution and cultural symbolism of patterns, while relatively little research has been conducted on the craftsmanship and technical processes of pattern making. Secondly, although the application of traditional patterns in modern design has received wide attention, how to better integrate traditional and modern aesthetics remains a problem worthy of in-depth discussion. Future research should pay more attention to the technical details of pattern design and enhance its influence and value through cultural dissemination and commercial application in the context of globalization (Zhang, 2023).

In summary, research on traditional Guangdong furniture patterns has formed a more comprehensive academic foundation in terms of historical evolution, cultural symbols, and modern design applications. Future research can combine modern technology and design trends to further promote the innovation and global dissemination of traditional furniture patterns. In particular, strengthening the application of semiotic theories in the technical details of craftsmanship and design will provide new perspectives and impetus for the inheritance and development of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns.

#### *Current Research Status of Morris's Semiotic Theory*

Semiotics was founded by Saussure and Peirce and later developed into a systematic theoretical system by Charles W. Morris. Morris (1938) divided semiotics into three dimensions: syntactics, which focuses on the

form and structure of symbols; semantics, which explores the cultural and social significance of symbols; and pragmatics, which analyzes the use and interpretation of symbols in specific contexts. This theoretical framework not only expands the scope of application for semiotics but also provides strong support for the in-depth analysis of cultural symbols, especially in cross-cultural contexts.

In the study of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns, Morris's semiotics provides an effective tool for revealing the cultural symbols and social functions of these patterns. As mentioned earlier, researchers have extensively explored traditional Guangdong furniture patterns from perspectives such as historical evolution, cultural symbols, and modern applications. However, most studies have focused on the cultural inheritance and static characterization of these symbols, while less attention has been paid to the dynamic evolution of pattern symbols and the diversified symbolism in cross-cultural communication.

In recent years, researchers have gradually introduced the three-dimensional framework of Morrisian semiotics to analyze and interpret traditional Guangdong furniture symbols more deeply. Specifically, the three-dimensional framework of Morrisian semiotics has been widely used in the study of typical pattern symbols in Cantonese furniture. At the syntactic level, researchers have analyzed the structural and formal features of symbols such as dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, and plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum patterns, highlighting elements like the symmetrical composition of the dragon and phoenix pattern and the intricate carving of the pine and crane pattern. At the semantic level, they have revealed the cultural significance of these symbols, such as the dragon and phoenix representing power and auspiciousness, the pine and crane symbolizing longevity and elegance, and the plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum symbolizing high moral standards and literate temperament (Zhang, 2023). At the pragmatic level, the functionality and contextual interpretation of these pattern symbols have been explored, particularly how they serve different social classes and cultural contexts (Ju, 2023).

In addition, Morris's semiotics has gradually demonstrated its unique advantages in studying the modern applications of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns. By simplifying and abstracting traditional symbols, modern designers are able to integrate these symbols into a globalized design language, thereby achieving the modern inheritance and re-semanticist of cultural symbols. The cross-cultural applicability of this semiotic analysis provides theoretical support for the design innovation and global dissemination of Guangzhou furniture.

However, applying Morris's semiotic theory to dynamic cultural symbol systems still faces limitations. Some scholars argue that its three-dimensional framework has major limitations in explaining the dynamic changes and diverse meanings of symbols (Tou, 2021). In the context of globalization, the cross-cultural communication and diversification of symbols often exceed the explanatory capacity of its theoretical framework. Therefore, future research should consider combining semiotic theory with other interdisciplinary approaches to better explain the dynamic evolution and cultural adaptation of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns in global cultural transmission.

#### *Research Gaps and Innovative Points*

Existing studies mostly stay at the level of artistic aesthetics and historical value of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns, the systematic application of semiotic theories is relatively weak, the research content is fragmented, and there is a lack of in-depth interpretation of the symbolic system as a whole and its dynamic evolution. Most of the studies only analyze the auspicious symbolism of the patterns on a superficial level, failing to reveal their complex cultural symbols and social functions in different historical periods.

This study indicatively introduces the three-dimensional analytical framework of Morris semiotics to systematically analyze the symbolic structure, cultural connotations, and evolution of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns from three levels: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, which provides a comprehensive theoretical support for the study of traditional symbol systems.

In addition, this study further explores the cultural translation and re-semanticist path of Guangdong traditional patterns in modern design, providing designers with guidance on integrating traditional cultural

symbols into modern design language, promoting the organic integration of cultural inheritance and design innovation, and providing new theoretical support for the global dissemination and application of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a variety of research methods, with Morris's semiotic theory as the foundation, to systematically analyze the characteristics and cultural implications of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns. The literature review method is used to collect relevant academic literature and resources, providing a comprehensive overview of the historical development, classification, and cultural symbolism of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns, thereby constructing the cultural background for the research. The semiotic analysis method utilizes Morris's three dimensions—syn tactics, semantics, and pragmatics—to conduct an in-depth interpretation of the structure, symbolic meanings, and functional transformations of pattern symbols in different contexts. The comparative research method is applied to compare the application of patterns in different historical periods and modern design, analyzing their inheritance and innovation, and uncovering the integration of traditional culture and modern design.

### Research Framework

This study, based on Morris's diacritic semiotic theory (syn tactics, semantics, and pragmatics), systematically analyzes the cultural symbolism of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns and their application in modern design. The framework of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.

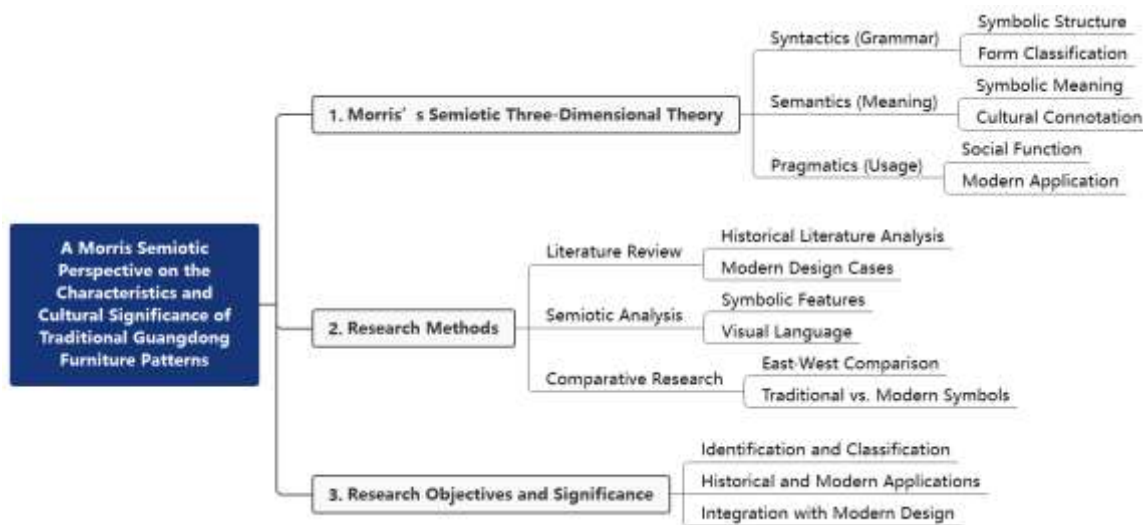


Figure 1. Research Framework Diagram of This Paper

Image Source: Self-drawn by the author




The research methods include literature review, semiotic analysis, and comparative research, aiming to identify, classify, and analyze the pattern symbols in Guangdong traditional furniture while exploring their cultural connotations and social functions in both historical and modern design contexts. Through an in-depth cultural interpretation and semiotic analysis of traditional patterns, this research reveals the cultural value of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns and investigates their inheritance and innovation in contemporary design, providing a theoretical foundation for the integration of modern design and cultural heritage transmission.

## Research Results and Findings

### *Symbolic classification and cultural symbolism of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns*

#### *Symbolic Classification and Typical Patterns*

The patterns of Guangdong traditional furniture can be roughly divided into three categories: animal patterns, plant patterns and geometric patterns. Each type of pattern conveys unique cultural symbols and social meanings through its morphological features, arrangement and application scenes. Table 1: The categories of pattern symbols of Guangdong characteristic furniture, typical samples sharing the connotation of pattern symbols and cultural symbols are organized as follows. **Table 1: Classification of Pattern Symbols in Guangdong Traditional Furniture and Their Cultural Symbolism**

Guangdong Characteristic Furniture Pattern Symbols			
Astern Category	Typical Patterns	Typical Symbolic Patterns	Symbolic Meaning and Cultural Significance
Animal Patterns		Dragon, Phoenix, Bat	Power and nobility (Dragon and Phoenix), Prosperity (Bat)
Plant Patterns		Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, Chrysanthemum	Integrity and scholarly qualities, resilience (Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, Chrysanthemum)
Geometric Patterns		Cloud motifs, Fretwork	Order, continuity, and auspiciousness

#### *Cultural Symbols of Guangdong Traditional Furniture Patterns*

Guangdong traditional furniture pattern is not only a kind of decorative symbol, but also a kind of cultural symbol that carries the Lingnan cultural spirit and social value. Through the multiple dimensions of the formal structure, cultural symbols and social functions of symbols, Guangdong traditional furniture patterns have become an important symbolic system for expressing regional cultural connotations and conveying cultural identities and values. In the grammatical analysis of symbols, the focus is on the formal structure and design logic of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns. The pattern symbols show a complex and delicate design style through geometric composition forms such as symmetry, repetition and balance. For example, the dragon and phoenix motifs often adopt left-right symmetry, which enhances the sense of visual balance and fits the core value of “harmony” in Cantonese culture. The dragon and phoenix motifs are often combined with symbols such as auspicious clouds and ruyi to form a symbol system of “good fortune, wealth and auspiciousness”, which not only enriches the visual effect, but also conveys the Lingnan culture's deep understanding of nature, life, and auspicious symbols. Through the grammatical

analysis of these symbol systems, it can be seen that the design of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns contains deep cultural connotations and subtle structural logic.

In the semantic analysis of symbols, the relationship between various types of pattern symbols and their referents reveals the cultural symbols and social values behind them. For example, the dragon and phoenix pattern is a common combination of traditional symbols in the Lingnan region, in which the “dragon” symbolizes the power and dignity of the emperor, and the “phoenix” symbolizes the virtue and nobility of women, and the combination of the dragon and the phoenix signifies “dragon and phoenix presenting good luck”, representing family harmony, family life, and social values. The combination of dragon and phoenix symbolizes “dragon and phoenix presenting good fortune”, representing family harmony, marriage and social good fortune. The Plum, Orchid, Bamboo and Chrysanthemum pattern symbolizes the literati spirit in traditional Chinese culture. The plum blossom represents perseverance, the orchid stands for purity and elegance, the bamboo symbolizes integrity and resilience, and the chrysanthemum symbolizes seclusion and longevity. The semantic analysis of these symbols can reveal the deep-seated pursuit of power, virtue and harmonious life in Guangfu culture, demonstrating the rich cultural connotation and value system of Lingnan region.

In the semantic analysis of symbols, the ways of using pattern symbols in different social scenes and their cultural functions are explored. The dragon and phoenix motifs in traditional Guangdong furniture often appear on important furniture such as wedding beds and large chests, which are mainly used in weddings and clan rituals, symbolizing family status, honor and social authority, and conveying the social meaning of prosperity and harmony. The pattern of plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum is mostly found in the study furniture and stationery, symbolizing the master's elegant taste and cultural cultivation, and its use not only demonstrates the aesthetic interest, but also reflects the recognition of the literati spirit and cultural ideals. The symbolism of these patterns in different scenes changes with different social roles, showing the dynamic social functions of symbols in specific contexts.

With social change and cultural development, these traditional symbols have been gradually introduced into modern design, and through simplification and abstraction, they have adapted to modern aesthetic needs and become visual elements that integrate tradition and innovation in modern home design and decoration. The flexible application of symbols in different scenarios and the dynamic evolution of cultural functions reveal their enduring adaptability and continuity of cultural inheritance. Through the comprehensive analysis of the three dimensions of Morris semiotics, the multi-dimensional significance of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns in terms of formal structure, cultural symbols and social functions can be seen. These patterns are not only the carrier of Lingnan culture, but also continuously adapt to the needs of social development in the inheritance and innovation of modern design, becoming an important element of traditional cultural symbols in contemporary design, and realizing the organic integration and value extension of cultural inheritance and design innovation.

#### *Functional Evolution of Pattern Symbols in Different Periods*

The pattern symbols in Guangdong traditional furniture have experienced the functional evolution from ceremonial symbols to cultural decorative elements in different periods, and have shown diversified cultural values and symbolic meanings in different stages of social development.



**Table 2.** The Results of Semiotic Analysis for Guangdong Characteristic Furniture Are as Follows**Semiotics Theory Analysis of Guangdong Characteristic Furniture Patterns Results**

Pattern	Form (Syn tactics)	Cultural Symbolism (Semantics)	Social Function (Pragmatics)
Dragon & Phoenix	Symmetrical layout, dynamic lines	Power, nobility, family harmony	Used in wedding beds and cabinets, indicates family status
Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum Patterns	Simple and elegant lines	Perseverance, purity, integrity, longevity	Found in study furniture, symbolizes scholarly spirit
Cloud	Smooth curves, spiral shapes	Good fortune and happiness	Decorative use, represents peace and harmony
Pine & Crane	Straight branches, elegant posture	Longevity, honor	Clan worship and ancestral halls, symbolizes family prosperity
Ruyi Pattern	Smooth curves, often combined with other symbols	Success and fulfillment	Used in ceremonial and wedding furniture, conveys good wishes

*Ming and Qing Dynasties: Ceremonial Symbols*

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the symbols of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns were mainly used to convey family honor, clan etiquette and social status. Pattern symbols such as dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum were widely used on important furniture such as wedding beds and large chests, symbolizing royalty, wealth and harmony, and often appeared in weddings, festivals and other major ceremonial occasions, conveying the family status and clan glory. According to the statistics of Art of Furniture of Ming and Qing Dynasties, about 70% of the Guangzhou-made furniture adopts dragon and phoenix and other patterns with strong cultural symbolism, which not only visually enhance the decorative nature of the furniture, but also convey deep cultural values and ethical meanings in specific occasions, reinforcing the clan ethics and social order.

*Modern Times: Functional Decorative Symbols*

In modern times, with the transformation of social structure and the acceleration of industrialization, the pattern symbols in traditional Guangdong furniture gradually shifted from ceremonial symbols to daily life

decorations, showing both functional and decorative features. Traditional patterns began to appear more often in the daily furniture of ordinary families, becoming a symbol of family decoration and cultural heritage. For example, in the early 20th century, the frequency of dragon and phoenix motifs in Guangzhou-made furniture dropped from 95% in the Qing Dynasty to about 60%, indicating that their symbolic significance was gradually weakened and transformed into daily decorative elements. This evolution reflected the gradual separation of traditional motifs from power and clan symbols, and their integration into daily life, which more broadly expressed the pursuit of a happy and fulfilling life.

#### *Contemporary Period: Cultural Innovation Symbols*

In the modern design context, the pattern symbols of traditional Guangdong furniture have been further simplified and abstracted, and are endowed with brand-new cultural symbols and visual forms. By reinterpreting the traditional symbols and combining them with modern materials and techniques, designers have preserved the traditional cultural connotations of these symbols while meeting modern aesthetic demands. According to statistics from the Guangdong Modern Furniture Design Association, sales of traditional symbols such as simplified dragon and phoenix, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum in modern furniture increased by 30 percent between 2015 and 2020, especially in Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States, where their share rose from 20 percent to 45 percent. The popularity of traditional symbols in the international market shows that they have become globally competitive cultural elements, demonstrating the potential for integrating traditional culture with modern design in the context of globalization.

In general, Guangdong traditional furniture pattern symbols were mainly used as symbols of family honor and social status in the Ming and Qing Dynasties; they were gradually transformed into elements with both decorative and cultural inheritance functions in modern times; and in contemporary times, they have evolved into important cultural symbols in modern design, which have realized the organic integration and value enhancement of traditional culture and modern design through continuous reconstruction and re-semanticist to adapt to the new social contexts and aesthetic demands. Through continuous reconstruction and re-semanticist to adapt to new social contexts and aesthetic demands, the organic integration and value enhancement of traditional culture and modern design is realized.

**Table 3.** Functions of Traditional Symbols in Different Periods and The Transformation of Application Scenarios

<b>Situation analysis of traditional symbols over time</b>				
<b>Period</b>	<b>Symbol Type</b>	<b>Primary Function</b>	<b>Primary Application Scenarios</b>	<b>Symbol Characteristics</b>
Ming and Qing Dynasties	Dragon and Phoenix, Pine and Crane, Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum	Ritual symbol, representation of status	Clan rituals, wedding furniture	Complex and refined, symbolizing social hierarchy and status

### Situation analysis of traditional symbols over time

Period	Symbol Type	Primary Function	Primary Application Scenarios	Symbol Characteristics
Modern Times	Dragon and Phoenix, Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum	Cultural inheritance, decorative function	Daily furniture in ordinary households	Enhanced decorative nature, symbolizing tradition
Contemporary Design	Simplified Dragon and Phoenix, Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum	Innovative cultural element, modern design	Furniture, architectural decoration, public design	Simplified and abstract, integrated with modern aesthetics

#### *Application And Innovation of Guangdong Traditional Patterns in Modern Design*

The inheritance and innovation of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns in modern design are mainly reflected in three aspects: simplification of form, reconstruction of cultural symbols and multi-dimensional translation of function. Designers promote the re-semanticist of traditional symbols through the combination of symbol re-interpretation and modern design concepts, so that they can retain cultural connotations while adapting to modern aesthetic demands and globalized market trends.

#### *Simplification and Innovation of Formal Structure*

From the point of view of formal structure, traditional patterns such as dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum symbols have undergone significant simplification and geometric transformation in modern design. Designers have replaced the complicated carving process through linear and abstract expression, and integrated modern technologies such as metal hollowing, laser engraving and 3D printing to revitalize traditional symbols in contemporary design. For example, renowned designer Chen Jianming has simplified traditional dragon and phoenix patterns into geometric lines and applied them to home designs such as coffee tables and bookshelves, which not only retains the cultural essence of traditional symbols, but also fits in with modern minimalist aesthetics. Data from the Guangdong Home Furnishing Design Association shows that sales of modern furniture with simplified dragon and phoenix, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum symbols increased by 30% between 2020 and 2023, and are especially favored by young consumers.

#### *Reconstruction and Reinterpretation of Cultural Symbolism*

From the perspective of cultural symbolism, traditional Guangdong patterns not only continue the original cultural connotation in modern design, but also give it new social significance through cultural reconstruction and reinterpretation. Traditional symbols such as the dragon and phoenix were used in

ancient times to express the honor and authority of the family, while in modern design, this symbol is widely used in home decorative paintings, headboards and textiles, becoming an element that symbolizes the harmony and happiness of the family. Plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum motifs continue to represent noble character and cultural cultivation, and are used in home accessories to symbolize the owner's cultural taste. This reconstruction and reinterpretation of symbols allows traditional patterns to continue their cultural value in modern life. 2020 survey by the Guangdong Institute of Household Culture showed that more than 60% of consumers would consider the cultural elements contained in products when choosing home furnishing products, with symbols such as the dragon and phoenix, and the mei, lang, zhu and chrysanthemum symbols remaining widely popular due to their distinctive cultural connotations.

### *Multi-Dimensional Transformation and Application of Symbol Functions*

From the perspective of symbol function, the application of Guangdong traditional pattern symbols in modern design has gradually transformed from ceremonial symbols in the past to decorative elements in daily life. While traditional symbols were mostly used in religious ceremonies, weddings and family celebrations in the past, the function of these symbols in modern design focuses more on daily cultural expression and aesthetic decoration. For example, simplified versions of the dragon and phoenix, pine and crane, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum symbols are widely used in home design such as coffee tables, dining tables, and decorative paintings, enhancing their decorative and cultural value. In recent years, many internationally renowned designers such as Marcel Wanders have collaborated with local Chinese designers to apply simplified versions of traditional symbols in home and lighting design, presenting a new look of traditional symbols through modern materials and techniques. This shift in function and application expands the use scenarios of traditional symbols and enhances their practicality and cultural value in modern design.

Overall, the inheritance and innovation path of Guangdong traditional furniture patterns in modern design realizes the re-semanticist of traditional symbols through the simplification of form, the reshaping of cultural symbols, and the multi-dimensional transformation of function, making them fit the modern design language as well as the globalized market demand. According to the analysis of Guangdong furniture export data from 2022 to 2023, the sales share of modern furniture with Lingnan traditional patterns in Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States rose from 20% to 45%, demonstrating the cultural attraction and commercial value of Guangdong traditional symbols in the global market. The innovative application of cultural symbols in the context of globalization not only revitalizes Guangdong traditional furniture, but also becomes an important design strategy to promote Chinese traditional culture to the world.

## **Discussions**

### *Sustainable Inheritance of Traditional Cultural Symbols in Modern Design*

As the visual symbols of Lingnan culture, how to realize the balance between cultural inheritance and innovation in modern design is one of the core challenges for designers of traditional Guangdong furniture patterns. Simplification and abstraction of symbols are common techniques in modern design, but over-simplification may lead to the loss of the original cultural value of the symbols. The grammatical perspective of semiotics emphasizes the close connection between forms and cultural connotations, therefore, designers should retain the core cultural characteristics of symbols when adjusting their forms to avoid excessive dissolution of cultural connotations. Meanwhile, the pragmatics perspective reveals that the meaning of symbols changes dynamically with the social context. Therefore, designers should combine modern technology and cross-cultural design techniques, so that traditional symbols can obtain new cultural interpretation and expression in modern design. Only by sticking to the cultural roots and balancing inheritance and change in innovation can the cultural vitality of traditional Guangdong patterns be continued in the context of globalization, and the sustainable inheritance and value enhancement of the symbols be realized.

*Adaptation to Globalization and Cultural Innovation of Guangdong Traditional Pattern Symbols*

When Guangdong traditional furniture patterns are applied in the globalized market, they not only face the opportunity of cultural dissemination, but also the challenge of cross-cultural interpretation and design innovation. Designers should redefine the cultural significance of these symbols through the strategy of cultural adaptation, based on respecting the original cultural connotation of the symbols and combining the modern design language with the global aesthetic trend. For example, the dragon and phoenix motif symbolizes power and peace in China, but in the Western context it needs to be culturally reconfigured to adapt to new ways of understanding. Through commercialization and simplification, designers can retain the cultural core of the symbols while enhancing their cross-cultural acceptance and market competitiveness. This cultural translation strategy not only integrates the traditional symbols into the global design language, but also gives them new cultural added value and innovative vitality, which promotes the dissemination and influence of Guangdong traditional culture in the global design market, and provides a new path and new kinetic energy for the sustainable development of Lingnan culture in the context of globalization.

## Conclusion

This study systematically analyzes Guangdong traditional furniture patterns through the three dimensions of semiotics, revealing their deep cultural connotation and social significance as the core symbols of Lingnan culture. Symbols are not only decorative elements, but also carriers of cultural heritage and social values. The study shows that the evolution and re-semanticist of patterns such as dragon and phoenix, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum in different historical periods reflect the social and cultural changes and the dynamic transformation of symbol functions.

The innovation of this study lies in the first systematic application of Morris semiotics theory to explore the application potential of Guangdong traditional patterns in modern design and cultural and creative industries. Through the simplification and abstraction of symbols and the combination of new materials and processes, designers have transformed them into design elements that meet contemporary aesthetic and market demands, enhancing the cultural connotation and economic value of traditional symbols, and providing new design inspirations and development directions for cultural and creative industries.

However, due to the limitations of data and research scope, this study fails to comprehensively cover all the complex features of Guangdong traditional patterns. In the future, the comparative study of furniture symbols from different regions can be further expanded by combining other theoretical frameworks and digital technologies to explore the dissemination and innovation paths of cultural symbols in the global market, so as to better promote the continuous inheritance and innovative development of Lingnan culture in the context of globalization.

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