

Creative Transformation of Traditional Minnan Floral Tile Patterns and Their Application in Cultural and Creative Design

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Abstract: Traditional Minnan floral tiles represent a significant material carrier of the cultural integration between Minnan's overseas Chinese heritage and Chinese-Western civilizations, embodying the historical context and unique aesthetics of Quanzhou as a World Heritage City. Taking Minnan floral tiles as its entry point, this study systematically examines their historical origins, cultural connotations, and artistic characteristics through literature research, field investigation, and design practice. Representative regional cultural symbols including the Bell Tower, Swallowtail Ridges, and East and West Pagodas are extracted to construct a modern design translation pathway that integrates regional symbols with traditional floral tile patterns. Three pattern series, "Bell Tower Reflections in the Spring," "Swallowtail Bearing Auspiciousness," and "Pagodas Standing Over the Spring City", have been completed. The objective is to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Minnan floral tile patterns, provide theoretical references and practical pathways for the contemporary revival of traditional architectural decorative patterns and the development of regional cultural IP, and thereby contribute to the inheritance and dissemination of Quanzhou's World Heritage culture.

Keywords: Minnan Floral Tiles; Traditional Patterns; Creative Transformation; Regional Culture; Cultural and Creative Design; Quanzhou World Heritage

1. Historical Origins and Cultural Background of Traditional Minnan Floral Tiles

The historical origin of Minnan floral tiles can be traced back to the European cement tile craftsmanship of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, overseas Chinese from Minnan

brought them from Southeast Asia to the Minnan area. After achieving success abroad, these overseas Chinese returned to their hometowns and built Western-style buildings and "overseas Chinese houses" (fanzi lou), widely using floral tiles as the main decoration for buildings. Thus, in seeking Western life, the overseas Chinese in Minnan were able to incorporate local culture and gradually made floral tiles a symbol of their culture abroad. The period from the 1920s to the 1950s was a golden age for Minnan floral tile art. Floral tiles were used to decorate the floors and walls of Western-style buildings and traditional ancestral houses in Quanzhou, Xiamen and other places. As they spread, the floral tiles became more localised; European geometric patterns were combined with Chinese auspicious symbols, and new Minnan blessings and symbols were added to the colours of Southeast Asia. This eventually formed a characteristic style of Minnan floral tiles and carried the collective memory and local sentiment of generations of the Minnan people who "ventured to Southeast Asia, sought livelihoods, and returned home with honour."

With the development of modern buildings, many of the old floral tiles are no longer used. However, in recent years, after Quanzhou achieved the success of World Heritage listing and the rise of "guochao" (national trend) culture, floral tiles have re-entered public view, evolving from building materials into regional cultural symbols and becoming essential components of cultural and creative design and brand visual identity^[1]. As bearers of the spirit of overseas Chinese, floral tiles have witnessed the entrepreneurial history of the Minnan people's "courage to strive and win", as well as the process of cultural exchange and integration between China and the West, and serve as a "living fossil" of Minnan's overseas Chinese culture. Minnan floral tile patterns are rich in auspicious symbolism: the fret pattern means "endless prosperity", the swastika pattern is "boundless blessings and longevity", the

crabapple pattern means "blossoming wealth", the mandala flower signifies "auspicious perfection", and the scrolling grass pattern means "endless continuity"—all carrying the wishes of the Minnan people for a good life. As a starting point of the Maritime Silk Road, Quanzhou has floral tiles that have absorbed the cultures of China, Europe and Southeast Asia; they offer a visual display of the cultural diversity along the Maritime Silk Road and show that Quanzhou has long been a "world maritime trade centre".

2. The Original Art of Minnan Floral Tile Patterns

2.1 Beauty of Form

Minnan floral tiles are based on symmetry and order and generally feature central symmetry, axial symmetry, and four-direction continuous arrangements. It has a regular structure and is well-proportioned; although it contains both solid areas and empty spaces, there is also harmony^[2] with the Chinese idea of completeness and balance. The border and central patterns are harmonious; they can be used as a single tile or arranged in continuous strips to create a stable and regular look, which is in line with the Minnan people's wishes for a good life and good fortune.

2.2 Profundity of Meaning

The three main themes of floral tile patterns are geometric, botanical and auspicious symbols, and they are typically combined with Chinese and Western elements and carry blessings. The structure consists of fret and swastika patterns, interspersed with scrolling grass, mandala flowers, and crabapple patterns. Butterflies and the ruyi (auspicious scepter) are folk symbols that carry the meaning of good luck. All are harmoniously integrated and convey the people's wishes for lasting prosperity and longevity, as well as Minnan folk beliefs and family aspirations.

2.3 Brilliance of Color

Minnan floral tiles have developed a regional colour system, with Minnan red, Nanyang green, porcelain white, gold and indigo blue as the main colours, and typically feature warm, matte hues and complementary warm and cool tones. Mineral pigments have strong adhesion and durability, and they also reflect the local culture

embodied by red-brick ancestral houses and the rich decorative traditions of Nanyang. This colour system is suitable for the hot and humid climate in Minnan and has also become a well-known cultural symbol of overseas Chinese.

2.4 Precision of Craftsmanship

Traditional floral tiles are made by filling with multiple colours, mechanical pressing, natural curing and hand-polishing; thus, they have soft, undulating lines and delicate handmade textures that are different from the cold and precise nature of industrial printing. This simple, substantial handcrafted style has a rich cultural heritage and has remained popular in recent years; it also adds a touch of vintage charm to modern life.

3. Limitations of Contemporary Cultural and Creative Applications of Traditional Floral Tile Patterns

The previous discussion has presented the typical shapes, symbols, colours and other artistic ideas in traditional Minnan floral tiles. However, this decorative system started in the paving scenarios of overseas Chinese architecture, and it is not suitable for direct application in current cultural and creative design or World Heritage visual communication. These are the reasons for undertaking this creative pattern translation design.

First of all, the pattern structures are too complex and repetitive, with limited adaptability to different carriers. Traditionally, floral tiles were used for large-scale floor and wall decoration, and they generally feature rich scrollwork, intertwined branches and numerous flowers; although they are highly decorative, there is little negative space. If they are used directly on small, lightweight cultural and creative products such as bookmarks, coasters and personal items, the patterns will appear crowded and disorderly. Another problem is that the original square symmetrical design does not have the necessary radial or multi-angle extension for large-scale hanging scrolls and soft-furnishing murals, so it is unsuitable for many application scenarios.

Second, the native color system exhibits a significant temporal aesthetic disconnect. Traditional floral tiles rely on highly saturated mineral pigments—Minnan red, Nanyang green, indigo blue, and other primary colors with

intense contrast and pronounced heaviness, well-suited to the rich vintage atmosphere of modern ancestral houses. However, they contradict the contemporary cultural and creative pursuit of low saturation, soft elegance, and simple restraint. Large-area application tends to create visual pressure, making them difficult to adapt to everyday consumption scenarios such as home soft furnishings, high-end souvenirs, and lightweight museum commemorative products.

Third, regional cultural symbols are lacking, and thus homogeneity is prevalent. The typical Chinese auspicious designs of old floral tiles include fretwork, roundel flowers and crabapple flowers. Although they convey auspicious meanings, they do not incorporate local World Heritage architectural symbols such as Quanzhou's Bell Tower, Swallowtail Ridges and East and West Pagodas. The traditional floral and geometric patterns are not in line with the coastal, overseas Chinese and World Heritage City character of Quanzhou. Many similar floral tile cultural and creative products from the Minnan, Chaoshan and Taiwan regions exhibit visual convergence, making it difficult to create a distinctive Quanzhou regional cultural IP.

Fourth, traditional craftsmanship has high costs and is difficult to implement in practice. The original hand-layered colour filling and pressing method is very labour-intensive and costly for mass production, so it is only suitable for small-scale custom restoration of ancient buildings. Direct application of traditional relief texture and multiple shades in modern planar printing, digital printing and ceramic transfer techniques results in blurred lines and uneven colours; thus, batch development of patterned cultural and creative products is not possible.

4. “Upholding Tradition While Innovating”: Strategies for Modern Translation

The design of the "Quanzhou Tile Shadow" series is based on the original artistic features of traditional Minnan floral tiles and adheres to the main creative idea of "upholding tradition while innovating". It provides an organised, complete and feasible path for modern pattern translation and thus revitalises and carries on the traditional artistic qualities of Minnan floral tiles in contemporary design.

4.1 Composition Translation

The "Quanzhou Tile Shadow" series design

follows the core compositional logic of traditional floral tiles—symmetrical regularity and clear primary-secondary relationships—preserving the classic layout of a central primary pattern, corner secondary patterns, and border decoration. It maintains the inherent sense of order and visual stability of traditional floral tiles while breaking through the limitations of traditional pattern themes. Iconic Quanzhou landmarks—the Bell Tower, East and West Pagodas, and Swallowtail Ridges—are organically embedded into the floral tile compositional framework, achieving deep integration of traditional compositional forms with regionally specific cultural identifiers and endowing the patterns with renewed cultural significance and distinctiveness.

4.2 Theme Interpretation

"Quanzhou Tile Shadow" draws on the cultural spirit of traditional floral tiles and preserves the basic symbolic meanings of classic auspicious patterns, such as the mandala flower, fret pattern and scrolling grass. By discarding the cumbersome, fragmented and redundant decorative details of traditional patterns, the design geometrises and abstracts their forms, refining the line contours and overall silhouettes. While retaining the original culture, the pattern design is also more in line with modern minimalism and can be used in many places^[3].

4.3 Color Optimization

The design of "Quanzhou Tile Shadow" draws on the traditional regional colour system of floral tiles and extracts characteristic colours, such as Minnan red, dark green and Quanzhou blue, as the main colours for each series. At the same time, it reduces the contrast between colours and makes them more harmonious by lowering the saturation of the traditional palette. Some low-saturation colours are added to make the whole scheme lighter and more elegant; at the same time, the original natural colours of the region are retained while being made suitable for various applications, such as cultural and creative products, visual packaging, and posters. Thus, the original aesthetic qualities of traditional floral tile patterns have been combined with new applications in modern life.

5. “Quanzhou Tile Shadow” Series Pattern Design Practice

5.1 Bell Tower Reflections in the Spring: Flat Translation of Urban Landmark Graphics

5.1.1 Refined Extraction of Architecture and Traditional Patterns

Bell Tower Reflections in the Spring was inspired by the culture of Quanzhou's Bell Tower. Translation intentionally leaves out the realistic and fragmented details of doors, windows, relief carvings, etc., and only keeps the most recognizable structural outlines—such as the circular frame, vertical columns and arch lines—to turn the three-dimensional, solid architectural form into simple, clean planar geometric shapes and achieve standardisation of real architecture as a decorative pattern. Although the classic auspicious patterns of floral tiles, such as scrolling grass, fretwork and crabapple patterns, still have the cultural idea of "enduring prosperity and blossoming auspiciousness", they lack many fine, curling details and only have a basic linear framework. This way can preserve the original culture and avoid being too repetitive; at the same time, it will be simple enough to suit the taste of modern people.

5.1.2 Recomposition of Composition Based on Traditional Floral Tile Structure



Figure 1. Bell Tower Reflections in the Spring

5.1.3 Softened Adjustment of Traditional Regional Colors

The characteristic red colour of Minnan ancestral houses will be used as the main colour for this series of patterns. Traditional floral tiles are generally made with bright mineral pigments, and when used in large areas, they can appear too intense; thus, they do not fit the soft and mild colour requirements of contemporary cultural and creative design. Specifically, the saturation of red is reduced somewhat and its brightness increased, while warm cream and light orange colours are added to lessen the intensity. Gold lines are to be used sparingly to outline local contours, and the overall proportion of gold should be kept small to avoid the heaviness and ostentation of traditional

In accordance with the Chinese aesthetic concept of balanced completeness, the Design continues to use the traditional compositional logic of Minnan floral tiles, which is central symmetry and clear primary-secondary relationships. A simplified Bell Tower graphic will be placed in the centre of the picture to replace the traditional floral pattern at the top, and it is hoped that this will strengthen Quanzhou's local urban cultural identity by creating a special memorial area that does not resemble other general Minnan floral tiles. Lightweight auspicious patterns are added to the four corners as extra ornaments, and a continuous fret pattern is arranged along the outer edge for indefinite extension in both directions and to meet the printing requirements of the four sides. At the same time, all the line thicknesses in the work are uniform; thus, there will be no three-dimensional relief shading as in traditional handmade tiles. This will reduce the technical difficulty of the following printing, fabric printing, ceramic printing, gift box hot stamping and other multi-carrier applications significantly, and make the century-old compositional form of floral tiles suitable for all kinds of modern cultural and creative uses^[4].

colouring. In this way, the traditional local colours can retain the native charm of red-brick ancestral houses and be used in various cultural tourism products for everyday life, such as city promotional posters, commemorative silk scarves, cultural and creative tote bags, and souvenir gift packaging.

5.2 Swallowtail Bearing Auspiciousness: Adaptive Translation of Curvilinear Forms from Ancestral Houses

5.2.1 Integration and Simplification of Swallowtail Ridge Forms with Auspicious Patterns

The main motif in the whole design is the characteristic Swallowtail Ridge of Minnan ancestral houses, known as "Swallowtail

Bearing Auspiciousness". Change the symmetrical curved shape of the upward-curving ridge tip and remove unnecessary ornaments, such as elaborate porcelain mosaics and multiple layers of floral and bird carvings in the ridge area, to obtain a simple and elegant ridge curve for all patterns in this series [5]. Based on the above, local folk patterns such as the mandala flower and ruyi scrolling grass are added to carry the auspicious meaning of perfect harmony and family happiness. The first several layers and fine details of flowers have been reduced to simple geometric shapes to meet the current demand for understated elegance. Design has created a pattern system based on the exterior appearance of Minnan residential buildings, and at the core of this system are traditional auspicious symbols; thus, these patterns can be traced back to the Minnan area and do not have deep cultural connotations specific to architectural graphics, achieving a two-way integration of architectural symbols and traditional auspicious culture.

5.2.2 Adjusting Composition Density to



Figure 2. Swallowtail Bearing Auspiciousness

5.2.3 Lifestyle-Oriented Enhancement of Ancestral House Foliage Tones

The native dark green of the Minnan ancestral house wooden structures is used as the main colour in the palette. The original dark green is too heavy and dull to be used across a large part of the work. Therefore, the overall brightness is increased, and the dark green can be combined with light brown, warm yellow and porcelain white as background colours to create a low-contrast, warm and elegant colour scheme. Unlike the strong contrasts and old-fashioned style of traditional floral tiles, the extended colour range is soft and gentle; thus, it has less historical heaviness, is suitable for many modern lifestyle applications, such as home textiles, daily-use ceramics, cultural and creative gift box linings, and fragrance packaging, and can smoothly blend traditional mineral colours with

Accommodate Small-Format Carriers

The original arrangement of the floral tile is centred and symmetrical and can be retained: a mandala flower is often placed at the centre and surrounded by swallowtail ridge curves and scrolling grass patterns. Small ruyi patterns are placed in the corners to balance the negative space, and the outer border is enclosed to achieve a unified appearance; thus, the requirements for the integrity of individual patterns and continuous tiling can be met. For small-scale lifestyle cultural and creative products, such as coasters, canvas bags, cushions, pocket bookmarks and ceramic tea sets, the distance among the various pattern elements has been intentionally increased to avoid the crowded visual problem of traditional full-coverage floral tiles. Negative space is used to reduce the visual density and regulate the rhythm of the work; thus, patterns passed down through generations of Minnan ancestral houses can be better adapted for contemporary life, such as in soft home furnishings and personal items.

contemporary living styles.

5.3 Pagodas Standing Over the Spring City: Orderly Translation of the Octagonal Structure of the East and West Pagodas

5.3.1 Geometric Simplification of World Heritage Architectural Forms

"Pagodas Standing Over the Spring City" is inspired by the East and West Pagodas of Kaiyuan Temple, a World Heritage Site, and a new pattern system has been developed in accordance with the special octagonal shape of the pagodas. The three most typical structural features have been simplified and kept in this work, and elaborate ornaments such as Buddha statues and doors, windows, etc., have been omitted. Tall, three-dimensional pagodas have been reduced to regular, flat octagonal shapes and some visual interest has been added to the

depiction of Quanzhou's World Heritage architecture. Supplementary patterns of decoration, such as butterflies and mandalas, have also been simplified in an abstract way; only symmetrical curved lines are used to draw the outline of the outside, and the inside is filled with solid colours to create a harmonious and fresh visual style for all elements by combining the language of architectural symbols with that of traditional floral tiles.

5.3.2 Expanding Traditional Compositional Forms Based on the Octagonal Structure

Although the original balanced and regular Design Logic of floral tiles has been preserved, it is no longer restricted to square symmetry and can now use the octagonal form of the East and West Pagodas to create a new radiating composition. At the centre is a mandala flower;

eight radiating arms extend outwards from this point, and along them are small pagoda shapes, butterflies and scrolling grass patterns are arranged in a circle around them. This design has inherited the stable and balanced characteristics of Chinese design in Minnan floral tiles, but it is also different from traditional square floral tile cultural and creative products because it is octagonal. All the pattern units have been standardised in terms of size and rotation angle for continuous large-area application, and they are suitable for all kinds of large-scale visual displays, such as exhibition panels, decorative hanging scrolls, large-scale artistic ceramics and feature walls in exhibition halls; thus, the application scope of traditional floral tile patterns has been expanded.



Figure 3. Pagodas Standing Over the Spring City

5.3.3 Refined Upgrade of Maritime Silk Road Blue Tones

Traditional blue is a good choice for the basic colour system of Quanzhou's maritime Silk Road trade culture. Traditional blue pigments are relatively cool and highly saturated, giving them a heavy appearance. At the same time, the colour intensity is reduced, some light cyan is added for a gentle gradation, and a little light orange and light purple are introduced to balance warm and cool colours and create a refreshing, open coastal Silk Road cultural atmosphere. An expanded palette is used to reduce the weight of traditional glazes and create a light and elegant overall style that is more suitable for modern, high-end cultural and creative products, such as museum commemorative items, luxury art gifts and exhibition hall decorative ceramics; thus, the traditional colours of the Silk Road culture are in harmony with contemporary refined aesthetics.

6. Conclusion

Minnan floral tiles are not only material evidence of the cultural exchange between China and the West and changes in overseas

Chinese society, but also excellent resources with folk auspicious symbolism and local aesthetic qualities. By building on the foundation of traditional culture and integrating new design ideas such as geometric simplification, symbolic language and colour adjustment, modern designs can achieve an organic harmony of tradition and modernity. The design of the "Quanzhou Tile Shadow" series integrates local culture with innovative decorative patterns. It will help promote the contemporary revitalisation of Minnan floral tiles and provide a model for the development of regional cultural intellectual property and World Heritage visual communication. With the rise of "guochao" and the cultural inheritance movement, new designs for traditional patterns still need to be continuously explored to allow more outstanding traditional decorative arts to be revived in modern life and to achieve the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture.

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