

The Semiotics of Chinese New Year: Tradition Meets Modernity

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Abstract: *Spring Festival, or the Chinese New Year, in Chinese, is the most important aspect of Chinese cultural identity, with rich traditions and images of good luck, prosperity, long life, happiness, and wealth. An ancient tradition that stretches almost 4,000 years, its rituals evolved with social and cultural changes but preserved important aspects of family togetherness and gratitude. January 1, 2023: The Chinese New Year is the traditional festival of the Chinese nation. The study explores how to interpret cultural stories through significant brilliant images, symbols, and representations in various forms in woodblock prints and paper cuts, by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics scaffolding. Employing qualitative semantic and visual analyses on 145 iconic images, the research reveals common themes with motifs such as the "Fu" character, mythological creatures and flora embodying prosperity, reinforcing their potential in sustaining cultural identity. The research emphasises that modernisation and digitalisation have enabled these symbols to expand globally, turning them into something that is usable on a diverse platform, including in social media and virtual markets. This shift allows traditional Chinese New Year symbols to reach broader audiences, while still anchoring in their relevance in a globalised world. These results underpin the significance of such aesthetics as an intermediary between tradition and modernity, reflecting larger stakes for cultural preservation. Future studies suggested examining these texts in light of audience perception, the integration of technology, and comparative approaches across cultures to further solidify their place in a digital environment.*

Keywords: Chinese, visual analyses, Peirce, semiotic, culture

1. Introduction

Chinese New Year (Spring Festival), the first day of the lunar calendar, is the most important cultural celebration in China, with a history of nearly 4,000 years. Based on the solar term Lichun (the beginning of spring), it conveys themes of renewal, prosperity and hope, ensuring it is a pillar of Chinese cultural identity. The festival, with origins tracing back to the Qin and Han Dynasties and spearheaded with prosperity through the Tang and Song periods, embeds diverse traditions that emphasize family cohesion, cultivation of gratitude, and prosperity (Yang, 2008; Zhang, 2019).

The Spring Festival, which includes various traditional practices known as "celebrating the Spring Festival" (Xu Chen & Xu, 2018; Zhou, 2021), covers twenty-three days of the twelfth lunar month to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. These customs range from worshipping the Kitchen God, sweeping dust (as a renewal ritual), pasting red couplets and paper cuts (to ward off evil spirits), setting off firecrackers (to invite joy and good fortune),

and exchanging New Year greetings (to deepen family and social relationships) (Xu et al., 2018). These traditions go beyond celebration and are cultural spectacles that embody the deep-rooted values. Their historical and cultural significance is emphasized by declaring these practices as a part of the Chinese national intangible cultural heritage (Zheng & Wang, 2022; Ibekwe, 2021).

Nevertheless, modernization and urbanization have significantly altered the Spring Festival traditions and challenged the preservation of its cultural identity (Yang, 2008; Zhang, 2019). Urbanization causes geographic dispersion, leaving less room for traditional face-to-face festivities. Rituals based on kinship and location have also developed diverse manifestations driven by modern tools including mobile communication and social media (Wen, 2014; Quest Mobile, 2024). These digital platforms allow families to remain connected, offering new ways to engage with traditional symbols while adapting them to modern contexts

The most conspicuous of these transformations is found in the visual language of Chinese New Year. Traditionally stemming from craftsman traditions, such as woodblock printing and paper cutting, these hand-painted flat images were visual storytelling vehicles that communicated cultural values through the generations. Today though, these symbols have been crafted into a modern look, being contemporary, yet still holding their traditional essence. It is an ever-present tension between authenticity and innovation, allowing these artifacts to retain meaning in a digital and global landscape.

This study aims to investigate the enduring relevance of Chinese New Year imagery by analyzing its semiotic elements and exploring its adaptation to modern contexts. It addresses traditional Chinese New Year pictures as visual records of cultural expression, showing how elements of fortune, prosperity, longevity, happiness and wealth are communicated. Furthermore, with the onset of contemporaneity and growing digitalisation, the study aims to understand how globalised images became seeds of cultural identity in a pan-national context. The study seeks to evaluate the delicate equilibrium between preserving authenticity and adopting innovation, with the understanding that such images become more than mere objects in a physical sense it become transmitters of cultural identity in a digital, global framework. This approach of the research adds in, this topic as weaving to a narration that question constantly the validity of a name, its meaning and power and the preservation of a status que toward it, lastly as binding the modern world with the believers of its past.

2. Literature Review: Chinese New Year Cultural Symbols

2.1 Chinese New Year Cultural Symbols

The symbolism of normal Chinese New Year originates from the cultural artifacts that integrate rich historical, cultural and artistic connotations, which show the political and historical background of different dynasties for thousands of years (Jiajing et al., 2024). Key to these celebrations are dragons, phoenixes, lions and other animals representing power, harmony and protection. Likewise, plants like plum blossoms, bamboo, and pine trees symbolize resilience, longevity, and renewal (Jiufang et al., 2019; Li, 2024). Popular decorations include red lanterns, firecrackers, Chinese knots, Gate Gods and the God of Wealth, incorporating blessings, protection and wealth (Yang, 2008).

To classify them thematically better, these symbols fall under three major themes: Blessings and Prosperity (e.g., "Fu" character, God of Wealth), Protection and Strength (e.g., Gate Gods,

lions), and Renewal and Longevity (e.g., plum blossoms, bamboo). This thematic lens not only elucidates their roles but emphasizes their lasting importance within Chinese cultural heritage. These globes far from purely decorative, but rather symbolic act as vehicles for cultural education and preservation. Not only do traditional crafts, such as woodblock printing and paper cutting, showcase these motifs, but these crafts also provide mediums for passing down stories and values from generation to generation (Jia et al., 2019; Emrich-Rounge, 2020). Although they go back thousands of years, their flexibility has made them current. For example, the era of digital technologies has rendered these symbols transferrable between social media, online markets, and digital designs, increasing their access for global audiences (Chia, 2020; Barrett, 2019).

Many symbols retain their original meanings, but their interpretations have shifted, as a close reading shows. The character "Fu," traditionally considered for usage on a scroll or a craft art, is now common in stickers and online media campaigns, in line with modern aesthetics and spontaneous dialogue. The Gate Gods, a traditional core protective deity, can also be leveraged in physical, commercial, and new media art practices (Zhao, 2022; Quest Mobile 2024). However, there are still differences between regions, and some symbols have unique interpretations and meanings in different parts of China, further showing the diverse nature of Chinese cultural practices.

Additionally, younger generations have infused these symbolic markers with new meaning, incorporating them into their digital existences. For instance, red lanterns are not only decorative but also find their way into online campaigns, focusing on a theme of unity and celebration. Meaning that these cultural artifacts remain relevant with the times and continue to connect the past to the present whilst maintaining the tradition and adopting new innovations. This discussion is further enriched by cross-cultural perspectives, parallels can be drawn with other cultural festivals, such as Japan's New Year celebrations or Diwali in India both of which employ symbolic decorations that embody the themes of prosperity and protection. These comparisons bring out the universality of cultural symbols while also indicating the peculiarity of Chinese New Year's practices.

Examining how themes have evolved also magnifies transitions between your themes through traditional crafts like paper cutting evolve into their modern adaptations in digital formats, which shows the easy relationships heritage and technology have with each other. Thus, the incorporation of modern styles in these symbols, while still preserving their cultural characteristics, they remain a virtual vehicle for the dissemination of Chinese identity in the broader context of globalization.

2.2 Semiotics of Traditional Chinese Culture

Semiotics also serves as a powerful lens through which we can understand the cultural meanings that Chinese New Year symbols evoke. By grounding discussions in the seminal theories of Saussure and Peirce, semiotics provides scholars with the means to examine systems of signs and symbols against their sociohistorical and ideological contexts. In general, patterns, colors, and motifs are symbolic shared visuals that reflect inseparable cultural values with deep meaning. The consistent presence of red in Chinese New Year decorations is not just for aesthetic purposes; it represents luck and is believed to scare evil old spirits, based on traditional legends. In order to decode such meanings semiotic analysis is adopted, which involves examining their genesis and progression in cultural traffic (Lu, 2020; Ma, 2023).

Peirce's triadic model the representamen (the physical form of the sign), the object (the concept it refers to) and the interpretant (the meaning derived by the observer) is especially appropriate for a study of Chinese New Year symbols. Illustrate the differences between these three categories of sign as they operate in the same sign: for example, red lanterns serve as icons (the physical form resembles actual lanterns), symbols (representing reunion and celebration) and indices (the presence of these in the home or streets indicates the arrival of the New Year). While Saussure's dyadic model, focused on the signifier (the form of a sign) and the signified (the concept a sign represents), adds important perspectives, it does not offer the interpretive layers available in Peirce's triadic framework. Peirce's model thus provides a more flexible tool to describe the layered meanings and dynamic cultural significance of Chinese New Year imagery.

Li (2024), a leading semiotician in the Chinese context, advocates for the potential of semiotics to mediate between cultural narratives to nurture and propagate the understanding of these narratives. His analysis demonstrates the power of semiotic inquiry to expose the changing discursivity of traditional signifiers, like the character "Fu" (福). While the symbol's historical meaning is blessings, for example, modern adaptations such as augmented reality filters or digital stickers showcasing the symbol prove that it can still be able to resonate with the culture while adapting to newer mediums. Zhao Yiheng's approach emphasizing how signs play an integral role in our understanding of Chinese society, suggests that Chinese New Year signs are far from static signs from the past, but instead active participants in the ongoing process of meaning-making that is essential to humanity (Zhao, 2022).

The contributions of Gong Pengcheng and Ye Shuxian have further expanded the theoretical applications of semiotics to Chinese cultural symbols. A native Chinese background with a specific focus on Chinese philosophical constructs in the context of cultural semiotics, Gong's research focuses on potential symbolic semantics and the psychological cognition of how meaning is generated. An analysis by Gong of the dragon, which is a prominent motif in Chinese New Year celebrations, describes both the dragon's symbolic role as a protector and bringer of prosperity, as well as its psychological resonance, as a representation of strength and unity. Likewise, Zhang (2015) offers a cultural semiotics theory, which combines multilevel cultural coding.

From a pragmatic perspective, semiotics is essential for understanding how conventional cultural icons are repurposed for contemporary environments. As an example, the character "Fu" acts as the depot of good fortune, a representamen when it exists in physical or digital form, and an index in an upside-down form of the character indicating that good fortune is coming ("福到"). Its contemporary forms say, digital stickers or AR-enabled door decorations highlight the fluidity of semiotic meaning and the adaptability of cultural traditions. Just as incense smoke during ancestor worship serves as an indexical sign of the practice of honouring the deceased and invoking their protection, this object retains meaning within contemporary temple rituals as well.

Modern versions of Chinese New Year symbology illustrate how semiotic economy evolves in accordance with new technologies and events. For example, the inclusion of these symbols in digital branding, AR/VR venues and even global advertising campaigns reflects their ability to rise above cultural differences whilst conserving their original meanings. For instance, dragons or the "Double Happiness" motif is increasingly integrated into global marketing ads to invoke themes of prosperity and joy while melding traditional aesthetics with modern design

principles. With fluid presences, the Chinese cultural symbols migrate from objects from history to multi-functional and flexible communication tools in global fields.

This investigation into semiotics that emerges from Chinese New Year reveals such flourishing dialogues crafting syncretic relationships between tradition and modernity by intertwining theoretical profundity with practical illustration. It highlights how these signs as cultural symbols endure as heterogeneous entities which can still transcend the very recontextualization that makes them meaningful. Semiotics maximizes the understanding of these symbols and provides a methodology with which to analyse these symbols, across generations and cultures.

2.3 Historical Development and Evolution of Symbols

Chinese New Year symbols can be viewed in various ways, from historical contexts, traditional practices, to changes in society. With their long history, these symbols constantly change and adapt to remain relevant both locally and globally. One such tradition, the lion dance, a staple of New Year festivities, highlights this transformation. Originally appearing in the Han dynasty, the lion is a symbol of protection and good fortune. The lion was associated with sacredness and auspiciousness, due to the influence of a Greek-Buddhist iconography that gained popularity in the Tang dynasty as Buddhism ascended to the status of a major religion in Chinese society. By later dynasties, the lion was employed to depict wealth and power, its posture and expressions reflecting socio-cultural values of changing eras (Shi & Li, 2014; Ma, 2023). This transformation illustrates how symbols evolve to reflect the cultural and ideological demands of a given era.

The development of the “Five Fortunes” (福, 禄, 寿, 喜, 财) offers a further example. The phenomenon of the five sevens morphing into five bats and the impermanence of traditional beliefs was kept alive by the reinterpretation of minute forms (tails) in an implicit rhetoric of permanency, the bats being the visual metonym of the five core values - fortune, prosperity, longevity, happiness, and wealth, intentionally performed, because of the homophonic relationship between the Chinese word for bat (fu) and the word for fortune (fu). This characteristic of wordplay and imagery is pervasive in Chinese culture where meanings are hidden in symbols. Bats are a perfect example of how much more than that is at play due to the (1) use of the bat conveys blessings; (2) both artistic and linguistic creativity; (3) non-prohibitive nature of fengshui vs destructive forces at desecration versus dharma, as (yet another) anthropological comparison showcasing the need for generality and symbolic resonance in Chinese to all the way to the god of wealth (source of gods capable of having conversation through physical motion/dancing) (Qian, 2019).

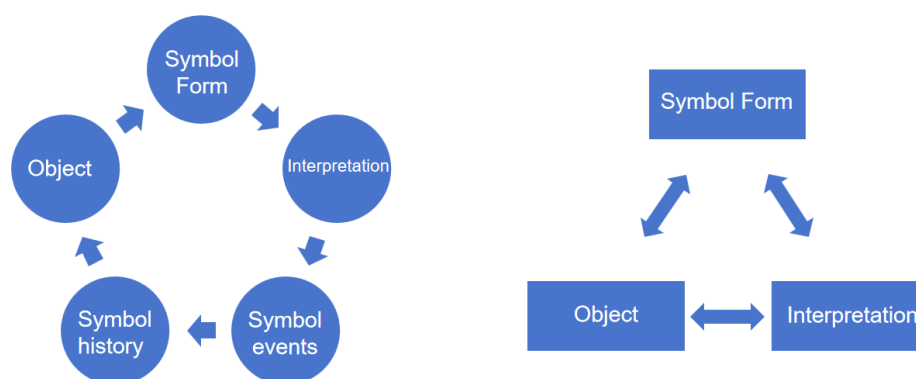


Figure 1: Ma (2023) five-element symbolic model of cultural symbols, adapted from Pierce's triadic model of symbols

Symbols related to the origins of the Chinese New Year, such as “Nian” and “Sui”, emphasize the strong agricultural and ritualistic roots of this festival and its cultural significance. “Nian” is known as a grain harvest, and “Sui” is an agricultural tool for farming used for reaping sacrifices. These terms, used in early Chinese agrarian production and calendar systems, became an integral component of New Year practices and symbols as a time of gratitude and renewal (Ma, 2023). These origins link the festival to ancient beliefs in harmony with nature and the rhythms of time, themes that continue in modern celebrations.

The evolution of New Year symbols mirrors broader changes in society throughout history. In the pre-Qin period, the concept of “year” emerged, New Year celebrations included sacrifices to heaven and earth, gods, and ancestors. The rituals highlighted by the Book of Songs were focused on devotion, protection, and blessings: “Friends drink together, slaughter lambs, ascend the hall, toast with ox-horn cups, and wish for longevity” (Ling, 2023; Kim, 2020). These traditions developed considerably during the Qin and Han dynasties when the date of the New Year was established to be the 1st day of the 1st month of the lunar calendar. New layers of meaning were added to the celebrations with the introduction of symbols like the twelve zodiac signs. Group worship, door gods, and firecracker displays became parts of a festival, which was hot on a religious and cultural context (Tian et al., 2020).

By the Tang dynasty, New Year customs were becoming less focused on religious rituals and more on secular and festive celebrations. Sleeping overnight, attending court meetings, and putting up spring couplets, door gods, and window craftwork also became popular. This was a time when social and cultural practices were fused with celebratory tradition. These customs were further institutionalized during the Ming and Qing dynasties, serving as the basis for what is now seen as the modern Spring Festival (Cheu, 2021). These rituals epitomize an ever-evolving symbol and practice through merging it with the new society their changing agrarian lifestyle represented into a diversified hybrid model that highlights tradition without undermining modernity.

Different regions of China also offer unique symbols that add to the variety and depth of Chinese New Year symbols. In northern China, the motifs are often dragons, firecrackers and so on, as they have historically been meant to ward off evil spirits. Southern motifs, however, may reflect an abundance of water, and thus fish, considering agricultural influence in these regions. Regional variances in language and customs are informed by local traditions and environmental and economic activities, resulting in a cultural potpourri throughout the country. Today, these sacred symbols have not been lost; they continue to adapt in both the digital media era, within branding and global culture. “Fu” under Digital Technology: The “Fu” character has been a traditional image on the doorways, but introduced by digital stickers and augmented reality filters, the various manifestations of “Fu” during the Spring Festival have been widely used. Likewise, the dragon, once representing imperial power, has transformed into an international symbol of strength and prosperity, often added to international marketing schemes. These adaptations demonstrate how symbols endure, but through now both traditional and contemporary lenses, attain new meanings.

The development of symbols in Chinese New Year also represents more macro socioeconomic forces, such as urbanization, globalization, and technology. This is the result of the penetration of urban life into many kinds of rural customs with new urban interpretations. This has led to a transnational domesticating of Chinese emblems that promotes intercultural respect while simultaneously oversimplifying or misrepresenting their values. However, with technological

developments, particularly in the digital environments, there are new benchmarks to preserve and promote these elements, rendering them relevant in the globalising age.

Transit project to preserve Chinese New Year symbols and these symbols reflect the interplay between tradition and innovation from their origins in agricultural rituals to which they were integrated in modern digital media. They not only echo the heritage of the Spring Festival, but are also a vivid manifestation of the identity of “being Chinese”, balancing the past and the present to provide rich modes for future research on the cultural heritage and contemporary adaptation of cultural practices (Chen et al., 2018; Mingyu, 2023)

2.4 Application of Semiotics to Chinese New Year Images

Integrating Peirce’s triadic model of semiotics establishes a solid scaffolding for interpreting traditional imagery, especially the complex iconography of Chinese New Year. In the context of Peirce’s theory, signs are classified as icons, symbols, and indexes, respectively, which helps to provide a framework for comprehension of the process through which cultural meanings are integrated with these emblematic vessels of culture (Zhao, 2019). Not only does this offer a richer dissection of the potential for Chinese New Year graphics, from woodblock prints to modern renderings, as vessels of cultural memory that transcend the time-boundary (Gorlee, 2022; Wright, 2024), but they also give the impression of practicing a form of trans-temporal civic engagement.

Icons are signs that bear a close similarity to their referents, triggering intuitive associations in an observer’s mind. Traditional Chinese New Year imagery, for example, often includes images of fish, which are iconised for their visual likeness to the real animal. In Chinese, fish (鱼) have come to symbolize abundance because it sounds the same as surplus (余), which is the same pronunciation (yu). Likewise, representations of the God of Wealth and firecrackers also serve as icons, directly mirroring the rituals and objects that they symbolize during the festival (Qian, 2023; Clarke, 2019). These symbols seamlessly melded visual form and cultural significance, making the idiom of these icons easy to be understood within context by all members of the culture.

Symbols, by contrast, have meanings established by social contracts and cultural conventions. Fu is a key image used during Chinese New Year and symbolizes blessings and good fortune. However, it needs to be learned what this character means, the character itself does not embody these concepts. In a similar vein, dragons and phoenixes, which are common in annual decorations, also mean power, harmony, and auspiciousness. They are infused with meanings rooted in Chinese mythology and history and express social values that have evolved over thousands of years (Zhang, 2015). Symbols such as these are crucial in maintaining cultural identity, as they enshrine common values and aspirations.

Indexes are not like icons or symbols; indexes are related to their referents by direct causal or spatial connections. Peirce claims that unlike icons, indexes are not based on resemblance but rather on a dynamic connection between sign and referent (Peirce, 1931). Indexical signs are formed in the context of Chinese New Year symbols; the smoke caused by burning incense is produced in the context of worshipping and revering ancestors. Another example is with the remnants of firecrackers long after they’ve been used, signalling celebration and the warding off evil spirits. Such indexicality is evidence itself and derives its meaning from the accompanying rituals and experiences (Zhao, 2019; Tian et al., 2020). When it comes to meaning, however, indexes demand less interpretative work than symbols because their meanings are rooted in direct, observable connections.

Drawing on Peirce's Theories will provide a multi-layered understanding of Chinese New Year imagery and how these symbolism work together in maintaining such narratives. Symbols like peaches, denoting prosperity, evoke immediate visual associations with what they signify. The sublime patterns of dragons provide culturally translatable ideas that span generations and maintain mutual heritage (Chen, 2021). Symbols deliver culturally specific messages. While indexes (Abbott 2005) related to the different rituals of the traditional Moon Festival, for example the placement of the Chinese character for "blessing" ("福") upside down in the doorstep, serve as referents to traditional practices that can be immediately identified, encouraging the audience to engage conceptually with the wider cultural context in which these rituals occurred.

It also gives insight on why in current uses, semiotics of Chinese New Year imagery is adaptive and emerging on computerized and globalized stages. Red envelopes, originally physical items that were meant to represent a monetary gift to the receiver, now exist on mobile payment apps as digitally rendered iconography, keeping the look of the item but increasing the number of potential recipients. Appearing in social media stickers and AR filters, the character "福" combines traditional symbolism with modern technology, creating an engaging experience for younger, tech-savvy audiences. Firecracker animations in digital advertisements follow suit, retaining an indexical tie to celebration but turning to appeal to a globalized audience. These adaptations demonstrate semiotic elements from traditional imagery that is deconstructed to meet modern culture without losing its identity.

Correlatively, semiotic categories of Chinese New Year icons also vary regionally and globally. Fish and water motifs are emphasized in southern China, for example, where waterways are vital to agriculture, while northern areas feature dragons and firecrackers, which protect against harsh winters. Among overseas Chinese communities, these symbols often take on hybridized meanings, fusing traditional values with multicultural overtones. This is especially noticeable with ancient Chinese dragons; while within the scope of a storyline dragons may be interpreted as merely images of imperial might, when looked at from a global perspective dragons are also a common representation of might and wealth, showing how statements change when seen from different semiotic standpoints due to cultural variances.

In conclusion, Peirce's semiotic theory provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine Chinese New Year graphics, revealing how the interplay of icons, symbols, and indexes collectively articulate cultural values and preserve traditions. Through this framework, the modern adaptations can hold their place alongside traditional representations, showing how these images continue to function as vehicles of cultural expression and preservation. The layered significations that these signs carry reflect their capacity to shift according to the circumstances in which they are embedded, allowing them to continue to signal in an increasingly globalized and digitalized world. This constant evolution highlights the efficiency of semiotics as technique to create a link between traditional heritage and modern production.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Semiotic Analysis of Chinese New Year Images

Analysing traditional images recorded during Chinese New Year as a cultural medium of expression and communication using the semiotics-based model Semiotic analysis assists researchers in interpreting the visual, symbolic, and cultural contexts present in these images. Building from the theoretical insights of Saussure, Peirce, and Zhao Yiheng, this section

articulates an integrative framework for making sense of the design, interpretation, and cultural meanings of Chinese New Year imagery.

In Peirce's semiotic model, the sign consists of three parts: the representamen (the form a sign takes), the object (the concept it represents), and the interpretant (the meaning viewed by readers). For example, in the context of Chinese New Year, the representamen is a red envelope (hongbao), the object is the concept of monetary blessings, and the interpretant is the viewer's cultural understanding of that envelope as a sign of good fortune. They are framed within layers of iconic (matches visual appearance), symbolic (cultural reproduction of meanings) and indexical (causal connections, such as the burning of incense indicating prayer). These semiotic layers also represent the cultural context of the symbols themselves as they relate to the Chinese New Year. A motif of red lanterns or peaches takes on symbolic meanings of health and rejuvenation via images reminiscent of their physical forms. Symbolic aspects, such as the character "福" (Fu), necessitate an understanding of culture to decipher as blessings or prosperity. Things like the rising smoke from incense, for example, are indexical, they point to things like ancestor worship or spiritual rituals in Chinese New Year festivities. Through this triadic model, the study connects these traditional visual elements to Chinese cultural values, thereby preserving historical narratives and ensuring they are relevant to successive generations.

Such a framework is not only helpful in making sense of the ancient images, but also points the way to decoding modern interpretations of Chinese New Year imagery. Traditional symbols have transformed into their digital counterparts, from emojis and stickers to augmented reality filters, making them applicable to modern forms of communication. For example, the character "福" is now often inscribed in the form of digital stickers, keeping its meaning intact as its medium transforms. This shows the persistence and cultural flexibility of these symbols, merging traditional values with the digital media of the day.

Through the study of semiotic units based on Chinese New Year materials as examples, this study will not only take you to explore the cultural connotation of its meaning, but also to show you that the cultural value of the unit is still relevant in modern society. Through these works of art, the artists explore semiotics and its implications as a set of signs that carries a wealth of cultural meanings, thus underlining the importance of keeping cultural heritage alive in the face of technological revolution and advancing society.

3.2 Peirce's Semiotic Theory

Charles Sanders Peirce builds further upon Saussurean binaries, providing a triadic model with three components that constitute semiosis: the representamen (the form of the sign), the interpretant (the idea formed in the mind of the interpreter), and the object (the referent of the sign in the world) (Bateman, 2018). Peirce's model highlights the interactional nature of signs, and how context drives meaning, as a more nuanced approach to understanding how signs operate (Chandler, 2002).

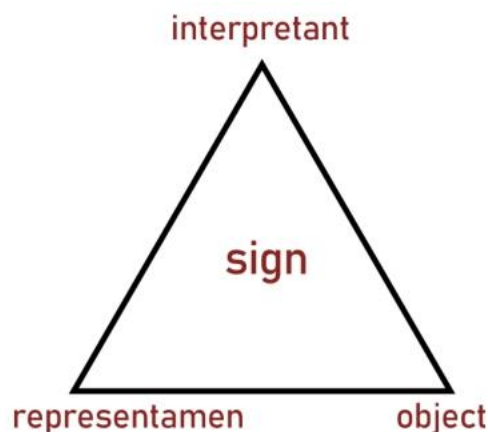


Figure 2: Theory by Charles Sander Peirce

According to Peirce, there are three categories of signs: icons, symbols, and indexes, which can each serve as the basis for productive lines of reasoning when interpreting traditional Chinese New Year images. Icons are like their referents in being visually alike, icons are intuitive and easy to comprehend (Gorlee, 2022). The pictures of red envelopes or firecrackers represented the physical aspect of traditions during Chinese New Year. These representations evoke the visual and cultural sense of these objects (Joesoef, 2020).

On the other hand, symbols get their meaning from social conventions and shared cultural understanding. Symbols, in contrast to icons, do not simply represent by visual resemblance but hold meanings that arise in cultural contexts. Another example is the character “福” (Fu), which means good fortune and can be found in many Chinese New Year decorations. Its importance is a result of centuries of cultural affiliation, aiding it become a meaningful phantom motif in festival imagery.

Indexes provide a direct, contextual connection to their referents, typically by means of spatial or causal relationships. These signs rely not on what they resemble or socially accede but what they signal through association. Images of people with red envelopes may be indexical signs indicating blessings given and prosperity shared in the New Year or some such thing.

Peirce’s framework provides an effective lens to consider the layered meanings conveyed by the representational qualities of traditional Chinese New Year images (Moradi et al., 2022). The integration of iconic, symbolic, and indexical elements can also be seen in a depiction of a family gathering under a “福” character, around red envelopes and firecrackers. All these components work in unison to create a vibrant aesthetic that captures the spirit of marriage in this festival of togetherness, celebration and prosperity. This triadic understanding can fully appreciate the cultural and communicative power of traditional New Year imagery (Van Waolde, 2018; Bor & Könczöl, 2019).

4. Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative approach is adopted in this study to explore the symbolic meanings and cultural significance of traditional Chinese New Year images. This approach is well-suited for examining cultural artifacts, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuanced meanings embedded in visual symbols meanings that may not be easily quantifiable. Both semantic and visual analyses are employed to capture the dual nature of these images: their role as

transmitters of cultural values across generations and their embodiment of artistic and emotional significance. These methods provide a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between traditional art components and their contemporary cultural relevance.

The study analyzes 145 traditional Chinese New Year images, selected based on specific criteria, including historical relevance, cultural symbolism, and visual prominence. Images were drawn from museum archives, traditional craft collections, and historical texts to ensure a representative sample of key themes. The inclusion criteria focused on images prominently featuring themes of blessings—"Fortune" (福), "Prosperity" (禄), "Longevity" (寿), "Happiness" (喜), and "Wealth" (财)—as these are integral to New Year cultural practices.

Semantic analysis forms the core of this study, focusing on uncovering the symbolic meanings embedded in these images. Each graphic is systematically analyzed for its cultural connotations and thematic significance, guided by Peirce's triadic model of semiotics. For instance, the "福" (Fu) character is examined as an iconic symbol of blessings, a symbolic representation of good fortune requiring cultural literacy, and an indexical sign tied to traditional practices of home decoration.

Visual analysis complements this approach by examining the design, symbolism, and stylistic features of the images. Specific visual elements, such as patterns, colors, and motifs, are systematically analyzed to identify how they convey cultural messages. For example, the repeated use of vibrant red and gold symbolizes luck and prosperity, while motifs like plum blossoms and dragons signify renewal and strength. This analysis highlights how traditional imagery incorporates symbolic artistry, preserving cultural heritage while contributing an aesthetic dimension to the annual celebrations.

In interpreting these cultural artifacts, great care was taken to respect their historical and cultural contexts. The study cross-validated its findings through historical texts and consultation with experts in Chinese art and cultural history, ensuring reliability and validity. Additionally, ethical considerations were addressed by acknowledging the cultural origins of these symbols and avoiding overgeneralization, recognizing the diversity of regional interpretations and practices.

The qualitative analysis is guided by Peirce's semiotic framework, enabling a structured interpretation of iconic, symbolic, and indexical elements in the imagery. This connection provides a theoretical lens through which the cultural and visual elements of these symbols are decoded and contextualized. By combining semantic and visual analyses, the study underscores the interplay between traditional values and modern cultural adaptations.

This methodological approach not only reveals how traditional visual embodiments convey cultural values and emotional meanings but also illustrates their continued relevance in a contemporary context. For example, while traditional imagery reinforces core Chinese cultural values, modern adaptations—such as the use of the "福" character in digital stickers—demonstrate the resilience and evolution of these symbols in the digital age. By bridging historical and modern interpretations, this study highlights the dynamic role of traditional Chinese New Year imagery as both a cultural artifact and a medium of artistic expression.

4.2 Sampling

The cultural identity form of graphic design with traditional Chinese elements has unique symbolic meaning in which fine arts and culture are rooted, hovering with the pertinency in

artistic and cultural historic background. This study chose 98 woodblock prints and 47 paper cuts from famous sources, such as "The Compendium of Chinese Woodblock New Year Prints" (Feng, 2017), as well as artifacts seen during field visits to cultural museums in Kaifeng, Tianjin and Suzhou. Some of these artifacts were chosen, to a greater or lesser degree, because of their historical significance, artistic quality, and cultural relevance; others were included to ensure a balanced representation of regional styles. Yangliuqing's colourful and elaborate designs stress family wealth and harmony, Taohuawu's tasteful elegance represent dainty craft, and Zhu Xian Town's vigorous and energetic styles emphasize festive spirit. The choice of 145 images was judged enough to reach around the diversity of the Chinese New Year imagery while enabling detailed analysis at the same time across regions and themes.

The sampled artifacts exemplify five core themes of Chinese cultural aspirations good fortune, prosperity, longevity, happiness, and wealth. We prioritized the character 福 (Fu, meaning blessings), mythological creatures like the Qilin and the phoenix (signifying good fortune and harmony), and auspicious motifs like peaches, pomegranates, and treasure bowls (symbolizing longevity, fertility, and wealth). The themes reflect Chinese New Year customs and beliefs and exemplify how traditional art forms express common values and hopes. It also discusses the historical and cultural contexts of these artifacts, illustrating the ways in which their meanings developed in response to sociopolitical changes that evolved over time through dynasties.

By studying such traditional depictions, the research highlights the evolution and endurance of cultural symbolism across multiple generations. Although this study focuses on woodblock prints and paper cuts, other mediums for example, textiles or digital designs have the potential to deepen our understanding of New Year symbolism. For example, further studies could investigate how contemporary reinterpretations, such as social media stickers or augmented reality filters, apply these symbols to modern contexts, allowing them to remain salient, impactful, and therefore relevant.

This study connects traditional art and new interpretations by developing an analysis around these habitual representations. Different generations in China and now more and more subcultures in western societies are reinterpreting this aesthetics for themselves; they are integrating traditional Chinese symbols into contemporary design and pop culture. This process reaffirms that Chinese New Year imagery is not only extant but is flourishing, reincarnating itself through the prism of contemporary aesthetics without losing the cultural identity. Such value can be gleaned from this research, which underpins the idea that these visual symbols hold a significant position in the fabric of Chinese heritage, reminding the world of their ability to unify tradition and innovation, as well as contribute to cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world.

4.3 Data Collection Techniques

Integrating literature reviews and visual analysis, this study adopts Peirce's semiotic framework to explore the cultural and symbolic dimensions of Chinese New Year imagery, as well as the lasting significance of traditional cultural symbols. Data collection focused on a systematic search of the main databases of academic archives, museum records, and curated publications, such as The Compendium of Chinese Woodblock New Year Prints (Feng, 2017). Relevant texts were selected for their coverage of traditional symbols of New Year and their historical and cultural backgrounds. These resources guided the study to identify key themes of "Fortune" (福), "Prosperity" (禄), "Longevity" (寿), "Happiness" (喜), and "Wealth" (财) as translatable from Chinese on auspicious links, laying the foundation for an in-depth qualitative analysis of their cultural significance in Chinese heritage.

The dataset was further enriched by field visits to the cultural museums in Kaifeng, Tianjin, and Suzhou, where artifacts would be examined in person. The selected museums were chosen by looking for a cross-section across regions relevant to traditional Chinese New Year imagery and focusing on their collections of woodblock prints and paper cuts. These visits resulted in detailed notes, photographs of artifacts (permitted), and interviews with the curators to tease out their expert opinions about the cultural and historical significance of the imagery. One challenge was limited access to rare artifacts and handling restrictions on fragile materials, addressed by relying extensively on curator guidance and archival records.

Central to the visual analysis was Peirce's semiotic model, which included the representamen (the form of the sign), the object (the concept or entity it refers to), and the interpretant (the meaning derived by the observer). This configuration led to the systematic decoding of how cultural values were embedded obscurely in such traditional motifs as woodblock prints and paper cuts. For example, the character "福" (Fu) was analyzed as a representamen that symbolizes blessings, its object signifying good fortune, and its interpretant connecting harmony and prosperity during festive occasions.

This study constructed a coding scheme based on semiotic theory to systematically categorize things identified with each symbol by its material forms (representamen), cultural references (object), and semantic interpretations (interpretant). Historical and social contexts were woven into the analysis to explain these connotations more safely. As a case study example, pomegranate motif was discussed as the representamen of fertility, the cultural object associated with family prosperity, and the interpretant of communal dreams of sharing abundance and blessings. Likewise, the phoenix was analyzed as a representamen of harmony, its object representing a divine connection, and its interpretant signifying renewal and good fortune.

Although the study is largely concerned with traditional forms, such as woodblock prints and paper cuts, it notes that contemporary adaptations, like social media stickers or augmented reality filters, were excluded from it. Perhaps they offer a useful entry point for future analysis, especially in terms of how contemporary readings are reimagining long-standing symbols for new generations and international communities.

In order to verify the reliability and validity of the results, the study was cross validated with the historical texts and consulted with curators and experts in Chinese cultural heritage. There were also ethical considerations, such as honoring the integrity of cultural artifacts, crediting contributors, and making sure that the interpretations were faithful to their historical and cultural contexts.

Specifically, this research applies a combination of these methodologies to address how contemporary Chinese New Year Art reflects cultural belief systems as well as how such culturally significant images maintain relevance over both historical and modern contexts. Those results showcase the active function of these images as transmitters of heritage that can be played around and perceived during Chinese cultural identity exploration.

5. Results

5.1 Semantic Analysis of the Traditional Chinese New Year Graphic Features

This study highlights the symbolic richness, cultural significance, and enduring relevance of traditional Chinese New Year imagery. By employing Peirce's triadic model of semiotics (icon,

symbol, and index) and integrating both semantic and visual analyses, the findings reveal how these images communicate core values such as fortune, prosperity, longevity, happiness, and wealth. The results are organized into thematic categories to emphasize their cultural depth and relevance.

a) Fortune (福)

One of the most recognizable and popular symbols of health and good fortune in Chinese culture is the "Fu" character (福). These bold, flowing strokes, often written in classical calligraphy, are often interspersed with decorative motifs like blossoms and mythological animals like dragons and images of good-luck fruit like pomegranates. Other ornamental design touches render a richer, more vivid visual experience and reflect the themes of abundance and harmony that the character embodies. This "Fu" character is not just a decoration but an embodiment of cultural aspirations for blessings and prosperity.

The Fortune theme depicts blessings and good fortune, which are presented as the Fu character: (Figure 1). This is one of the cultural motifs of Taohuawu woodblock prints and other forms of art. The representamen of the "Fu Character Image" is the Fu character that is enriched with additional floral and figure-based imagery. The object of this sign refers to blessings and harmony, while the interpretant talks about the wish for abundance and happiness at home.



Figure 1: Fu



Figure 2: Pomegranate with Many Seeds



Figure 3: Hundreds of Blessings Together

Other symbols, like "Pomegranate with Many Seeds," (Figure 2) convey Fortune through representations of upper-class women and children presenting bursting pomegranates that symbolize fertility and blessings. Yangliuqing visual focuses on family growth and prosperity, both of which are viewed as essential elements of good fortune. "Hundreds of Blessings Together," (Figure 3), which opens with a chorus of children, butterflies and flowers, extends this theme by suggesting shared happiness and plentiful blessings. These images frequently

include combinations of multiple elements — animals and flowers and decorative objects, all of them layered together to convey messages of well-being and harmony.

Incorporating animals, like roosters (homophonically connected to luck so as a symbol of good luck and fortune) and tiger (as a symbol of protection), into the pictures adds even more symbolic value. Artistic representations of such activities embody prevailing cultural norms of soliciting divine favor and securing the welfare of the family unit.

The Fu character operates on multiple levels from a semiotic perspective. As a symbol, it embodies more classical calligraphy, and all its historical and cultural baggage. It represents blessings and prosperity, representations that are entrenched in Chinese conventions and known all throughout the regions. As an index, its placement often upside down on doorways or walls is a signal of fortune arriving ("福到"). This deliberate form of inversion renders its cultural appropriation dynamic and participatory.

Today, the "Fu" character has adapted itself perfectly for the digital world. Now you can see it as mobile wallpapers, social media stickers, and augmented reality (AR) filters, making it available to tech-savvy audiences. Such adaptations preserve the traditional meaning behind the symbol but redefine its meaning for the younger generation and across the globe, highlighting how relevant the symbol still is today in a modern, digitalized world.

b) Prosperity (禄)

Mythical beasts such as the Qilin, laurel wreaths and the scholarly-themed ones scrolls, and various writing materials frequently appear in Chinese New Year imagery as symbols of prosperity. These spectacles are part of a visually rich tradition that deeply complements the Chinese ethos of striving for success, honor, and betterment. Often portrayed with ornate detail in woodblock prints, the Qilin is a legendary symbol of prosperity and good fortune. The use of laurels and a motif of scholarship also reinforces themes of education and societal respect as means for achieving prosperity.

In semiotic terms, the Qilin operates as an icon, as it maintains a hybrid form that evokes its bestial and auspicious characteristics. These mores are a symbolic social event a social affair, honors, and knowledge. Imagery of children holding scrolls or laurels, for example, as an index of familial pride in academic accomplishments, represents traditional aspirations for educational and social advancement.

Symbols of Prosperity are concerned with success, prosperity and honour, which are usually associated with academic and professional accomplishments. This was the most effective way to prosper in traditional Chinese society, as passing imperial examinations and gaining official ranks were the goals for most people at that time. While it also includes auspicious symbols of wealth, scholarly success, and Fortune as in "Qilin Bringing a Child" (Figure 4), Qilin is a mythical creature, said to be a harmonious blend of ox, horse, deer and dragon also believed in most Asian cultures as fortune bringer and protector. Yet this representamen carries the cultural goal of familial prestige through academic success.



Figure 4: Qilin Bringing a Child



Figure 5: Kui Xing

The graphic for the "Kui Xing " (Figure 5) places emphasis on examinations, featuring Kui Xing in an action-like post with brush and ink in hand to signify scholarly achievements. His object represents achievement in academia hierarchy, and his interpretant repositions education as a vehicle for social stratification upward.

Other portrayals, like “Winning the Laurel in the Moon Palace” (Figure 6), also strengthen the cultural focus on academic success. It also incorporates motif elements like laurels, peonies and crabs (a homonym of “second place”) that highlight the prestige associated with high rankings in the imperial exams. Such imagery is also in line with a popular belief in society that scholarly excellence guarantees a bright future for the next generation.



Figure 6: Winning the Laurel in the Moon Palace

In traditional Chinese art, symbols of prosperity represent success, wealth, and honor of academic and professional achievements. Images such as “Qilin Bringing a Child” (Figure 4) convey scholarly success and familial prestige through the revered Qilin, who carries a child who is destined to be great. Likewise, “Kui Xing” (Figure 5) depicts the examination deity and highlights one way people could rise through society through education. “Winning the Laurel

in the Moon Palace” (Figure 6) solidifies these values through motifs like laurels and peonies, attesting to the cultural belief that academic success guarantees prosperity for future generations.

These symbols of prosperity have even new applications in the modern sophisticated arenas of the contemporary world such as branding, advertising, and digital media. Motifs of growth are ubiquitous in the business world, from logos and advertisements to online content, especially in industries that center around growth and success. So, too, on educational platforms and in professional development tools, representations of prosperity symbols continue to be employed digitally, maintaining their applicability to modern life.

c) Longevity (寿)

Longevity is a constant theme in Chinese New Year imagery, and peaches, pine trees, and the God of Longevity are all symbols of this auspicious topic. These graphics accentuate health, vitality and resilience. The peach is another particularly iconic representation of long life and prosperity, often shown as golden and stylized. Pine trees and plum blossom, despite their harsh environment in winter, make those two more powerful symbols for resilience and our lives through the experience of life.

The theme of Longevity reflects aspirations for a long and healthy life, interwoven with concepts of prosperity and familial harmony. Key motifs include symbols like the peach (longevity), pine trees (evergreen vitality), and the God of Longevity (寿星), whose presence epitomizes health and extended lifespans.



Figure 7: Magu Offering Longevity

“Magu Offering Longevity” (Figure 7) depicts the Daoist immortal Magu, dressed in the robes of a beautiful young woman and holding a flower basket and dust whisk, here used to indicate blessings of long life. Based on Daoist beliefs, this image expresses how cultural narratives interconnect immortality and divine protection, both of which are offered through the Qingming Gujian observance. Likewise, the “Longevity Character Image” joins the longevity character (寿) with other symbols of good fortune such as the plum blossoms and immortals holding peaches, reinforcing how culturally significant the desire for longer life and vitality.



Figure 8: Three Stars (Fu, Lu, Shou)

Works like “Three Stars (Fu, Lu, Shou)” (Figure 8) and “Hundred Blessings and Thousand Years” (Figure 3) combine symbols of happiness, wealth, and longevity. By incorporating divine figures, children, and elements such as bats (homophones for "blessings"), these pieces express collective cultural hopes for abundant and harmonious lives.



Figure 9: Continuous Blessings of Longevity

Traditional art also represents longevity as interconnected with community well-being, through visuals like “Continuous Blessings of Longevity”, (Figure 9) where children provide peaches and other illustrations of vitality. Such artistic choices underscore how the Chinese value longevity not only as an individual boon but as a shared ideal intertwined with prosperity and harmony. Traditionally in Chinese art, the theme of Longevity represents hopes for long life, health and vitality; harmony and wealth are often associated with it as well. It also expressed through emblematic symbols as peaches, pine trees and the God of Longevity. Magu Offering Longevity (Figure 7), which features the Daoist immortal rendering blessings of long life, and “Longevity Character Image,” which combines the longevity character with ideal auspicious elements. “Three Stars (Fu, Lu, Shou)” (Work 8) and “Hundred Blessings and Thousand Years” (Work 3) unite longevity with happiness and wealth, representing collective aspirations for conjoined lives. “Continuous Blessings of Longevity” (Figure 9) reminds us that longevity is a blessing all its own, and that it is part of a plan for community prosperity.

According to semiotic analyses, peaches are also icons, and their pictograms, realistic yet stylized, would mean the symbols carry a sign of longevity. As symbols, they signify a culturally entrenched wish for longevity, which often correlates with well-being and prosperity at home. Pine trees and plum blossoms act as indices, indirectly indexing resilience and vigor by demonstrating a low-affinity resilience to harsh circumstances.

Within the healthcare and wellness industries, you can find many modern takes on longevity symbols. Brands weave these motifs into product packaging, advertisements, and logos, mixing the traditional meanings with modern health-related communicatory agendas. This has transformed symbols of longevity to speak to our current desires for wellness and vibrance.

d) Happiness (喜)

In Chinese New Year imagery, symbols of happiness, like the “Double Happiness” motif, dragons, and phoenixes, are closely associated with ideas of joy, harmony and unity. The “Double Happiness” character, frequently depicted in bold red, is a ubiquitous feature of celebratory occasions such as weddings and family reunions. Dragons and phoenixes are often depicted together and signify balanced energies and auspicious unions.

Happiness theme is celebrating joyful occasions like marriage, harmony, and prosperity. Representations of harmonious marital coupling, such as “Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity” (Figure 10), where the dragon and phoenix were metaphors for ideal matching male and female energies. The “Double Happiness Window Flower” emphasizes marital harmony and is generally reserved for display during wedding ceremonies to encourage happiness and fertility between couples.



Figure 10: Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity

“Joy Descends from Heaven” (Figure 11) highlights the importance of academic and career achievements in traditional Chinese culture. This piece showcases Zhong Kui, a well-known character in Chinese mythology who serves as a protector while also potentially being a bringer of good luck. This also generally depicts Zhong Kui who, seated on a charging horse, fresh to deliver a scroll of good news, represents the coming of success and fame. This underscores the importance that has always been given to excellence in academia and one's career as a major source of happiness for oneself and family. In Chinese culture, such achievements are often seen as steppingstones that bring family honor and prosperity or align with society's collective dream of growing in wealth and success. In its dynamic and heart-pulsing narrative, the image pays tribute to the gaiety of meritocratic achievement and its additional dividends in familial self-respect and harmony.



Figure 11: Joy Descends from Heaven

Images such as one titled “The Two Immortals of Harmony and Unity” (Figure 12) represent these deep-rooted cultural values of harmony and unity which are crucial to familial and societal well-being in the Chinese tradition. Known as He-He Erxian (和合二仙), it embodies happy marriage, brotherly concord and mutual help. Often shown with lotus flowers, treasure bowls and scrolls containing auspicious sayings like “Harmony Brings Prosperity,” the Immortals celebrate peace, wealth and happiness. Grounded in Confucian ideals surrounding familial stability and Taoist principles of balance, their imagery acknowledges the interconnectedness of unity and enjoyment. With Chinese New Year traditions celebrating togetherness and prosperity, this harmony encourages both individual and communal joy during the holiday. Thus, the Two Immortals continue, through their symbolic representation, to hold our ideals of a harmonious and joyous life.

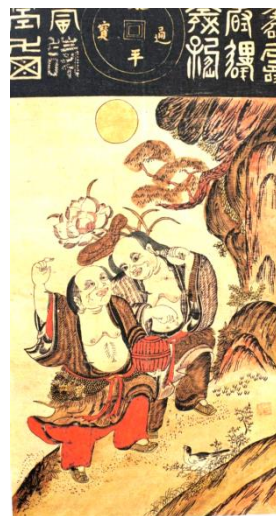


Figure 12: The Two Immortals of Harmony and Unity

Art originated in traditional Chinese art with the theme of Happiness to celebrate joyful moments such as marriage, family harmony, and success. “Dragon and Phoenix Bringing Prosperity” (Figure 10) signifies marital harmony and “Double Happiness Window Flower” symbolizes good fortune and fertility. “Joy Descends from Heaven” (Figure 11) depicts bittersweet joy for academic and career accomplishments and is all about success and recognition. “The Two Immortals of Harmony and Unity” (Figure 12) celebrates peace, unity and joy, echoing Confucian and Taoist values that view harmony as fundamental to happiness. This image of dragon and phoenix symbolising harmony and unity serves as an icon from a semiotic perspective. The double happiness motif functions as a symbol, representing companionship and fertility in marriage. Today, symbols of happiness are popular wedding design, event planning, and invitation elements. Their colorful shadings and profound meanings hold relevance in celebratory settings to this day, shining brightly in their continuing

applications and reach in contemporary contexts, too, in celebrating people, places, and things with people.

e) Wealth (财)

Chinese Spring Festival images also reflect its theme of wealth with images of the God of Wealth, treasure bowl and gold ingots, and various auspicious animals, including the tiger. This element is typically beautiful and bright where gold and red represents profit and wealth. The intricate description of gold ingots and coins makes the scene more vivid, and it evokes the reader's idea of material wealth instantly.

Wealth theme is expressed with financial prosperity, represented by the God of Wealth, and various auspicious animals and items. “God of Wealth Bestowing Fortune” (Figure 13) depicts the deity with children and bats: a divine grant of material efficiency. Likewise, “Ten Thousand Taels of Gold” and “Tens of Thousands of Gold and Daily Accumulation of Gold” underscore abundance, with bowls of treasure and banners, and mythical figures reinforcing aspirations for wealth.



Figure 13: God of Wealth Bestowing Fortune

Animals such as the tiger, pig, and donkey are also prominent symbols of wealth. For instance, the “Tiger of Wealth” (Figure 14) combines protective qualities with copper coins, illustrating wealth attraction through a mythical lens. These representations align with the belief that animals can embody auspicious meanings in everyday life.



Figure 14: Tiger of Wealth

Mythological and historical figures, such as Zhao Gongming and Chai Rong, appear in works like “Burning Lamp Taoist and Zhao Gongming,” (Figure 15) symbolizing wealth acquisition and blessings. The inclusion of gold ingots, coral, and treasure bowls further reinforces the cultural emphasis on material success as a sign of divine favor and personal achievement.



Figure 15: Burning Lamp Taoist and Zhao Gongming

This traditional division of the Chinese New Year graphic symbols into Fu, Lu, Shou, Xi, Cai reflects a broad cultural ideals that shape Chinese society well captured by cultural practice. Human, animal, plant and decorative elements are combined to evoke rich layers of meaning that resonate with our collective aspiration for health and strength, prosperity and harmony. The art produced constitutes a not just aesthetic but a cultural history that has kept traditions alive and reflective of the values that have been passed down through generations and continue to shape modern Chinese culture. By its significant symbolism, these works embody and emphasize the continuing role of fortune, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity as pillars to a harmonious and prosperous life

These graphic symbols provide a means of communication, and semantic analysis can help to uncover the deeper cultural, historical, and symbolic meanings of traditional Chinese New Year graphic symbols. These auspicious symbols are divided into the five blessings of Fortune (福), Prosperity (禄), Longevity (寿), Happiness (喜), and Wealth (财), which characterize the pursuit of the audience of Chinese society. “Pomegranate with Many Seeds” but also in depicting the character “fu,” which signifies fortune, representing blessings and harmony. Excellence emphasizes academic and professional accomplishments as vehicles to success, where symbols like the Qilin and Kui Xing represent scholarly accolades. Longevity encapsulates desires for a long and healthy life, reflected in symbols such as the peach and the God of Longevity, frequently intermingled with peace and vigor. Happiness with its essence portrays marital bliss, the family unit and careers, illustrated by the dragon and phoenix, Zhong Kui, and the Two Immortals of Harmony and Unity. Wealth center around monetary abundance with items like the God of Wealth, treasure bowls and auspicious creatures such as the tiger and pig.

Gold ingots and coins can be understood as icons in semiotic terms, visually representing wealth and success. As a symbol, the God of Wealth represents stories of wealth that are entwined with centuries of Chinese mythology. Treasure bowls, animals with coins: indexing the collection (and sharing) of wealth in community.

Symbols of wealth have tipped into the digital world, increasingly cropping up in gaming apps, e-commerce ads and designs for online red envelopes. Thus, remain realisable in present day economic environment, both traditional values and consumers culture.

6. Conclusions

The study explores the symbolic, cultural, and semiotic dimensions of traditional Chinese New Year imagery and how these visual artifacts can be important carriers of cultural heritage that are contributing to preserve traditions within a modern context. Using Peirce's triadic model of semiotics and a diverse collection of 145 artifacts that include everything from woodblock prints to paper cuts, the analysis writes to reveal the dynamic depth of these symbols. The results shed light on their importance in transmitting essential aspects of cultural identity, including core values, such as fortune, prosperity, longevity, happiness, wealth, etc., in such a way that these traditions can be adapted to new generations and new contexts.

One major finding of the study is about how these symbols serve as vehicles of cultural continuity. Symbols such as the "Fu" character, dragons, and peaches represent embedded values that reach beyond time. Infused with layers of visual and semantic meaning, these symbols connect contemporary society to historical traditions and can be seen to reflect (and reinforce) Chinese cultural identity. The placement of the word "Fu" on doorways, for instance, is more than just a wish for blessings, but a ritual embedded in community life. These artifacts allow individuals and families to remain tethered to their cultural heritage, as they maintain a living connection to the past through their continued presence.

Importantly these symbols can be applied to contemporary contexts. The study highlights how traditional depictions have evolved into new formats, from social media and digital stickers to augmented reality. Such simplified and hybridized designs mix traditional motifs with contemporary aesthetics, making them relevant to younger and tech literate audiences as well as to increasingly global and cross-generational societies. Likewise, the "Fu" character has been redeployed in digital formats, moving into augmented reality filters and e-cards and broadening its reach but maintaining its symbolic core. Such evolution not only guarantees the continued relevance of the symbols in a globalized and digitized age, but also demonstrates how tradition can flourish in innovative settings.

It also highlights the regional and stylistic diversity in Chinese New Year imagery. While the vibrant depictions of family harmony and prosperity, typical of Yangliuqing, for example, or the more refined scholarly motifs of longevity that characterized Taohuawu, there are also bold and expressive themes of protection and blessings such as those associated with Zhu Xian Town, highlighting the diverse nature of this tradition. As such, these regional styles are not only a reflection of localized cultural values, but also an embodiment of a shared national identity that, above all, represents one of many ways in which unity and diversity can share space in a larger cultural fabric. The diversity also speaks to the richness of a Chinese New Year imagery and tradition that is a living, breathing cultural expression, resonating within different communities.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the possibilities for preservation through innovation. Though modernization and globalization threaten traditional practices, they can also enhance the revitalization of cultural symbols. For protecting these traditions, digital media, education and international branding come out as powerful instruments. Embedding traditional symbols within design curricula or providing opportunities for younger generations to learn about these symbols through interactive digital stories can increase awareness of the importance of these symbols to better embrace the significance of cultural heritage. Through the case study, it serves as an example of how cultivation can lead to a renewed symbol, one which meets the

requirements of today while still maintaining the social norms and traditions essential for harmonious cohabitation.

Thus, this study sheds light on the determining role of Chinese New Year iconography as a continuum over time. These artifacts convey values that are deeply meaningful across generations, regions, and even international borders, thanks to the fusion of their iconic, symbolic, and indexical dimensions. These traditions can adopt newer tools yet hold a culturally relevant meaning and importance. In conclusion, the study that Chinese New Year imagery serves as a vibrant realm of artistic expression, where traditions are not merely relics of the past, but dynamic forces of creativity that find new life in contemporary society.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

A significant theoretical contribution of this study lies in its use of Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model as a framework for the analysis of traditional Chinese New Year imagery, providing empirical evidence for the theories of cultural semiotics. The deployment of Peirce's model in this cultural context does not merely contribute to a more robust understanding of semiotics; it also provides a methodological template that could be reproduced and adapted in studies of other cultural artifacts. By leveraging representamen (the sign itself), object (the thing the sign represents), and interpretant (the interpretation of the observer), the analysis illustrates the power of semiotics to uncover the multiple meanings encoded in cultural symbols.

The research highlights the flexibility and practical application of Peirce's model in reading traditional imagery. The semiotic nature of cultural signs is apparent in the analysis of the "Fu" character (福), a representamen with an object as good fortune and interpretant as harmony and prosperity, revealing the semiotic relationship of signifier and signified. Through detailed analysis of the symbolic, iconic, and indexical elements of motifs like peaches, dragons, and the God of Wealth, the study illustrates how Peirce's framework can help dissect the dynamic interaction between visual form and cultural meaning. This systematic framework provides a blueprint for researchers interested in investigating cultural symbols systematically and replicable, advancing the field of cultural semiotics.

Owing to its semiotic analysis, this thus manifests another key theoretical contribution of the study which is bridging between tradition and modernity. In the case of cultural artifacts like woodblock prints, paper cuts, etc., their meaning is often embedded in history and society. Yet, the very fact that these artifacts are adapting to new forms of media, like digital and augmented reality, might cause the meanings inherent to them to change in the process. Using Peirce's model to analyse specific representations of Chinese New Year symbols from history to the present day, the research illustrates how semiotics can be used to deconstruct and reinterpret cultural artifacts into contemporary forms relevant to the current audience.

Such as this study traces the evolution of the "Fu" character from its original calligraphy traditionally seen on doorways to its role in more contemporary forms like digital stickers, AR filters, and social media campaigns. Peirce's model clarifies how the representamen of the character has transferred from physical paper to digital registries, even if its object blessings and good fortune never changed. Interpretant, however, has died and is broadened with each new layer of meaning within the context that it is used, such as, being used as a tool or mediating device for engagement in the virtual spectre of cross-culture communication. This exploratory piece exemplifies the stubbornness of traditional symbols and illustrates how semiotics can map tension between cultural preservation and innovation.

In addition, the study reveals the semiotic theory's potential to go beyond academia to find its place in impactful areas such as design, education, cultural preservation, etc. It includes a tribute to various details that trained designers and teachers to feel the lifeblood of traditions in their own entry. For example, graphic designers can use the knowledge in the study to design something semantically meaningful and aesthetically relevant to the global market, and educators can create curricula that can teach the semiotic and cultural significance of traditional symbols.

This study also advances the theoretical conversation around cultural adaption and globalization and contribute to the academic literature. However, as traditional Chinese symbols are reinterpreted for global audiences, their meanings risk hybridisation, fusing traditional and contemporary readings. Using a Peircean model to examine this process, the study lays the theoretical groundwork to show how cultural symbols can preserve their essential meanings and gain new meanings to a varying extent across different contexts. In many ways, this also makes a lot of sense in our world of global cultural exchange and rapid digital transformation where the survival and relevance of any traditional artifact depends on its being adapted and reinterpreted.

This study thereby contributes to the field of cultural semiotics by showing how an application of Peirce's model can bring about new interpretations of cultural artifacts over time and across contexts. A framework that makes it possible to interpret the dynamic continuity of cultural symbols, and the transformation of cultural practices across the lines of traditionalism and modernism in a globalized environment. The research provides a methodological framework that is both replicable and flexible in such a way as to lay the basis for future research on the semiotics of other culture traditions and helps provide a deeper understanding of the fluid relationship between culture, meaning and modernity.

6.2 Practical Implications

a) Cultural Preservation and Education

The results of this research are critically important for cultural preservation and education, presenting practical strategies to continue utilizing and celebrating traditional Chinese symbols in an ever-modernizing society. Educators and policymakers can use this information as guidance to encourage cultural heritage by interactive exhibits and educational programs. Museums can generate immersive experience as showing the development of symbols like "Fu" character or God of Wealth through augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR). Such technologies have the potential to make traditional artifacts more accessible and engaging, particularly for younger generations who may not have a direct connection to these cultural elements.

To ensure traditional symbols continue to live on, they can be incorporated into school curricula. Applied semiotics and its implications for art and design practice could be woven through art and design education programs, with modules dedicated to exploring the semiotic and cultural significance of popular symbols and how to interpret and create for contemporary contexts. This type of programming not only deepens students' understanding of Chinese heritage but also encourages students to re-envision traditional motifs in ways that speak more directly to audiences today. Public art programs might do this by simply building the symbols into urban civilization, like murals or installations, so that culture heritage becomes an aspect of civilized space time in the urban livelihood. This approach inserts these symbols into both educational and public spheres, ensuring their tenacity and vitality for generations to follow.

b) Digital Integration and Design

It also highlights the adaptability of traditional Chinese symbols for use in modern digital media and graphic design, offering a rich source of inspiration for content creators and designers alike. The study of these symbols further enhances their transmission in digital form, including the "Fu" character, dragons, and peaches. Designers can use for inspiration the rich visual and cultural stories that surround these symbols to create innovative digital products, ranging from AR filters that let users put a virtual "Fu" character on their doorways to VR experiences that simulate traditional New Year celebrations in a fully digital landscape.

Brands seeking to engage with Chinese consumers can also leverage these symbols in their marketing strategies. Through a means of motifs like God of Wealth or the Double Happiness character, brands can reflect an authenticity and ingenuity into their campaigns. To illustrate, during the Chinese New Year season, an e-commerce company may use digital red envelopes with traditional designs to attract customers. More than just a visual enhancement to digital products, these symbols evoke emotional connections with audiences as they embody deep cultural significance.

Also, the findings from this study can provide direction for global brands to develop designs that are sensitive to cultural nuances and contextual factors. Awareness of the semiotic characteristics of these motifs will help designers to bypass superficial or inaccurate applications in their works of product development and be more empathetic with the genuine respecting and representation of the Chinese cultural legacy. This is crucial for success in a globalized marketplace, where authenticity and cultural sensitivity matter now more than ever to any marketable product or service.

c) Cross-Cultural Understanding

Through the lenses of this study, this has the potential to develop a new age of cross-cultural communication and exchange. Characters such as the "Fu" and dragons have become symbols among those who know little about China, acting as ambassadors of Chinese culture and tradition to some in international contexts. They're also powerful tools for bridging cultural divides because of their adaptability and universal appeal. Likewise, the dragon, with its symbolic connotations of power, wisdom, and fortune, is thus easily understood and appreciated by various cultures, even as its specific meaning is tied to Chinese symbolic beliefs. The study analyzes the semiotic richness of these symbols, illustrating how they express universal values like prosperity, happiness, and resilience, and therefore become appropriate specific expressions for nations and peoples. For example, work across borders might include international art exhibitions, cross-cultural design projects or multinational marketing campaigns. On the other hand, an international event such as the Olympics would also want to maintain its logo design with traditional Chinese symbols as it would showcase cultural intersectionality while making a move based on universal ideas of success and unity.

In addition, they may also serve as an educational tool to familiarizing Chinese culture with people all over the world. This not only sheds light on activities and their traditions but could be developed into an integrated theme within the interactive digital platforms or cultural exchange programs that creates such symbols. The study further illustrates this point by showing how each of these symbols can serve as a bridge across cultures, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of different ways of living in an increasingly connected world. Beyond its theoretical contributions, the real-world implications of this study have the potential to inform practical strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage in an increasingly digital landscape, as well as fostering meaningful engagement between diverse cultural communities.

These results prove how cultural heritage is still relevant in a globalized world with the incorporation of Chinese cultural symbols into educational, design, and global communication contexts. Whether it is through interactive museum exhibits, immersive digital experiences or international collaborations, these symbols continue to inspire and connect people across generations and cultures alike, solidifying their legacy as powerful mediums of cultural expression and exchange.

7. Limitations

This study specifically focuses on traditional mediums, particularly woodblock prints and paper cuts that are closely tied to the traditions and heritage of imagery used in Chinese New Year. Such media are another wonderful archival repository of artistic and symbolic expression, and the painstaking efforts in craftsmanship and cultural storytelling have survived generations. But this focus, while extensive in its exploration of traditional mediums of visual artistry, also comes with a certain lack of representation for other major elements of cultural production. Additional paths through which symbols of Chinese New Year are expressed and interpreted in historical and modern context are textiles, ceramics, contemporary digital art, among others.

Embroideries of the Chinese characters "Fu" (福, meaning blessing), dragons, and peonies are frequently used motifs, embroidered with several thousand stitching techniques that symbolize auspicious themes of blessing, prosperity, and beauty. Analogously, ceramics, such as vases and porcelain plates, provide another vehicle for symbolizing these motifs, which are frequently colored and detailed with ornate designs that encapsulate cultural beliefs. Not only are these objects decorative but they are also cultural artifacts that reflect regional aesthetics, social values and technological advances in different periods of history. Future research may be better for considering these other forms, as a broader analysis of material culture and the move of Far Eastern symbols into art will be completer and more accurate.

As contemporary digital art continues to curate the experience of cultural symbols like those found in the vibrant world of Chinese New Year, a new frontier opens; a new layer in the study of the personality of these works. Dives into the digital, like social media graphics, AR filters, and virtual reality experiences, can open more avant-garde reimagining of the past that help make these allusions accessible to a wider, oftentimes younger, audience. Interactive digital stickers of the God of Wealth or animated characters with the symbol "Fu" provide users with fresh ways to interact with cultural tradition in the light of contemporary times, for example. Not only do these digital representations retain the third dimensional meanings of the symbols, it also lend new significance to their utilizations within wider, globalized spheres of communication and marketing. Such things should perhaps be included in further studies, not least to spot the continual reinterpretation and adaptation of symbols in a digital world.

However, one area for further development is the analysis of the symbols — which in this study are analyzed using mainly historical and cultural texts. These sources give important context to the classic meanings and purposes of the symbols, but they fall short of explaining how these motifs are understood and employed in modern culture. Audience analytics, collected via surveys, interviews or focus groups, could provide a mutable analytical sub-layer to the study. How do younger generations, for example, view the "Fu" character or the dragon in the scope of modern festive celebrations? Do these signs still have the same weight and cultural significance as they had historically or have, they transformed meanings in globalized and digitized world?

Also, audience perceptions can expose regional and generational differences in how these symbols are understood and appropriated. For example, where older generations might look at a motif such as the God of Longevity and see the sacred deification of the elderly, younger audiences are more likely to connect with a more commercialized brand image. This approach could benefit future studies by looking at the changing role of traditional representations in contemporary culture, perhaps providing a deeper exploration of the relationship between symbolic traditions and their meaning in a modern context.

To summarize, though this is a sophisticated analysis of woodblock prints and paper cuts in Chinese New Year imagery, it could also have included textiles, ceramics, and digital images, thereby offering a broader and richer analysis of Chinese New Year images. Likewise, addressing audience perspectives complementing the discussion about these symbols will enrich the understanding of their relevance and meanings today, further way, broader, and multidimensional heritage concept.

8. Recommendations for Future Studies

a) Broader Scope

A broader evaluation of both new media and modernity would help to elicit the multiplicative agency wherein traditional symbols are retained and translated in contemporary society related to Chinese New Year. In addition to traditional mediums such as woodblock prints and paper cuts, future research could investigate their representation in emerging forms including non-fungible tokens (NFTs), video games, and interactive storytelling platforms. NFTs, for example, allow the creation of specific digital items, provide a unique digitization of culture symbols, and provide a way to commoditize them on the world market while preserving the artistic meaning. Today, artists are reinterpreting traditional motifs such as the "Fu" character or dragons in NFT collections, combining them with modern aesthetics to resonate with collectors as well as cultural enthusiasts.

Video games, too, are increasingly weaving cultural elements into their storytelling and designs. For example, a Chinese-themed game could incorporate New Year symbols such as the God of Wealth or peaches as collectibles or power-ups, effectively bringing these traditional motifs to a global gaming audience in an interactive and engaging package. Interactive storytelling platforms also offer a useful way for users to explore what these symbols represent and their significance in history. By extending the narrative to these platforms, coming research could offer more nuanced understandings of how established codes can succeed in the networked world.

b) Audience Perception

Grasping how distinct demographic groups reinterpret the reactionary symbols in modern settings is key to analyzing their shifting cultural weight. Future research could explore generational and regional differences in the perception and use of images of Chinese New Year.” For instance, while older populations may see symbols such as the God of Longevity as sacred and spiritual, younger consumers may associate with commercialization related to branding for wellness products or apps.

Regional variations might also offer some valuable leads. Instead of in typical or traditional ways, like monuments or signage in urban areas with more technology integration and globalization, like social media filters or AR applications, they might be acknowledged. In the countryside, however, those symbols may be afforded their original corporeal versions and

traditional roles, e.g.: paper cuts decorating windows; woodblock prints hung in houses. Qualitative data in the form of surveys, interviews or focus groups could be used to capture these different perspectives, which would show how the cultural significance of these symbols varies by age and location. An understanding that could inform an approach that allows these symbols to be preserved in their original meaning and traditions while still being relevant to modern audiences.

c) Technological Applications

Future research on integrating traditional imagery into such emerging technologies as blockchain-based art, AR, and VR may be another fruitful area. Blockchain technology, specifically through non-fungible tokens (NFTs), can create a radically new way to reserve and share cultural objects. Minting traditional symbolism as digital assets guarantees their authenticity, provenance, and longevity in a decentralized digital space. This is one way for us to preserve cultural heritage, while also attracting high tech collectors and global viewers.

Cultural preservation and education are also exciting possibilities offered by AR and VR technologies. AR software could enable users to put virtual “Fu” characters on their doorways or step into 3D depictions of traditional woodblock prints. VR experiences might transport participants into a virtual iteration of Chinese New Year celebrations, embedding them in environments populated by digital representations of the various symbols, say dragon or the Double Happiness motif, with engaging ways to learn about their meanings and histories. Older generations are still just beginning to enjoy these tools; future studies could explore how these technologies improve accessibility and comprehension of cultural symbols for younger generations and international audiences.

d) Comparative Studies

Cross-cultural analyses would infer not only how traditional symbols adapt but also how and why they develop and change in accordance with modernizing themes. One could, for example, compare symbols which accompany Chinese New Year with those attached to other new year festivals, like Christmas or Diwali, and discover similarities in the ways that cultural artefacts are maintained and adapted in globalising contexts. Like the “Fu” character or the God of Wealth in Chinese culture, Christmas imagery, such as Santa Claus or Christmas trees, has undergone commercialization and adaptations in various cultural markets. Likewise, symbols of Diwali like diyas (oil lamps) and rangoli (decorative art) have migrated to new digital forms, circulating in social media campaigns and virtual greetings.

A contrastive study can be undertaken to analyze how these symbols tend to preserve their rootedness in the culture to the extent possible while still accommodating to the new medium and broad audiences. It might also explore how technology, commercialization and generational shifts have shaped their evolution. This kind of research would not only make more visible the distinctively Chinese New Year stories told through the visual motifs, it would also contextualize those narratives within a larger lens of cultural adaptation and globalization that speaks to the overall forces at play in cultural preservation and innovation.

However, there are rich opportunities for future research directions to enhance and extend the understanding of traditional Chinese New Year symbols. Networking-Most Pressing Problem: Networking can help keep these symbols alive by studying them in emerging mediums such as NFTs and video games, or broadening ‘audience’ perceptions over space and time, exploring emerging technologies and possibilities of symbolism, and comparing perspectives across cultural forms. It will not only contribute to the historical academic study of cultural heritage

but the practical study of how a traditional self-integration can be relevant in a global and digital world.

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