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APPLICATION OF TRADITIONAL BRICK CARVINGS IN MODERN INTERIOR DESIGN

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This article examines the traditional residential brick carving in Chinese architecture as an important form of decorative art with both aesthetic and symbolic significance. Found in ancient houses, temples, and ancestral halls, brick carvings reflect deep-rooted cultural beliefs, religious symbolism, and values embedded in Chinese society. The research analyzes the materials and techniques used in the carving process and explores key ornamental elements, such as mythological creatures, floral and animal motifs, and philosophical symbols. Special attention is given to compositions like “dragon and phoenix,” “two dragons playing with a pearl,” and the swastika as a Buddhist symbol of prosperity. The article also discusses how brick carvings are integrated into architectural structures—roofs, gates, shadow walls, and various types of windows—and their influence on spatial and visual composition. In addition, the study highlights the continued relevance of this tradition through examples of modern interior design that incorporate classical Chinese elements.

Keywords: traditional brick carving, Chinese ornaments, architectural heritage, decorative art, modern design

INTRODUCTION

Traditional brick carving is an integral part of Chinese architectural heritage. Used to decorate residential buildings, temples, and ancestral halls, it combines visual expressiveness with profound symbolism, embodying ideas of well-being, harmony, and continuity. In the context of rapid urban development, preserving these decorative elements is especially important today.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to analyze the artistic, technical, and symbolic aspects of traditional brick carving in Chinese architecture and explore its integration into modern design. The research focuses on carving materials, techniques, and motifs, as well as the spatial placement of brick carvings within architectural structures. The study also examines the reinterpretation of these traditional elements in modern interior design as a way to sustain cultural heritage in contemporary contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional Chinese brick carving is most commonly executed using dark gray fired bricks (*qingzhuān*), which are durable and resistant to environmental degradation. These bricks are produced by firing clay at controlled temperatures and then slowly cooling them with water [1]. Two primary methods of carving are



used: post-firing carving and direct carving. The former enables detailed and refined patterns, while the latter results in more expressive, rougher forms with greater visual impact.

Common motifs include mythological creatures like dragons and phoenixes, which symbolize imperial power and virtue. The pairing of these two creatures conveys the idea of cosmic balance and marital harmony. Another frequently used motif is "Two Dragons Playing with a Pearl," which reflects the duality of yin and yang and the pursuit of wisdom. Buddhist symbols such as the swastika appear regularly as signs of prosperity and good fortune. These patterns are typically symmetrical, reinforcing the Confucian aesthetic of balance and order. Furthermore, symmetry plays a crucial role in these carvings, often aiming for auspicious meanings through paired designs, ultimately offering spiritual enjoyment to the viewer. Firstly, brick carvings frequently appear in even-numbered arrangements, with single brick carvings being less common. The combination of the dragon and phoenix is one of the most prevalent motifs. When the dragon—symbolizing the emperor, power, and majesty—is paired with the phoenix—representing the queen, wisdom, and nobility—the concept of harmony is maximized. Similarly, brick carvings featuring "Two Dragons Playing with a Pearl" and "Taoist Bagua" frequently appear in traditional dwellings, symbolizing the balance between heaven and earth, as well as the harmony of yin and yang.



Fig.1. Brick carvings of Jinzhong ancestral hall: a - The wall of the Chang Clan Ancestral Hall; b - The Caojia Ancestral Hall of Beihui Village

Floral and animal compositions are also central to brick carving design. Grapes symbolize fertility and family prosperity, while chrysanthemums and bamboo stand for endurance and integrity. Birds such as magpies, combined with flowering branches, are often used to express joy and renewal [5]. These motifs do not exist in isolation but are part of larger narrative scenes that reflect social values and aesthetic ideals.

Windows are another key architectural element enriched by brick carving. Mosaic windows, swastika-shaped windows, and stylized openings are all common.



The swastika design, known in Chinese as *wanzi*, is derived from Buddhist symbolism and denotes longevity and spiritual wealth [6]. These windows combine functionality with symbolic significance, allowing air and light while expressing aspirations for abundance.

Brick carvings are often used on roofs, where they are arranged in symmetrical rows. For example, chrysanthemum-shaped carvings on the roof of the Wang Family Ancestral Hall in Jingsheng Village emphasize the linear flow of the building. Animal-shaped carvings on rooftops in Pingyao County are meant to protect the household spiritually and reflect hopes for safety and prosperity.

Shadow walls, typically located opposite the entrance to an ancestral hall, are another surface for elaborate brick carving. These walls serve both decorative and functional purposes—enlarging the visual space, shielding the interior from external views, and enhancing the solemnity of the hall.

In the Chang Clan Ancestral Hall in Yuci, various decorative techniques are harmoniously combined. Brick carvings coexist with wooden and stone elements, such as lotus- and willow-themed carvings under the eaves and double flagpole bases at the gate. These reflect the themes of purity, remembrance of ancestors, and cosmic balance ("round heaven and square earth") [10]. The unity of materials and symbolic motifs contributes to a dynamic yet harmonious architectural composition.

Importantly, the brick carvings are not randomly placed; their arrangement follows a defined compositional logic. The "small-large-small" pattern in tympanum and roof design, along with circular and square brick outlines, demonstrates a philosophical worldview in which structure and meaning are closely aligned.

In modern times, designers are increasingly incorporating traditional brick carving motifs into contemporary interiors. Elements such as carved wall panels, decorative columns, arches, and feature walls bring cultural richness into modern residential and commercial spaces. Carvings of lotus flowers, dragons, clouds, and geometric shapes can be seamlessly integrated into minimalist or eclectic designs [5]. The application of these motifs using modern materials such as concrete, resin, and metal allows for innovation without abandoning historical meaning.

Thus, traditional brick carving not only preserves the memory of Chinese classical architecture but also serves as a resource for contemporary creative expression.

CONCLUSIONS

Traditional brick carving in Chinese architecture embodies a unique synthesis of artistic mastery, symbolic richness, and cultural identity. These carvings are not merely decorative; they convey deep meanings rooted in Chinese philosophy, religion, and societal values. The themes of harmony, prosperity, and reverence for ancestors are consistently reflected in symmetrical compositions and rich iconography.

The use of refined techniques, quality materials, and symbolic content has made brick carving a prominent art form, especially in the context of ancestral halls and residential compounds of the elite. Today, this art continues to evolve as designers incorporate traditional motifs into modern interiors, affirming its relevance and potential for innovation.



Preserving and promoting brick carving as a form of living heritage is essential not only for safeguarding tradition but also for enriching the visual language of modern architecture. The fusion of ancient symbols with new materials and spatial concepts illustrates how the past and present can coexist in a harmonious and meaningful way.

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ГАО Кай, ВАСИЛЬЄВА О. ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ ТРАДИЦІЙНИХ ЦЕГЛЯНИХ РІЗЬБЛЕНЬ У СУЧАСНОМУ ДИЗАЙНІ ІНТЕР'ЄРУ

У роботі розглянуто традиційне китайській цегляне різьблення житлових приміщень, як важливу форму декоративного мистецтва з естетичним і символічним значенням. Цегляне різьблення, яке зустрічається в давніх житлових будинках та храмах, відображає глибоко укорінені культурні уявлення, релігійну символіку та цінності китайського суспільства. Досліджено матеріали й техніки, що використовуються в процесі різьблення, а також проаналізовано ключові орнаментальні елементи: міфологічні істоти, флористичні й анімалістичні мотиви, філософські символи. Особливу увагу приділено композиціям «дракон і фенікс», «два дракони, що грають з перлиною» та свастиці як буддійському символу добробуту. У дослідженні розглянуто інтеграцію традиційного цегляного різьблення в сучасні архітектурні елементи – дахи, ворота, тіньові стіни, вікна. Окремо висвітлено актуальність цієї традиції в сучасному дизайні інтер'єру, що використовує класичні китайські елементи.

Ключові слова: традиційне цегляне різьблення, китайські орнаменти, архітектурна спадщина, декоративне мистецтво, сучасний дизайн.