Exploring the Element of Form Based on Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns

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ABSTRACT

Chinese traditional auspicious patterns, which date back more than 5,000 years, are a vital component of national art and traditional culture. These patterns have special meanings and are often associated with good wishes and blessings. Their development reached its peak in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. This research on auspicious patterns focuses mainly on the creation method and classification, with few forms. It seeks to ascertain the features of the traditional auspicious pattern form in China. This study adopts qualitative analysis, specifically in analyzing patterns by observation. Based on Panofsky's theory of iconography, the study selected six common Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and analyzed them to determine their classification, layout, composition and elements. It can be concluded that their form is characterized by various elements, specifically figurative and complete, complex pattern formations, full layout designs, balanced or symmetrical compositions, and single or fit patterns. Thus, this study summarized the pattern form analysis model or the PFC-Model. By addressing this gap in knowledge, the study enhances understanding of auspicious patterns. At the same time, the pattern analysis model can be used to analyze similar patterns, which makes it easier to analyze other pattern forms and brings the study of traditional Chinese patterns to a new height. In the meantime, this research only studies the external form of auspicious patterns. In this regard, as form and color is the first layer of research mentioned in Panofsky's image theory, it needs to be more comprehensive. In the future, researchers can continue to explore its color characteristics and extend the research into the content of the first layer of the theories. Undoubtedly, researchers can also expand the analysis of auspicious patterns using the theory's second and third layers.
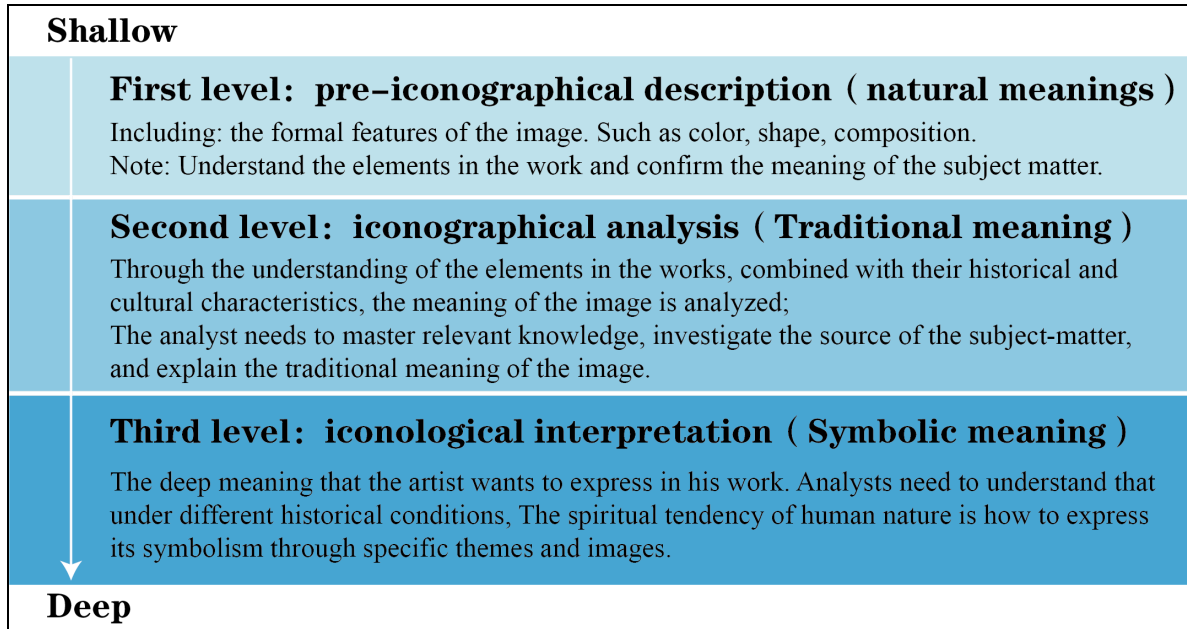
Keywords: *Chinese tradition, Auspicious patterns, Form characteristics, Elements.*

INTRODUCTION

A vital component of traditional culture and national art, Chinese traditional auspicious pattern art is the outcome of the nation's five centuries of cultural accumulation. "Auspicious patterns" are patterns that contain good wishes or blessings. Its history dates back to the primitive age, and several components of the pattern's unique importance first emerged during the Song Dynasty. The Ming and Qing periods produced the most well-known and common patterns that are still in use today.

There are numerous studies on auspicious patterns. However, they mainly focused on their meanings, creation methods and themes, with little research on their formal characteristics. Yuan (2021) defined auspicious patterns as expressing the meanings of fortune, auspiciousness, happiness, wealth, promotion and longevity. The method of its creation can be summarized into the harmonic method, the symbolic method and the literal method. Harmonization refers to the replacement of words with the same pronunciation; for example, in Mandarin, the word 'bat' and 'happiness' are both pronounced 'Fu', and in this context, bat is used instead of happiness. In the meantime, symbolism means that an object has a symbolic meaning. For example, as cranes and turtles have a long lifespan, they are commonly used to symbolize longevity. Lastly, the literal method refers to the use of words to directly express the meaning. For instance, the word "Fu" is used directly in the pattern to express happiness (Han, 2022). Its subject matter is often based on auspicious animals, plants, auspicious and terms. These include auspicious animals such as mandarin duck, bat, deer, crane, magpie, fish, dragon, phoenix, and unicorn, auspicious plants such as osmanthus, lotus, peony, orchid, plum, bamboo, and pine, and auspicious words such as longevity, happiness, fortune and promotion (Wang, 2020). Auspicious patterns are composed of several elements with different graphic elements and combination forms. They also have different external forms, and their formal characteristics are worth studying.

This study is based on Panofsky's theory of iconography, one of the most influential methods of studying artworks in the 20th century. The theory interprets works of art from the perspective of iconography, restores them to an actual historical environment, and studies them from the visual and cultural standpoint (Wang. & Ma, 2023). Panofsky divided the theory of iconography into three levels. As shown in Figure 1, the first level is the pre-iconographical description, which refers to the natural theme of describing the image. It is understood by recognizing pure forms. This level mainly focuses on visual elements such as image, shape, color and composition in artistic works.To obtain an accurate interpretation at this level, the researcher must understand the work's elements and confirm the expression theme to clarify its natural meaning. The second level is iconographical analysis, a traditional theme based on the description of the first level. It mainly refers to the traditional cultural level of images or artistic works, that is, to analyze the meaning of images by understanding the elements and themes in image works and combining their historical and cultural characteristics. The purpose is to analyze the subject-matter source and explain the image's traditional meaning. The third level is iconological interpretation, which is the inner symbolic meaning of the works of art. It refers to the deep meaning that the artist wants to express in his works, that is, the symbolic significance, which requires the viewer to have integrated cultural knowledge and understand how the spiritual tendencies of human nature under different historical conditions can express their symbolic meanings through specific themes and images. The goal is to determine why certain artists present certain subjects in certain styles and ways at certain times and places (Wang & Ma, 2023).

Shallow

First level：pre-iconographical description（natural meanings）

Including: the formal features of the image. Such as color, shape, composition.
Note: Understand the elements in the work and confirm the meaning of the subject matter.

Second level：iconographical analysis（Traditional meaning）

Through the understanding of the elements in the works, combined with their historical and cultural characteristics, the meaning of the image is analyzed;
The analyst needs to master relevant knowledge, investigate the source of the subject-matter, and explain the traditional meaning of the image.

Third level：iconological interpretation（Symbolic meaning）

The deep meaning that the artist wants to express in his work. Analysts need to understand that under different historical conditions, The spiritual tendency of human nature is how to express its symbolism through specific themes and images.

Deep

Figure 1. Panofsky's theory of iconography
(Source: Researcher, 2024)

Chinese traditional auspicious patterns are works of art left by Chinese folk artists, and they can be analyzed using iconography. According to the theory, there are three levels of analysis. The visual representation of auspicious patterns can be identified in the first layer, known as the pre-iconographical description. It seeks to describe the form variants of auspicious patterns in different eras in order to understand the historical background for their performance. This study examines the formal properties of traditional Chinese auspicious designs. This study falls within the first of the three-level analysis in this theory. The first level is known as the pre-image description, which is the visual representation of auspicious patterns. Four factors are used in this study to examine the form's characteristics: elements, composition, arrangement, and classification.The purpose of this work is to analyze and synthesize their formal qualities to construct a model for pattern form analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Status

There is a vast literature on the characteristics of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns. However, the existing literature mainly focuses on the characteristics of its creation method and classification without studying the characteristics of its color and form. The creation method and classification of auspicious patterns are essential as they reflect the difference between auspicious patterns and other traditional patterns. Thus, understanding them can accurately understand the cultural connotation of auspicious patterns (Yuan, 2021). Therefore, books and literature on auspicious patterns will introduce these characteristics. For example, Wang (2020) detailed the creation methods and classification characteristics of auspicious patterns. According to the literature, auspicious patterns have meaning, homophony, symbolism, and analogy in their expressive forms (Han, 2022), which clarifies its creative process instead of its formal attributes. In short, current research on the characteristics of auspicious

patterns has mainly focused on their creation methods and classification, and the research on their form characteristics needs to be more comprehensive and in-depth.

Auspicious Pattern Form Classification

Patterns are classified differently from different perspectives. In this study, they can be divided into four types: single pattern, suitable pattern and continuous pattern (Yang, 2020).

A single pattern is the most basic pattern and organizational form in pattern design, mainly referring to the absence of external outline and bone restrictions in shape, and structure can exist independently, with unquestionable integrity of the decorative pattern. Meanwhile, a fit pattern refers to the pattern composition suitable for a specific shape, among which the common forms are triangle, round square, hexagonal, semicircular, plum, plum blossom, peach gourd shape, and other shapes. The next is a continuous pattern, where the most prominent feature is the continuity of the pattern, with a sense of rhythm and rhythm.

Auspicious Pattern Form Composition

The pattern form is the most commonly used composition method to arrange the composition elements of patterns in a reasonable, orderly, and beautiful way. Commonly used composition methods are Balance, Expansion and Symmetry (Wang & Ding, 2022). Balance refers to the composition elements of different sizes added to the design that can make the whole picture balanced. Next is expansion, where the composition elements in the pattern appear in the picture in the form of extension, which brings the viewer a sense of continuous extension of the pattern from the sense of sense and attracts the viewer's attention in a unique visual form. Another composition method is symmetry. It refers to composing an image around a central point or on both sides of a Central Line, the upper and lower left and other directions of the modeling factors in the same shape, equal configuration, forming a symmetrical form; such a form has a strong sense of unity and a sense of integrity, but also bring the viewer a stronger sense of law.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the qualitative analysis method. It combines observation with professional knowledge of pattern form and analysis of pattern form. The purpose of this study is to summarize the formal characteristics of auspicious patterns, based on the first level of Pannovsky's theory of iconography, and analyze aspects of shape, elements, layout, and composition. The classification of the pattern method is based on the shape of the pattern and is divided into individual patterns, suitable patterns, and continuous patterns. Therefore, the form analysis of auspicious patterns can be carried out based on pattern type, composition, layout, and elements. The following table specifies the elements analyzed in these four areas

Table 1. Analysis Aspects in the Form Characteristics of Auspicious Patterns

Aim	Aspects	Analysis Detail
The form characteristics of auspicious patterns	Classification	Single, fit, continuous, corner
	Layout	Full, Not full
	Composition	Balance,Expansion, Symmetry.

	Element	Kind (People, Animals, Plants, Object, Landscapes and Chinese characters)
		Number (The number of element kinds and the total number of elements)
		External form (figurative, abstract, partial, complete)

The classification includes single, fit and continuous patterns. Traditional auspicious pattern layout is generally categorized into full and unfit, which is judged according to the white space left (Liu et al., 2020). The ordinary pattern composition methods include Balance, Symmetry and Expansion (Wang et al., 2022). The elements can be analyzed based on the quantity, kind and external form of elements. Species are people, animals, plants, landscapes, objects and Chinese characters. Quantity refers to the number of varieties and the total number of elements. External form refers to whether the element is abstract, figurative, local, or complete.
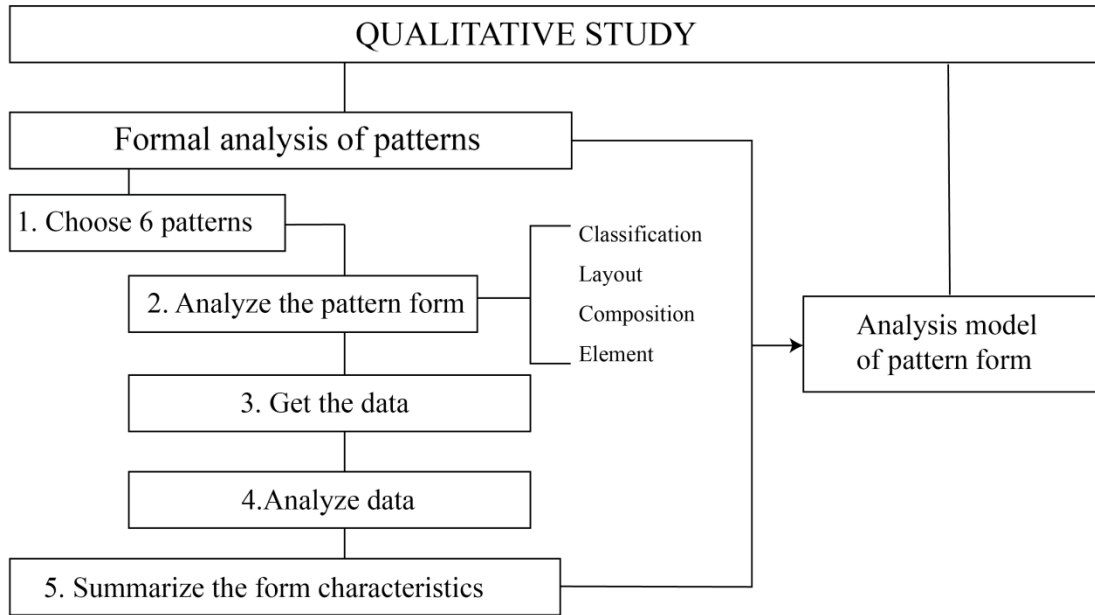
Figure 2. Research Framework
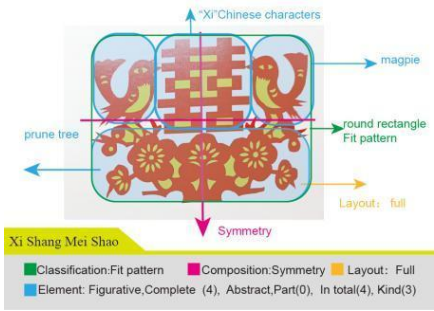*(Source: Researcher, 2024)*

The research framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. Qualitative analysis is used to analyze the pattern form, which is divided into five steps to complete the characteristics of pattern form analysis. The first step is to collect six auspicious patterns. Six distinct categories and style of auspicious patterns are chosen as study subjects.They were chosen, and the types and forms were as comprehensive as possible to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the analysis results. The second step is to analyze each auspicious pattern from classification, layout, composition and elements. The third step is to get the data of classification, layout, composition and elements; the fourth step is to analyze these data, and the fifth step is to summarize the form characteristics. Finally, the pattern form analysis model will be summarized based on the analysis of auspicious patterns.
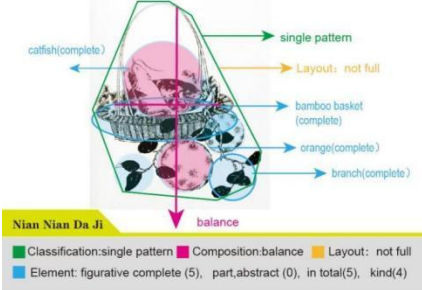
FINDINGS

Pattern Form Analysis

Six auspicious patterns are analyzed from four aspects, namely, pattern classification, composition, layout and elements, and the characteristics and analytical models of the formal analysis of auspicious patterns are summarized.
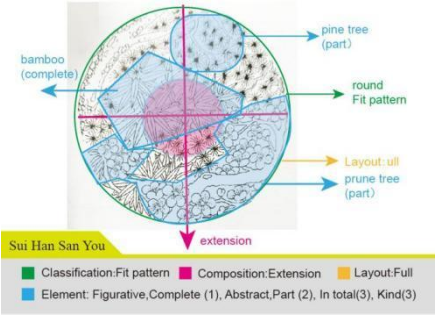
Table 2 Xi Shang Mei Shao (A magpie on a branch of a plum) Pattern Form Analysis

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

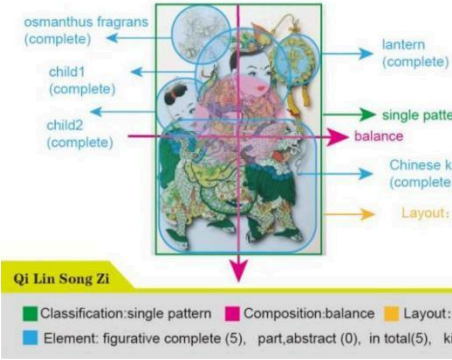| Classificatio: Single pattern	It is a separate pattern, with several elements, composed of a whole figure.
Composition: Symmetric	In the middle of the pattern is a double happy word, left and right a magpie, two magpies standing in a plum tree. It can be seen that the pattern is entirely symmetrical, so it belongs to the symmetrical composition.
Layout: Full	Elements in the pattern fill almost the entire rectangle, so the layout is full.
Elements: Figurative complete (4) In total (4), Kind (3)	The main elements are the magpie, plum tree and double happiness character 3. They are in complete and figurative form, of which two magpies, so the total number of elements is 4

Table 3 Nian Nian Da Ji (Every year is very auspicious) Pattern Form Analysis

(Source: Researcher, 2024)

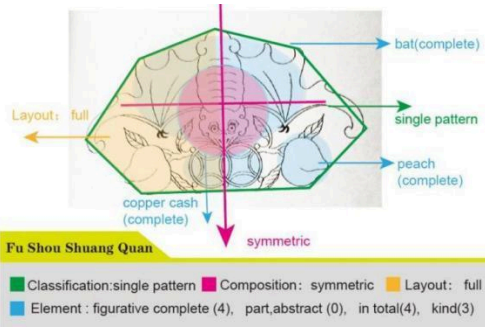| **Classification:** Single pattern	A pattern consists of several images forming a whole and belonging to a single pattern.
Composition: Balanced	The basket is in the middle of the pattern; it is upper and lower and left and right, and the distribution of elements can be seen through the central axis so that the picture is stable, so it is a balanced type.
Layout: Not full	The shape of the pattern is irregular, and the surrounding white area is large, which does not belong to the full version.
Elements: Figurative, Complete (5) In total (5), Kind (4)	There are four elements: catfish, bamboo basket, orange and its branches and leaves, all of which are complete figurative forms, of which two separate oranges count as two elements, so the total number is 5.

Table 4 Sui Han San You (Three friends of the cold) Pattern Form Analysis.

	Classification: Fit pattern	The shape of the pattern is circular, and all the elements belong to the fit pattern within it.
	Composition: Expansion	People can see that the elements in the pattern are local, and there is a sense of stretching around the pattern, so it belongs to the expansion type.
(Source: Researcher, 2024)	**Layout: Full**	Its elements are arranged so tightly that they fill the whole circle. The composition is full, with almost no white space, and belongs to the full plate.
	Elements: Figurative, Complete (1) Part, Abstract (2) In total (3), Kind (3)	There are three kinds of elements: plum tree, bamboo and pine. Except for the bamboo in the middle, which is a complete piece, the others are local figurative forms. Because the graphics are interspersed together, there are many small elements which are not easy to count.

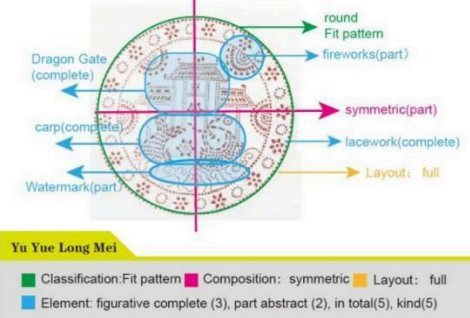**Table 5 Qi Lin Song Zi (The Kirin brings forth a child.) Pattern Form Analysis**

	Classificatio: Single pattern	It is a complete image belonging to a single pattern.
	Composition: Balanced	Children ride the kirin as the main body of the pattern, holding osmanthus flowers and lanterns in their hands so that the whole picture is balanced, belonging to the balanced type.
(Source: Researcher, 2024)	**Layout: Full**	Its composition is complete, with a bit of white space around it, belonging to the full plat.
	Elements: Figurative, Complete (5) In total (5), Kind (5)	There are two characters: a unicorn, a flower branch and a lantern. A total of 5 elements and four types. The elements are complete and figurative graphic elements.

Table 6 Fu Shou Shuang Quan (Good luck and longevity both) Pattern Form Analysis

	Classification: Single pattern	It has an irregular shape and is a complete image of a single pattern.
	Composition: Symmetric	One can see from the central axis that the pattern is perfectly symmetrical on the left and right sides.
	Layout: Full	A little white space surrounds it and belongs to the full layout.
(Source: Researcher, 2024)	**Elements:** Figurative, Complete (4) In total (4) Kind (3)	There are three elements: bats, copper coins and peaches, of which copper coins are attached as one element, and peaches are separated as two elements, so there are four elements in total. They are both complete and figurative graphic elements.

**Table 7 Yu Tiao Long Men (A fish jumped the dragon gate and became a dragon)
Pattern Form Analysis**

(Source: Researcher, 2024)	**Classification:** Fit pattern	All its elements are inside the circle and belong to the fit pattern.
	Composition: Symmetric	One can see from the central axis that the pattern is basically symmetrical on the left and right sides.
	Layout: Full	All elements almost fill the circle and belong to the full plate.
	Elements: Figurative, Complete (3) Part, Abstract (2) In total (5) Kind (5)	In the middle of the circle is a fish, a dragon gate, and some water ripples (the expression of water is generally part and abstract); in the circular's inner space, incomplete fireworks are added. Its outer ring is composed of patterns of circular lace elements. So there are 5 elements, 2 partially displayed and 3 complete figurative elements.

**Table 8. The Data Analysis Based on the Form Characteristics of Traditional
Chinese Auspicious Pattern**

Number	Classification	Constructs	Layout	Element				
				Figurative complete	part, abstract	Content	Kind	In total
Xi Shang Mei Shao	Single	Symmetric	Full	4(100%)	0	Magpie, plum tree and double happiness	3	4
Nian Nian Da Ji	Single	Balance	Not full	5(100%)	0	A catfish, a bamboo basket, two oranges and their leaves	4	5
Sui Han Shan You	Fit	Expansion	Full	1(33.3%)	2(66.7%)	Plum trees, bamboo and pine trees	3	3
Qi Lin Song Zi	Single	Balance	Full	5(100%)	0	Two characters, a unicorn, a flower branch and a lantern	4	5
Jin Yu Man Tang	Single	Balance	Full	5(90%)	1(10%)	A goldfish, some water plants, lotus flowers, lotus leaves and water	5	6

Yu Tiao Long Men	Fit	Symmetric	Full	3(60%)	2(40 %)	A carp, a gantry, some water ripples, fireworks and lace	5	5
Proportion Analysis	Fit: 34%, Single:66%	Balance:50% Symmetric: 33% Expansion:17%	Full:83% Not full: 17%	82%	18%	The content of pattern elements is rich, and it includes human, animals, plants, objects and Chinese characters. The kind is very complete; there are no characteristics.	More than three 67%	More than three 83%
Form Characteristic	Mainly Single and a little fit pattern	Mainly for equilibrium and symmetry	It is almost always full	• Figurative and complete element •Almost always more than three element •The elements are more complex				

After analyzing ten distinct types and contents of auspicious patterns, the above table shows that 80% of the layout is made up of the full plate, 83% is made up of a single pattern, 66% is made up of compositional balance, 33% is made up of symmetry, and 17% is made up of expansion. When it comes to elements, the abstract local elements make up 17% of the total, while the group of complete concrete elements makes up 82%. The rich material of the pattern elements consists of Chinese characters, objects, animals, and plants. The kind lacks any traits and is incredibly comprehensive. Additionally, more than three different element kinds make up 67%. Around 83% are made up of more than three parts. Therefore, the form attributes of auspicious patterns can be summed up as follows: The pattern is a complete plate with basically a single pattern and a small amount of appropriate patterns. The composition is primarily balanced and symmetrical, with more than three elements. Nearly all of the elements are concrete and complete, and the graphic elements are also somewhat sophisticate.

Pattern Form Characteristics Analytical Model

In conclusion, the formal characteristics of traditional Chinese patterns are dependent variables, which are summarized through the analysis of the four independent variables of 10 auspicious patterns, classification, layout, composition, and elements. This analysis technique is equally applicable to the formal properties of other patterns. Figure 3 displays the pattern-form characteristics analysis model.
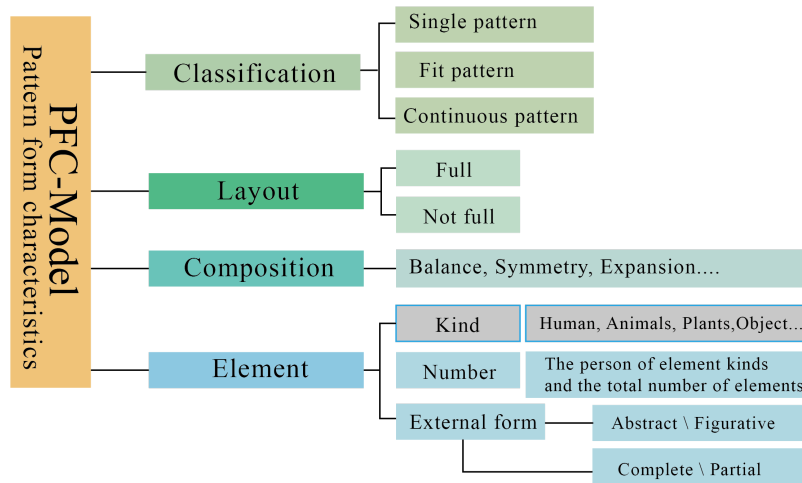
Figure 3. Analysis mode of pattern form characteristics(PFC-model)
(Source: Researcher, 2024)

As shown in the figure, the characteristics of pattern form (dependent variables) can be analyzed based on the pattern classification, layout, composition, and elements (4 independent variables). The patterns can be divided into four classifications: single patterns, fit patterns, continuous patterns, and corner patterns. The layout can be distinguished from whether it is full. However, it is not limited to this because there are many layout forms, such as skeletal layout, segmented layout, triangular layout, axial layout, symmetrical layout, the center of gravity layout, free layout, and curve layout, which should be analyzed according to the characteristics of the layout of specific patterns. The composition can be classified according to commonly used composition forms. However, it is not limited to these, such as balance, symmetry and expansion. Elements can be analyzed regarding the kinds, numbers, and external elements. Kinds can be distinguished from humans, animals, plants, landscapes, and objects. The number of elements contains the number of element kinds and total elements. The external form of elements includes whether the elements are abstract or figurative, complete or partial.

CONCLUSION

This study has several theoretical and practical significance. Through the analysis of the classification, layout, composition, and elements of 10 ordinary auspicious patterns, the paper concludes with 5 notable findings on the form features of auspicious patterns. First, auspicious patterns are commonly used in full-plate form layouts. Second, pattern form is generally single and fit pattern and the pattern is mainly balanced and symmetrical, with a few expansions. Next, the form and number of elements are generally more than 3, indicating a complex pattern. Lastly, the external form of an element is generally complete figuratively. The study was able to develop the pattern analysis model, which can be used to analyze a single or similar pattern. These findings can fill the gap in formally characterizing auspicious patterns and enrich the content and scope of the study of auspicious patterns. In addition, the study derived patterns of pattern form analysis to guide the analysis of the form characteristics of similar patterns, which presents its practical significance.

Notably, this study only analyzed the external form of the patterns. As the first layer of Panofsky's image theory entails the visual image also includes color, future studies can present a more comprehensive analysis by focusing on the color characteristics of auspicious patterns and studying them in detail. Future studies can also expand into studying the second and third layers of the theory and continue to explore related elements of auspicious patterns.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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