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ARTICLE

A morphological analysis of Joss paper image in Taiwan - A case study of Fu Lu Shou

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10

Full Length Research Paper

A morphological analysis of Joss paper image in Taiwan - A case study of Fu Lu Shou

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Based on the Fu, Lu and Shou Joss papers, the current study investigated the religious tradition of the Joss paper burning as well as the styling features, purposes, and types of the three-god Joss paper via the examination of previous studies and field work. With the collected Joss papers for different purposes, six samples with the three gods were extracted to decipher the componential principles of the three-god patterns, arrangement of printed characters, and decorative frames. Besides, with the Joss papers for different purposes, the current study compared and analyzed the styling features of the three god images, the complexity-simplicity transformation style and embedded connotation. The results of the current study revealed that the Fu, Lu and Shou Joss paper could be divided into Taiji-jin (that is, Tiangong-jin) for the heaven and gods, Shou-jin for gods and Buddha, and Yi-jin for ancestors or spirits. With differences in personality features and religious expectations, the tree gods differ not only in styling components such as the head, the costume, and objects held in hand, but also in prices, material quality, and worship connotations of Joss paper. In terms of pattern design, the use of density of lines and blocks to highlight the contrast between black and white, as well as the simplification as a result of integration and omission displays the transformation from complexity to simplicity. Taiji-jin and Shou-jin are more obvious in its components and differentiation between each part, and more elaborate and complete in the depiction of lines and blocks. While Yi-jin features the interconnection, integration, and omission of each part, it keeps focuses of the original components and could tell the character features among the three gods.

Key words: Fu, Lu, Shou, Joss paper, pattern, culture, Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

To religions around the globe, physical worship, confession, or worship of gods and icons are major

means to express followers' pious respect and to seek for spiritual sustenance. Different religions have specific

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worship ceremonies, such as silent prayer with folded palms or the cross for Christianity and Catholicism. In Chinese societies, incense offering, sutra chanting, and Joss paper (coarse paper, mostly in yellow color, made to resemble money and burned as an offering to the dead or gods, also called as ritual bill) burning are practiced in Taoism and Buddhism. In the worship ceremonies, various gods, totems, offerings, or ritual instruments are used for different purposes and intentions. The materials and forms objects present, symbolize different religious meanings and imply profound cultural connotation.

In terms of the folk beliefs in Taiwan, people express their respects and sincerity for gods via burning Joss paper, hoping to bring good luck and ward off calamities. Joss paper is also burned for ancestors or spirits so that they can have money to spend within the Underworld. Meanwhile, the notion of hierarchy in the world corresponds to the forms, patterns, sizes, and material quality of the Joss paper, since the targets for worship have class differentiation. When it comes to the Joss paper for rituals, Tiangong-jin or Taiji-jin is burned for Tiangong (that is, Jade Emperor, the ruler of heaven), Shou-jin is for average gods or Buddha, while Jingyi given exclusively to ancestral spirits. The purposes and patterns of Joss paper are diverse and contain profound religious meanings, constructing a set of complicated knowledge system. Therefore, research into the diverse patterns of Joss paper based on designing is a complicated issue worth investigating in greater depth.

Study purpose

The three-god, Fu, Lu and Shou (福祿壽) Joss paper commonly seen in the god and ancestor worship ceremonies, has rich symbolic meaning as well as many versions with different graphic designs corresponding to worship gods of different hierarchy (Shih, 2004). Thus, this study takes it to first investigate what is the connotation of Fu, Lu and Shou respectively, in Joss paper, second, how the three-god Joss paper could be divided into three main types to worship gods, and Buddha and ancestors, third, how styling components such as the face, decorations of the hat, costume, and objects held in hand have been implemented to distinguish the three types of Joss paper. Also, based on the composition theory of graphic design (Yeh and Chang, 1991), this study explores the degree of abstraction (simplification) been adopted in these three kinds of Joss paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the study review the origins and connotation and form of expression of the three gods, Fu, Lu and Shou in the folk beliefs, the origins and types of Joss paper, and the principle of abstract expression in



Figure 1. New year picture of Fu Lu Shou.

graphic design through related literature.

Origins and the significance of modeling of religions for Fu, Lu and Shou three stars

The three gods on Joss paper (that is, Fu, Lu, and Shou), also known as, Cai Zi Shou (財子壽), came from Taoism and folk legends and first appeared as “Fu Lu Shou three stars (gods), the Old Men of the South Pole” in Jinlu Qishou Zaochao Yi (金籙祈壽早朝儀, Golden Scripture for Longevity in Morning Pray) in early Ming Dynasty (Pan, 1991). In the modern society, the three gods often appear in folk engraving (Figure 1), Joss paper (Figure 2), paper-cut, year calendar (two-dimensional objects), or gifts for longevity, porcelain crafts, traditional temple forms (Figure 3), glove puppetry and actors’ dressing (Figure 4) in traditional dramas (three-dimensional objects).

Traditionally, they are arranged with Fu star in the middle, Shou star on the left, and Lu on the left. Sometimes there might be a left-right reversal arrangement. The Fu star refers to the Tein Guan (天官) star in Zi Wei Dou Shu (紫微斗數, old Chinese constellation), symbolizing prosperity. Therefore, the Fu star features the costume of high officials or noble lords in ancient China, a round face, cleverness, competence, with an officer cap on the head and a “A gift of happiness” scroll (or a Ruyi jade tablet, a sycee) in hand. The Lu star refers to the Tein Chu (天曲) star in Zi Wei Dou Shu. People in the Song Dynasty worshiped the spirit of Zitong (梓童) (Wenchang Dijun (文昌帝君), the God of Culture and Literature), who was in charge of positions and riches and featured the appearance of high position and handsome salary, with a Ruyi scepter or Shaku. After the



Figure 2. Fu Lu Shou Dinjijin, taken in the spot in 2015/03.



Figure 3. Fu Lu Shou in god temple of Tainan City.

Five Dynasties, with the other interpretation of “The Baby Delivery Zhang Xian (張仙)” attached, the folks often depicted the Lu star as a rich gentleman carrying a baby, symbolizing the prosperity of offspring. The Shou star refers to the Old Man of the South Pole in Zi Wei Dou Shu, featuring his high, domed forehead and the stick or peach which he carries as a symbol of longevity (Sung, 2003).



Figure 4. Fu Lu Shou theatre costume.

The origin and species of Joss paper

According to traditional beliefs and legends, Joss paper burning is related to Cai Lun (蔡倫), the inventor of paper, in the Eastern Han Dynasty (Lin, 2003). However, according to Feng (2005), god or spirit worship via burying elongated pointed tablet of jades, jaspers, coins and silks. Baoqian (寶錢, bronze coin) was used as mortuary objects in the Han Dynasty and had been replaced by Joss paper since the Six Dynasties. In the Tang Dynasty, Joss paper burning for funerals was popular, whether the nobles or the commonalty. JOSS paper is traditionally made from coarse bamboo paper and patterns are traditionally reproduced mostly with wood engraving, while relief press is used for printing nowadays. Since Joss paper is burned immediately after the god or ancestor worship, traditional patterns focus on the simple linear composition. Low printing cost of the modern machines makes it easy to mass produce realistic or abstract patterns. Gold paper, with gold foil on it, is burned for gods or used to pray for blessings, such as Fu Lu Shou Dinji-jin or Shou-jin. Silver paper, with silver foil on it, is burned for ancestors or spirits (Lin, 2003). For exploring the art of Joss paper, Chang (1996) has comprehensively collected various types of Joss paper with detailed description about their graphic composition which provide this study valuable reference for collecting Joss paper samples and for further analysis on them.

Graphic design from contract to abstract expressions

The composition of art or graphic design contains both realistic and abstract expressions, and simplification is an important technique in abstraction. Important features are



Figure 5a. Realistic bull.

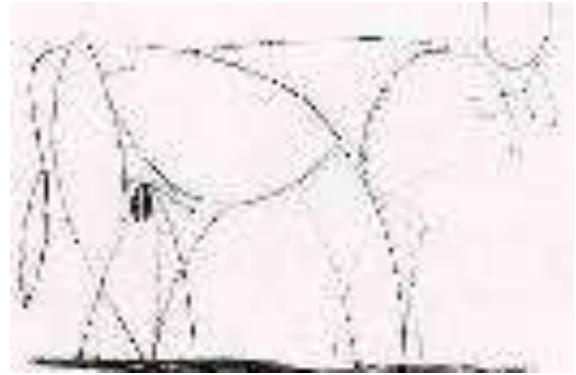


Figure 5d. Abstract line bull.



Figure 5b. Splitted bull



Figure 5c. Line and planar bull.

extracted from complex details and transformed into understandable simple lines or geometric forms. Based on Pablo Picasso's (1881 to 1973) Bull, a series of lithographs created in 1945 to 1946 (Figure 5a and b) (Yeh and Chang, 1991), the current study elaborated on related abstraction process. Figure 5a shows a realistic

sketch of a bull. In Figure 5b, a strong and solid shape of a bull could still be observed. However, lines are used to dissect the creature into black areas, and detailed shapes of eyes, ears, and noses are simplified. In Figure 5c, detailed depictions of the bull are simplified. Destructions with intersectional lines and a few sections make it hard to observe the strong shape of a bull, displaying a symbolic form. In Figure 5d, the bull is reduced to a simple outline, displaying an abstract image.

METHODOLOGY

Through the review of previous studies and in-depth interview to exports of **Joss** paper, the current study conduct literary analysis exploring the origin, connotation and form of expression of Fu, Lu and Shou in the folk beliefs. Then through morphological analysis on selected samples of Joss paper, the study compared and analyzed the complexity-simplicity transformation style and embedded connotation that the three gods had with regard to their appearance on the Joss paper of different purposes.

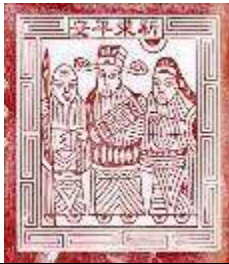





Investigative method and implementation

By referring to Chang (1996) and other online information and by taking photos of Joss paper from the field work, the current study first collected a large sample of the three-god, Fu Lu Shou, joss paper designed for different purposes. Among them, 6 samples with diverse details then were screened out, through a further analysis, for presenting three main types of Fu Lu Shou Joss paper (Table 1). Moreover, owners of Joss paper shops in Xiluo Township and Douliu Township (exports of joss paper) were interviewed to explain the types, production styles, and applications of different Joss papers.

Illustration of samples of Joss paper

Based on the hierarchy of the objects to be worshiped, the samples in Table 1 differed in the composition patterns, sizes, and paper textures, which could be

Table 1. Samples of Fu Lu Shou Joss paper.

Taiji-jin	Shou-jin	Yi-jin
		
Sample 1. Taiji-jin 1	Sample 3. Shoujin 1	Sample 5. Yi-jin 1
		
Sample 2. Taiji-jin 2	Sample 4. Shou-jin 2	Sample 6. Yi-jin 2

further divided into three major types. First, Taiji-jin (also known as, Tiangong-jin) for Tiangong (that is, Jade Emperor, the ruler of heaven) was larger in size, printed in a vertical rectangle, and soft in texture (Sample 1 and 2). Second, Shou-jin for average gods or Buddha was relatively smaller and printed in a horizontally distorted square (also known as, Square paper (Sample 3 and 4)). Third, Yi-jin for ancestors or spirits printed in a horizontal rectangle was the smallest in size and the roughest in texture (Sample 5 and 6).

Analysis on the components of sample images

In terms of shared features of styling compositions, all the six samples in Table 2 contained three components: main images of Fu Lu Shou, decorative frames and text frames. Analyses and discussions were as follows:

1. Subject image: For constructions of the main images shown in Taiji-jin and Shou-jin (Sample 1 to Sample 4), detailed features such as the head, the costume, and objects held in hand were depicted in a complicated fashion. To Yi-jin, however, the texts were omitted, the styling composition was clearly simplified, and a left-right reversal arrangement between the Lu star and the Shou star was common.
2. Decoration for outer frame: The outermost was thick line frame, while the inner was a thin line frame of "Winding pattern," symbolizing the endless prosperity and auspiciousness of Fu Lu Shou.

3. Text box: **Sample 1 to Sample 4** were burned for gods or Buddha, with "Praying for safety" inscribed on the "Winding pattern" frame of Sample 1, 2 and 4, symbolizing the prayer for safety and smoothness. "Yuan Long (源隆)" inscribed on the Sample 3 represented pouring profits and prosperous business. Sample 5 and Sample 6 were burned for lower level spirits, thus inscription was not included.



















A morphological analysis of the patterns of the Fu, Lu, and Shou Joss paper

The three gods in the six samples (Table 1) were further divided into 18 sub-samples that contained respectively Fu, Lu, and Shou (Table 2). Sub-samples with different images of the three gods were analyzed based on symbolic meanings, styling components, complexity-simplicity transformation of styling features, and connotation of styling simplification.

The symbolic meanings and styling components of the three gods

According to the styling features and embedded connotations of the aforementioned, Fu Lu Shou gods, components of the main images of the six samples listed in Table 2 were to symbolize the three main wishes of Chinese that is, prosperity, high position and longevity or

Table 2. Sample classification of Fu Lu Shou image.

Type	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4	Sample 5	Sample 6
Fu						
	1a	2a	3a	4a	5a	6a
Lu						
	1b	2b	3b	4b	5b	6b
Shou						
	1c	2c	3c	4c	5c	6c

wealth, prosperity of offspring and longevity, respectively. Further explanations are as follows:

1. Fu star: The Fu star refers to the Tein Guan star, symbolizing prosperity. Therefore, the Fu star features the costume of high officials or noble lords in ancient China, a round face, an officer cap on the head, and a “Fu” (that is., happiness) scroll or a jade tablet (that is, a Ruyi jade tablet, a sycee) in hand.
2. Lu star: The Lu star refers to the Tein Chu star (also known as, Wenchang Dijun, the God of Culture and Literature), who was in charge of positions and riches. After the Five Dynasties, with the wrong interpretation of “The Baby Delivery Zhang Xian” attached, the folks often depicted the Lu star as a rich landowner carrying a baby, symbolizing the rich landowner who delivers babies.
3. Shou star: The Shou star refers to the Old Man of the South Pole, featuring his high, domed forehead and the stick or peach which he carries as a symbol of longevity (Sung, 2003).

Complexity-simplicity transformation of styling features of the three gods

Based on the 18 sub-samples in Table 2 (a set of six samples for each god), the current study analyzed the complexity-simplicity transformation and styling features of each set in terms of the head, the costume, and objects held in hand. In general, the degree of delicacy and richness of detail on the illustration of the three gods is in the order of Taiji-jin (for the god of highest rank), Shou-jin (for the gods of middle rank) and Yi-jin (for the gods of lower rank).

The heads of the three gods shown in Table 2 indicated that the Fu star featured the costume of high officials or noble lords, a high-rank officer cap with two horizontal blades on the head, and a round face. The Lu star was depicted as a rich round-faced gentleman, with his cap covering his neck and hanging down the shoulder. The Shou star was depicted as a long-lived old man, with a domed forehead. Long beards could be seen among the

three gods. Facial details in Sample 1 to Sample 4 suggested that each part (eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, and beards) was clearly depicted with lines, and that prospective depiction could be observed in eyes and nose. The three gods in Sample 1, in particular, clearly showed their eyeballs. However, obvious simplification was noticed in Sample 5 and Sample 6, where eyes and mouths were presented with lines or spots and some parts were combined, such as the connection of eyebrows and the blade of the officer cap in 6-a, beards and clothes in 5-a and 5-b, as well as mouth and beards in 6-b and 6-c. With regard to the shape of cap, the Fu star and the Lu star in Sample 1 to Sample 4 featured decorative patterns of lines and contrasting red dots on the yellow background to present the prospective effect and to show the direction of the face (right or left). However, in Sample 5 and Sample 6, the shape of the cap and decorative patterns were simplified and transformed into simple lines or blocks.

The three gods in Table 2 differed in costumes because of their personalities, with gorgeous officer costume for the Fu star, wealthy gentleman costume for the Lu star, and an elder in robes for the Shou star. In Sample 1 and Sample 2, white (yellow) lines or spots on a red background clearly differentiated the levels and details of the upper body, the lower body, two sleeves, and gestures. Besides, the beards and the upper body were masterly blended, such as sample 1b and 2c. In Sample 3 and Sample 4, levels of each part were combined, omitted, or simplified, and transformed into line compositions or symmetrical geometric styling with long stripes, such as simplifying the decorative patterns of the upper body and the lower body to symmetrical geometric styling (Sample 3a and 4a), combining the upper body with the decorations of the cap (Sample 4b), and omitting two sleeves and gestures into simplified blocks or arcs (Sample 3c and 4c).

Objects held in hand by the three gods shown in Table 2 yielded differences based on different symbolic connotation the role had. The Fu star symbolized prosperity and high officials, with a "Fu" (that is, happiness) scroll or a jade tablet (that is, a Ruyi jade tablet, a sycee) in hand. A "Fu" scroll was held right in front of the chest, with detailed decorative pattern depiction (Sample 1a). Ruyi jade tablet was held in hand, as observed in sample 2a and 3a. Sample 5a showed a slanting Ruyi jade tablet in the left clothes, where gestures were omitted. Simplification existed in sample 6a, with objects held in hand omitted. The Lu star symbolized the rich landowner delivers babies. In Table 2, sample 2a showed a baby face and baby clothing in front of the chest. Sample 4b was simplified into an oval arc and human form could not be observed, making it hard to infer its symbolic objects, The Shou star was a long-lived old man carrying a stick. Straight and thick depiction of sticks appeared among all the six samples. The curved surface depicted with white spots on a red background symbolized the head of the peach stick (Sample 1c). The

curved line in sample 5c and short curve in sample 6c were connected with the body, where the head of the stick was used to symbolize its image.

The rules of styling component of images of the three gods

To sum up, different purposes and types of the Fu Lu Shou three star Joss papers led to various facial expressions, head depictions, cap decorations, costumes, and objects held in hand. The degree of simplification and abstract on the illustration of the three gods is in the order of Yi-jin (for the gods of lower rank), Shou-jin (for the gods of middle rank) and Taiji-jin (for the god of highest rank). This is also reflected on other graphic design elements, such as line density, frame type and spot pattern.

1. Simplification principle of density of lines: Simplification was mainly reached via costume styling. In Sample 1 and Sample 2, the upper body, the lower body, and two sleeves were depicted in detail with straight lines, zigzags, and curved lines. However, in sample 4a, 4b and 5a, obvious regional combination or omission was observed, with simple lines used to depict symmetrical geometric styling.
2. Styling principle of white (yellow) spots on a red block: Such styling principle was used mainly for the cap patterns of the Lu star (for example, in sample 1b, 2b, 4b and 5b) or for the costumes, such as the upper clothes in sample 1a and the lower clothes in sample 3b and 3c.
3. Simplification principle of combination and omission: Such simplification principle was used mainly for the combination of each part or the integration of clothes levels. In Sample 4 to Sample 6, for example, combinations between the head and the upper body, the upper clothes with the lower clothes, or the object in hand with the clothes were obvious. In Sample 6, in particular, each component was omitted or combined for multiple times, and was simplified into the styling features of the main parts.

Conclusions

The study takes Fu, Lu, and Shou for examples to explore the purposes and the types that the folk beliefs in Taiwan burn Joss paper, 18 components of sample, complexity-simplicity transformation style of image and embedded connotation. The following conclusions were made:

1. To folk beliefs in Taiwan, different classes of the worship targets lead to diverse types and purposes of Joss paper burning. The results of the current study revealed that the Fu, Lu, and Shou Joss paper could be divided into Taiji-jin (also known as, Tiangong-jin) for the heaven and gods, Shou-jin for gods and Buddha, and Yi-

jin for ancestors or spirits.

2. With differences in personality features and worship purposes, the patterns of the Fu, Lu, and Shou Joss paper also differ in styling components such as the face, decorations of the hat, costume, and objects held in hand. Taiji-jin and Shou-jin are more obvious in its components and differentiation between each part, and more elaborate and complete in the depiction of lines and blocks. While Yi-jin features the interconnection, integration, and omission of each part, it keeps focuses of the original components and could tell the character features among the three gods. Meanwhile, the Fu, Lu, and Shou Joss paper differs in prices, material quality and worship connotations.

3. To cater to the tradition that Joss paper is immediately burned after the worship or ritual, Joss paper printing often adopts wood engraving or relief printing to lower the cost. Therefore, with regard to the pattern design of the three gods, the use of density of lines and blocks to highlight the contrast between red and yellow, as well as the simplification as a result of integration and omission displays the transformation from complexity to simplicity, showcasing the differences in types.

4. In religious festivals around Taiwan, Joss paper burning could be seen anytime. However, simple sheets of Joss paper not only connote the commodity's pious attitude towards worshipping gods, ancestors, and spirits, but also strengthen traditional proprieties and spirits.

Patterns of Joss paper express the profound philosophies that the commodity possesses towards religious culture and the features of folk art. Moreover, those patterns reflect the commodity's aesthetic and values that keep pace with the times. The results of the current study serve as valuable references for graphic design, folk culture research, and the cultural and creative industry.

Conflict of interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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A person is sitting on a wooden stool, reading a book. The book has a white cover with a blue and black geometric pattern. The person is wearing a white shirt with a blue patterned sleeve. The background is blurred, showing a wooden chair and a table.

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