

# The “Form” and “Meaning” of Semantics of Design of Cultural Creative Derivative Products

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**Abstract.** This essay investigates and analyzes excellent cultural and creative products derived from classical literature, aiming to extract and summarize how these products express the “Form” and “Meaning” of classical culture. It will also explore the inheritance way of Chinese classics through cultural and creative products, and the expression of the “Form” and “Meaning”.

**Keywords:** Classics; Form; Meaning; Cultural and Creative Products.

## 1. Introduction

Economic globalization has driven the growth of cultural and creative industry, with different countries showing different directions. Accordingly, these products reflect various features in different nations thanks to the different cultural traditions. China boasts a long history and profound culture. For that reason, designers are expected to grasp the spirit of Chinese culture and create products with rich cultural connotation. That is how they interpret traditional cultural classics from a modern perspective. There are two main purposes: first, to explore the essence of artistic work. In this way, users are able to understand the original intention of the works by breaking inertial thinking, and re-think classics in an independent way. Second, to dig modern elements that can best reflect the nature of classic works so as to give them new vitality. [1] Designers should display Chinese cultural characteristics through cultural and creative products instead of blindly copy other countries’ design. That is how we carry forward China’s excellent traditional culture and establish cultural confidence.

## 2. Cultural and Creative Products of Classics

### 2.1 Culture of Chinese Classics

Chinese classics represent China’s literary treasure, and is also an important part of the Chinese traditional culture and the world literature. They have various expression forms, including novel, poem, prose, etc. Classical literature is a way by which Chinese people express their dreams; therefore, it shows us the cultural psychological experience of the Chinese nation. [2] People in contemporary world are able to feel the charm of classics in a more direct way if the classics’ cultural elements can be grasped, connotation and spirit can be summarized and their essence can be expressed by cultural and creative products.

### 2.2 Typical Case Analysis

China’s “Four Great Classic Novels” (*A Dream in Red Mansions; Romance of the Three Kingdoms; Water Margin; Journey to the West*) must be mentioned when it comes to Chinese classics. They represent Chinese traditional novels, and are highly valuable accordingly. The following part will analyze the design of Chinese-classics-based cultural and creative products.

There are a variety of cultural and creative products derived from the “Four Great Classic Novels”. The silk scarf “butterfly of the Dream of Red Mansions” designed by KEYIART team is one example (Fig 1). It depicts a corner of the Grand View garden through a combination of traditional Chinese painting and silk scarf. Another example is a series of Water Margin heroes (Fig 2), which is of the British museum series. The book is launched by the Chenguang company, designed jointly by the British Museum and Gokawa Guofang, a traditional Japanese painting master. The cover of the book shows the vivid images of Water Margin heroes. Gokawa Guofang uses ukiyo-e to vividly and incisively embody these steel-willed men. These two cases are both the

excellent examples of using traditional method to express Chinese classics in real objects. For example, the scarf. The silk texture perfectly conveys the femininity of female characters in “The Dream of Red Mansions”, and thus properly expresses the “meaning” of the classics.



Fig 1. The silk scarf “butterfly of the Dream of Red Mansions” designed by KEYIART team

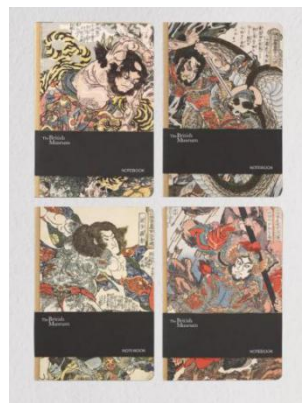


Fig 2. A series of Water Margin heroes



Fig 3. Three heads and six arms of Monkey King produced by In flames Toys

### 3. “Form” and “Meaning” in Cultural and Creative Product Design

This part investigates the cultural and creative products on the market and analyzes the cases mentioned in the previous part. Currently, the novelty of China’s cultural and creative products mainly reflects on the design of “Form” and “Meaning” (Table 1).

First, the design of “Form” requires the depiction of cultural elements after a deep interpreting of them. For example, the model toy shown in the case and other dolls designed according to classical characters. This kind of design directly uses the elements after deeply depict the characters in the classics. Such products are able to receive good feedback if they are in line with the image of the characters in consumers’ mind. Such being the case, consumers must have a proper and deep understanding of the characters, and should not divorce from the original work. If designers are

unable to create an image that is correspondence with consumers' mind, such design will not be accepted. The design of "Form" focuses on the depiction of form and a deep understanding of the characters. It is a direct method of design.

Second, the design of "Meaning" needs to explore the core spiritual connotation of the classics, and a wise combination of the connotation and products. At present, the design is mainly used in clothes, stationery and daily necessities, such as the silk scarf of A Dream in Mansions. Consumers can easily associate the softness of silk to the femininity of female in the novel. It is a clever connection between products and cultural connotation.

The design of "Meaning" uses different techniques and design methods to apply classic elements to daily products. Such elements include characters, stories, well-known scenes, etc. Designers must understand the classics properly and deeply so as to grasp the correct "Meaning". In this way, products are able to convey the correct "Meaning". Designed products should make sense and speak for themselves. Designers should not mechanically apply classics elements on products. Successfully design can bring consumers reasonable surprises.

Table 1. The phenomenon of cultural and creative product design of the classics

Cultural and creative product design based on elements of the classics		
	Application of cultural elements	Product output
Form	Understanding—direct application	Deep description of the form in the selected elements
Meaning	Understanding—combination with products	Combination of the cultural elements and products

## 4. Cultural and Creative Products based on Chinese Classic Culture

### 4.1 Direction of Design

To extract cultural elements from Chinese classics for cultural and creative product design, designers need to have a clear product positioning and a proper design direction. The description and shaping of "Form" or "Meaning" must base on the understanding of classics.

#### (1) Design of "Form"

Cultural and creative products focusing on "Form" expression requires strong modeling skills of the designer. When designing the product, designers must first understand the classic and extract the characters or scenes need to be depicted. After that, they should make conclusions of what they have extracted. For example, in character aspect, they should conclude the appearance, characteristics and the positioning of the characters. As for scene aspect, they ought to understand the time, history background and other elements included in the scene. When abstracting the elements, designers must collect as many information as possible so as to make sure the elements are not inconsistent with the original work. Take characters as an example. When designing the products, designers must have an overall view about the figure proportion, movements and expressions. After that, they ought to focus on more detailed work such as the characters' expressions, clothing and color. When all of these are done, the final product can be produced.

#### (2) Design of "Meaning"

Cultural and creative products focusing on "Meaning" expression should stress both element extraction and carrier selection, and these two parts must advance side by side. Carriers should echo with the elements. The design of "Meaning" is required to excavate the connotation of classics and to convey the core spirit of them. During the design, designers must have an overall thinking. When elements and carriers are selected, designers should integrate them and make the combination more rational. During this process, designers must ask themselves whether the expression of the connotation can be accepted by consumers and whether the transmission of the cultural spirit of the masterpieces is reasonable.

## 4.2 The Extraction of Cultural Elements

With regard to cultural and creative product design based on Chinese classic culture, designers need to have a clear understanding of the selected classic content, and then make a specific positioning for the designed product. It is necessary to have a clear logical thinking when extracting the cultural elements of classics. The extraction of cultural elements of classics can be roughly divided into three levels according to the difference of understanding (table 2).

### (1) Surface Meaning

Reading through the classics to comprehend the structure and content. Classics tend to have their popular surface meanings, which, at this level, can be summed up after reading through. Moreover, the surface meaning is the most intuitive one. For instance, after reading *Journey to the West*, readers can understand the plot and the characters in the book. At this level, the designer can directly extract main elements from key characters and important events in the book. For example, the image of Sun Wukong or the scene of Havoc in Heaven in *Journey to the West* are selected for design innovation. In the surface stage, it is more about the experience of "form". Designers can directly select cultural elements to depict and shape.

### (2) Middle-level Meaning

Reading the classics thoroughly and tasting the details in the books. There are direct or indirect links between characters and characters, or between stories and stories in literary works. After reading the famous works thoroughly, a general understanding can be grasped. The middle-level meaning refers to the relationship network discovered by the readers after reading the classics thoroughly. For example, Wu Song in *Water Margin* has many stories depicting him. If analyzing the story of *Wu Song Fighting Tiger and Meeting Brother*, the relationship between characters are Wu Song and Wu Dalang, Wu Dalang and Pan Jinlian, Pan Jinlian and XiMenqing and the relation between stories refers to Wusong's revenge because Pan Jinlian and XiMenqing poisoned Wu Dalang. These links, like a web, need readers to have a comprehensive understanding when reading those classics. When designers extract elements, they can carry out series design and integrate the story with the characters. They need to analyze the physical and mental states of the characters at that time according to the plot.

### (3) Deep Meaning

After reading the classics, a comprehensive understanding of its structure and content can be achieved, and then it is necessary to dig the connotation of the famous works in depth. The profound significance of classical works is the connotation of their transmission. The excavation of connotation is relatively complex, which requires the designer to have a deep understanding of the works. To be specific, the designer needs to collect and analyze the research literature of the classics by experts and scholars, make induction and arrangement, and then integrate with product carriers for consumers to think about cultural and creative products.

Combined with the three levels of research and design, the cultural and creative products are rich in connotation and can be intuitively understood by consumers, which is easy to bring "unexpected" surprise experience.

Table 2. Extraction of cultural elements of Chinese Classics

	Extraction of elements	Adaption of elements	Sensory experience
Surface Meaning	Characters, main events	Direct description of images	Direct transmission
Middle-level Meaning	The relationship network	The combination of characters and stories	Direct transmission
Deep Meaning	Ideological connotation	The combination of cultural connotations and products	Comprehensive thinking

## **5. Conclusion**

China, an ancient civilization with a long history, enjoys profound cultural heritage, which witnesses many literati and calligraphers, as well as imperishable literary works. These classics have different styles and convey different messages. Through these works at different times, readers can feel the social politics, natural geography, folk customs in different periods of our country. The culture of the classic works is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. The rapid development of China's cultural and creative industries makes contributions to the expression of classic culture in the form of cultural and creative products, which can make contemporary people enjoy the charm of China's traditional literature culture more intuitively.

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