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The Application of Saussure's 'Signifier/Signified' Theory in Jewelry Design: A Case Study of the Four Divine Symbols Eave Tile Patterns of the Han Dynasty

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Abstract

This study adopts Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory—specifically the “signifier/signified” framework—as the analytical foundation to explore the transformation and application of the Four Divine Beasts (Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise) eave tile patterns from the Han Dynasty in contemporary jewelry design. By deconstructing the visual symbols of these motifs, the research analyzes their formal characteristics on the signifier level (including visual language, compositional principles, and crafting techniques), and their cultural connotations on the signified level (such as mythological narratives, social systems, and religious beliefs), thereby establishing a symbolic translation pathway between traditional patterns and modern design. Utilizing a methodology that combines literature review, image deconstruction, and design practice, the study proposes a semiotics-based model for innovative cultural element design, consisting of three key dimensions: formal simplification, material reconstruction, and semantic regeneration. A series of jewelry design cases serve to validate the guiding value of semiotic theory in the modernization of traditional motifs and demonstrate the innovative expression of the Four Divine Symbols in contemporary adornment. This research not only offers methodological insights for the modern transformation of traditional patterns but also explores new approaches to the living heritage of cultural symbols. It contributes both theoretically and practically to the innovative application of traditional iconography in design and facilitates interdisciplinary dialogue among design studies, archaeology, and semiotics, offering new avenues for the revitalization of traditional motifs in the fields of fashion and accessories.

Keywords: Saussure's semiotics theory, Signifier/Signified, The four divine eave tile, Han dynasty patterns, Jewelry design

Citation

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02

การประยุกต์ใช้กฤษฎีสัญวิทยา ‘รูปสัญญา (Signifier) / ความหมายสัญญา (Signified)’ ของโซซูร์ ในการอ่านแบบ เครื่องประดับ: กรณีศึกษาลวดลาย กระเบื้องสีเทพศักดิ์สิทธิ์ใน สมัยราชวงศ์อัน

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้ใช้กรอบทฤษฎีสัญญาณวิทยาของเฟอร์ดินองด์ เดอ โซชัวร์ (Ferdinand de Saussure) โดยเฉพาะกรอบแนวคิดเรื่อง รูปสัญญาณ (Signifier) / ความหมายสัญญาณ (Signified) เพื่อศึกษาการแปรเปลี่ยน และการประยุกต์ใช้ลดลายกระเบื้องชายคาสีเทโพสูร์ ได้แก่ มังกรคราม เสือขาว หงส์แดง และเต่าดำ จากสมัยราชวงศ์ชั้น ผ่านงานออกแบบเครื่องประดับรวมสมัย จากการรื้อโครงสร้างสัญลักษณ์ชิงทัศนศิลป์ ของลดลายที่ปรากฏช้ำ (motifs) งานวิจัยนี้วิเคราะห์ถึงลักษณะเชิงภาษาภาพผ่านสัญญาณ (ทั้งภาษาเชิง ทัศนะ หลักการวางแผนค์ประกอบ และเทคนิคงานฝีมือ) ตลอดจนวิเคราะห์ นัยทางวัฒนธรรมผ่านความ หมายสัญญาณ (signified) เช่น เรื่องเล่าเชิงตำนาน ระบบสังคม และความเชื่อทางศาสนา เพื่อสร้างกรอบ การแปลเขิงสัญลักษณ์ระหว่างลดลายดังเดิมกับงานออกแบบสมัยใหม่ การวิจัยนี้ใช้การศึกษาแบบ บูรณาการที่ผสานการทบทวนวรรณกรรม การถอดรหัสภาพ และสร้างงานออกแบบ เพื่อเสนอแบบ จำลองการออกแบบค์ประกอบทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงนวัตกรรมบนฐานสัญศิลป์ ซึ่งประกอบด้วย องค์ประกอบหลัก 3 ประการ ได้แก่ การลดทอนรูปแบบ (formal simplification) การรื้อสร้างเชิงวัสดุ (material reconstruction) และการพื้นความหมายเชิงนัย (semantic regeneration) กรณีศึกษาการ ออกแบบเครื่องประดับถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อยืนยันทฤษฎีสัญศิลป์ในการทำให้ลดลายแบบดังเดิมก้าวสู่ความ ร่วมสมัย และเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นการแสดงออกเชิงนวัตกรรมของสัญลักษณ์ของเทพทั้งสี่ ในบริบทของเครื่อง ประดับรวมสมัย งานวิจัยนี้ไม่เพียงนำเสนอการแปรเปลี่ยนลดลายดังเดิมสู่การออกแบบสมัยใหม่เท่านั้น แต่ยังสำรวจการรักษาโครงสร้างที่มีชีวิตของสัญลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมอีกด้วย อีกทั้งมีส่วนช่วยทั้งเชิงทฤษฎี และเชิงปฏิบัติในการประยุกต์ใช้อัตลักษณ์ดังเดิมอย่างสร้างสรรค์ และส่งเสริมการสนับสนุนเชิงสหวิทยาการ ระหว่างสาขาวิชาการออกแบบ โบราณคดี และสัญศิลป์ พร้อมทั้งเผยแพร่มุมมองใหม่ในการพื้นชีวิตลดลายดังเดิม ผ่านงานออกแบบแฟชั่นและเครื่องประดับ

คำสำคัญ: ทฤษฎีสัญศิลป์ของโซชัวร์, รูปสัญญาณ/ความหมายสัญญาณ, ลดลายกระเบื้องชายคาสีเทโพสูร์, ลักษณะสัญราชวงศ์ชั้น, การออกแบบเครื่องประดับ

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1. Introduction

Semiotics, as an interdisciplinary field focused on sign systems and meaning making, has become a vital tool in understanding cultural expression since Ferdinand de Saussure's foundational work in the early 20th century (Saussure, 1916/2011). In contemporary design research, semiotic theory provides a structured framework for transforming cultural symbols in meaningful ways (Chandler, 2017). Under the impact of globalization, the creative reinterpretation of traditional elements has emerged as a central theme in design innovation. China's rich artistic legacy includes Wa Dang (decorative eaves tile), key components of ancient architecture that reflect the political, religious, and aesthetic ideologies of their time (Li, 2019). Among these, the Four Divine Symbols: Qing Long (Azure Dragon), Bai hu (White Tiger), Zhu que (Vermilion Bird), and Xuan wu (Black Tortoise) originated in the Zhou Dynasty and became prominent in Han Dynasty architecture. Representing the four cardinal directions and embodying hopes for peace and protection, these mythical figures carry profound symbolic meaning (Wang, 2021). However, despite their rich heritage, these motifs are rarely applied in modern jewelry design, and their transformation often lacks systematic guidance from a semiotic perspective. With the rise of the cultural and creative industries, more designers aim to integrate traditional motifs into contemporary products to promote cultural continuity (Liu & Shen, 2020). Yet these efforts often reduce complex symbols to decorative patterns, stripping them of context and depth (Sun, 2021). The challenge lies in how to preserve the cultural semantics of traditional symbols while making them relevant to modern aesthetics. Saussure's semiotic model which distinguishes between the signifier (form) and the signified (meaning) and offers a lens for decoding and reconstructing such imagery (Saussure, 1916/1983). This model has been applied across disciplines such as advertising, architecture, and fashion, but remains underexplored in jewelry design, especially in terms of translating two-dimensional cultural imagery into symbolic three-dimensional forms. Most studies on Han Dynasty Four Divine Symbols eave tile focus on archaeological or art historical contexts, lacking interdisciplinary design perspectives (Zhao, 2022). This opens space for innovation. Jewelry, as wearable art, has unique capacity for symbolic expression (Dormer, 1994). Incorporating the Four Symbols into jewelry can revitalize cultural memory and enhance user engagement. This study therefore adopts Saussure's signifier/signified framework and applies visual semiotic analysis to deconstruct and reinterpret these motifs. By analyzing their forms (lines, shapes, composition) and meanings (myth, belief, social codes),

the research proposes a transformation path: Traditional Motif → Cultural Connotation → Design Translation. Through literature review, visual deconstruction, and design practice, this study establishes a “Formal Simplification – Material Reconstruction – Semantic Regeneration” model. The research not only expands the application of semiotic theory in design but also offers a practical methodology for symbolic innovation in jewelry. It contributes to cultural sustainability discourse and enriches heritage-based design with new interdisciplinary insight.

2. Research Objectives

- 2.1. To deconstruct the symbolic structure of the Four Divine Symbols eave tile patterns of the Han Dynasty and examine the cultural semantic relationship between the “signifier” and the “signified.”
- 2.2. To establish a semiotics-based model for the modern reinterpretation of traditional cultural patterns and explore innovative pathways in jewelry design.
- 2.3. To validate the feasibility of the symbolic translation model through a series of jewelry design case studies, promoting the living heritage of cultural symbols.

3. Research Methodology and Research Framework

To systematically explore the application of Saussure's "signifier/signified" theory in the translation of Han Dynasty Four Divine eave tile patterns into jewelry design, this study adopts the following three research methods:

3.1. Literature Review Method

This method involves reviewing and organizing a wide range of relevant literature to establish the theoretical foundation and historical context of the research. Key areas include the core concepts of Saussure's semiotics theory and its contemporary interpretations; the mythological background, religious beliefs, and socio-symbolic meanings of the Four Divine Beasts in the Han Dynasty; the artistic characteristics of Wa dang (Eave tile) patterns; and the application of traditional cultural elements in modern jewelry design. Literature analysis provides the theoretical support and knowledge framework for subsequent visual deconstruction and design practice.

3.2. Image Deconstruction Method

Using visual analysis and symbolic deconstruction methods, this study systematically examines the graphic characteristics of Han Dynasty Four Symbols eave tile patterns. Starting from the “signifier” level, such as composition, line language, and structural form and combining it with the “signified” level, including the cultural connotations represented by the Four Symbols, such as legendary stories, religious culture, and social systems, this study establishes a symbolic connection between traditional images and cultural meaning. This process aims to provide a clear semiotic analytical foundation for design translation.

3.3. Design Practice Method

Building on theoretical analysis, this method constructs a jewelry design translation model based on three dimensions: form simplification, material reconstruction, and meaning regeneration. A series of design practices is then carried out, including sketch development, material selection, fabrication experiments, and prototype presentation. Throughout the practice, attention is paid to how symbolic forms integrate with materials and how traditional cultural meanings can be sustained through contemporary design expressions. Finally, case analysis is used to verify the applicability and effectiveness of the proposed semiotic model in cultural translation and design innovation.

3.4 Research Framework

This study constructs a three-phase research framework grounded in Saussure’s “signifier/signified” theory, integrating traditional pattern analysis with contemporary jewelry design. First, the Visual Symbol Analysis phase deconstructs the Four Divine Symbols’ formal features (signifier) and cultural meanings (signified). Second, the Translation Model Construction phase proposes a semiotic design pathway: formal simplification, material reconstruction, and semantic regeneration which bridging tradition and modern aesthetics. Finally, the Design Practice phase applies the model through prototype creation and material experimentation to validate its cultural and practical value in jewelry design, demonstrating the feasibility of symbolic transformation across theory and application. The research framework diagram is as follows:

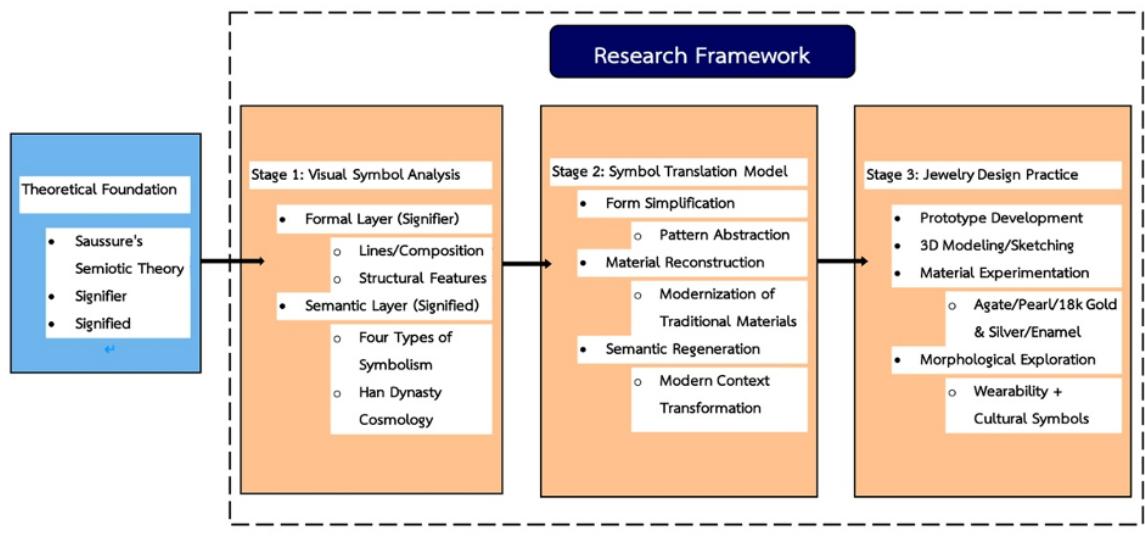


Figure 1
Research Framework

4. Literature Review

4.1. Overview of Saussure's Semiotic Theory

Ferdinand de Saussure is regarded as one of the founding figures of modern linguistics and semiotics. His theory of the “signifier/signified” binary structure laid the foundation for subsequent semiotic studies. In Saussure’s model, a linguistic sign is composed of the signifier (signifiant) which is the physical form of the sign such as sound or image and the signified (signifié) which is the concept or meaning it represents (Saussure, 1916/1983). The signifier refers to the expressive aspect of the sign, such as its color, shape, or material. The signified refers to the cultural connotation it conveys, the inner layer that communicates meaning (Zhao, 2015). Scholar Zhao Yiheng posits that “a sign is a perception regarded as carrying meaning.” A sign must express some form of meaning to function; that is, there are no signs that are devoid of meaning. Therefore, a complete sign is an organic combination of signifier and signified. Saussure’s semiotic theory has had a profound impact not only on linguistics but also on fields such as anthropology, literature, and the arts. In the field of design, particularly jewelry design semiotics provides designers with tools to analyze and deconstruct cultural signs, allowing traditional cultural elements to be reinterpreted and integrated into contemporary design.

4.2. The Application of Saussure's Semiotic Theory in Cultural Symbol Translation for Jewelry Design

Saussure's semiotic theory provides an essential framework for understanding and reinterpreting traditional cultural symbols in contemporary design. His "signifier/signified" model enables designers to analyze both the visual form (signifier) and the underlying meaning (signified) of cultural motifs, thereby achieving a balance between cultural inheritance and modern innovation. As Sun (2023) points out, semiotic analysis has become increasingly significant in the field of cultural and creative design. By symbolically extracting cultural connotations, designers integrate Saussure's, Peirce's, and Morris's semiotic principles into modern product development to reveal deeper cultural meanings. However, current studies still lack systematic methodologies for correlating form and meaning in design.

In practical design research, Wang (2022) analyzed Tujia ethnic patterns through this semiotic lens, linking their structural forms (signifiers) and color symbolism (signifieds), though noting that such analyses often remain superficial. Similarly, Xiong and Jiang (2008) emphasized that the relationship between signifier and signified in design should not be viewed as a simple pairing but rather as a dynamic interaction shaped by cultural background, social customs, and aesthetic coherence.

This theoretical foundation directly informs jewelry design, where translating traditional cultural symbols requires both formal reinterpretation and semantic renewal. Jewelry serves as a medium that materializes symbolic meaning, transforming abstract cultural imagery into tangible, wearable art. The reinterpretation of motifs—such as dragons, phoenixes, and lotus flowers—demonstrates how Saussure's model guides the transformation of ancient signs into contemporary expressions. Brands like ChuCui Palace exemplify this semiotic translation in practice. Through works such as Hidden Dragon: Long Yin Zhu Xuan and the Lotus Ripples and Four Gentlemen of Flowers series, the brand integrates Eastern motifs with Western jewelry craftsmanship, using materials like sapphires, emeralds, and mother-of-pearl to embody symbolic meanings of vitality, elegance, and spiritual harmony (see Figure 2). These designs not only highlight the adaptability of Saussure's semiotic theory in form–meaning reconstruction but also reveal how jewelry can function as a semiotic bridge between traditional culture and global aesthetics.

In essence, the application of Saussure's semiotic theory in jewelry design transcends decorative form—it enables the decoding, re-signification, and cultural renewal of traditional symbols. By recontextualizing ancient motifs through material, craftsmanship, and visual expression, jewelry becomes a cultural sign system that continually generates new meanings within the contemporary design landscape.



Figure 2

Chinese oriental elements integrated into modern jewelry design

Note: From *ChuCui Palace: Art Jewelry with an Enchanting Oriental Style*, by Yao Chuan (<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/591036132>).

4.3. The Historical and Cultural Connotations and Design Value of Han Dynasty "Four Divine Beasts" Eaves Tile

4.3.1 Historical and Cultural Significance of the Four Divine Beasts Eaves Tile

The Four Divine Beasts eaves tiles (Sishen Wa dang) embody the cosmological and spiritual beliefs of the Han Dynasty, representing one of the most distinctive visual and symbolic systems in ancient Chinese architecture. Their origins can be traced to pre-Qin astrological worship, as recorded in *The Rites of Zhou* and *Records of Artisans*, which reference the "Four Spirits." By the Han Dynasty, this imagery had evolved through the influence of apocryphal texts and divinatory cosmology, symbolizing the four

directions, seasons, and elements—Azure Dragon (East/Wood/Spring), White Tiger (West/Metal/Autumn), Vermilion Bird (South/Fire/Summer), and Black Tortoise (North/Water/Winter)—and embodying ideals of protection, harmony, and prosperity (Li, 2006; Wang, 2012).

Functionally, eaves tiles (Wa dang) were circular or semi-circular ceramic components affixed to the roof edges of major Han buildings such as palaces, tombs, and official halls. The term “Dang” (which means the end) refers to the lower or outer section of a roof tile that both channels rainwater and prevents erosion of the eaves. The Four Divine Beasts motifs transformed these practical elements into powerful talismans, merging structural necessity with symbolic meaning. Archaeological excavations, including findings of numerous White Tiger tiles in the southwest area of Han Chang’An, suggest intentional placement corresponding to cosmological orientations and urban planning principles (Liu, 2018).

From a typological perspective, most Four Divine Beasts tiles date from the mid to late Western Han period (Han Wu to Wang Mang) and exhibit refined ceramic techniques under centralized imperial production. Inscriptions such as “Left Minister of Works” and “Right Minister of Works” attest to their standardized manufacture by government workshops (Liu, 2007; Xu, 2015). These artifacts thus not only reflect the material sophistication and symbolic richness of Han architecture but also provide crucial evidence for understanding state authority, technological advancement, and the spiritual worldview of the era.

In summary, the Four Divine Beasts eaves tiles represent an integrated system of cosmology, craftsmanship, and architectural aesthetics—embodying the unity of heaven, earth, and humanity central to Han cultural philosophy.

4.3.2 Major Collecting Institutions and Representative Artifacts

Currently, eaves tile featuring the Four Divine Beasts are primarily preserved in museums across China. These artifacts are mostly excavated from significant Han Dynasty sites in ancient capitals such as Chang’An (modern Xi’An), Luoyang, and frontier regions. Those collections provide valuable examples for subsequent artistic exploration. Below are notable institutions and their representative collections:

(1) Xi'An Museum of Qin Bricks and Han Tile

This is China's only museum dedicated specifically to eaves tile. It houses an extensive collection of Four Divine eave tile, including an Azure Dragon tile (18.5 cm in diameter, with powerful lines) and a Black Tortoise tile (depicting an entwined turtle and snake, with rigorous composition) as signature pieces (Zhang, 2018). The museum holds a full set of Four Divine eave tile, each with roughly equal size and weight. The tile heads are circular, with a diameter of 18 cm and an edge width of 2–2.1 cm. The tile tubes are semi-cylindrical and 10 cm long.



Figure 3

Four Divine Eave Tile Display

Note. From Xi'an Qin Brick and Han Tile Museum (<https://www.qzhwbwg.com/sswd>) Copyright by Xi'an Qin Brick and Han Tile Museum

(2) Shaanxi History Museum

Many of the Four Divine eave tile here were excavated from the Weiyang Palace and Jianzhang Palace ruins of Han Chang'An, including architectural components from the mausoleum complex of Emperor Han Wu. Its White Tiger tile (specimen number: SHM-WT-016) shows strong dynamic motion, with the tiger body forming an "S" shape which demonstrating the artistic peak of mid-Western Han tile (Hu, 2009).



Figure 4

Four Divine Eave Tile Display

Note. From *Shaanxi History Museum* (<https://www.sxhm.com/>) Copyright by Shaanxi History Museum

(3) Mausoleum of Emperor Han Wu Museum (Maoling Museum)

Houses eaves tile excavated from the Maoling Mausoleum complex. The Azure Dragon tile (ML-WT-07) corresponds to the “Azure Dragon Watchtower” mentioned in *Sanfu Huangtu*, suggesting it may have been part of a mausoleum gate structure (Jiao, 2014).



Figure 5

Four Divine Eave Tile Display

Note. From *Mausoleum of Emperor Han Wu Museum (Maoling Museum)* (<http://www.maoling.com/>) Copyright by Maoling Museum

(4) Luoyang Museum

Some Four Divine Beasts tile in this collection date from the Eastern Han period. Their ornamentation is more simplified than that of the Western Han, reflecting a shift in architectural aesthetics during the Eastern Han era (Qian, 2016).



Figure 6

Four Divine Eave Tile Display

Note. From Luoyang Museum (<http://www.lymuseum.com/>) Copyright by Luoyang Museum

4.3.3 The translation value of the Four Divine Eave Tile Pattern in modern jewelry design

In modern jewelry design, the patterns of the Four Divine Beasts eaves tile carry significant value for cultural inheritance and creative innovation. By analyzing both the signifier (visual form, lines, shapes) and signified (mythological narratives, religious culture, sociopolitical systems) of these motifs, designers can transform traditional symbols into jewelry pieces that align with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. This enables a modern interpretation of traditional culture. However, current research on applying Four Divine Beasts motifs in jewelry design remains limited. There is a lack of systematic theoretical analysis and practical exploration. Therefore, it is essential to investigate these motifs from a semiotic perspective to explore their pathways and methods of translation into modern jewelry design.

5. Research Results

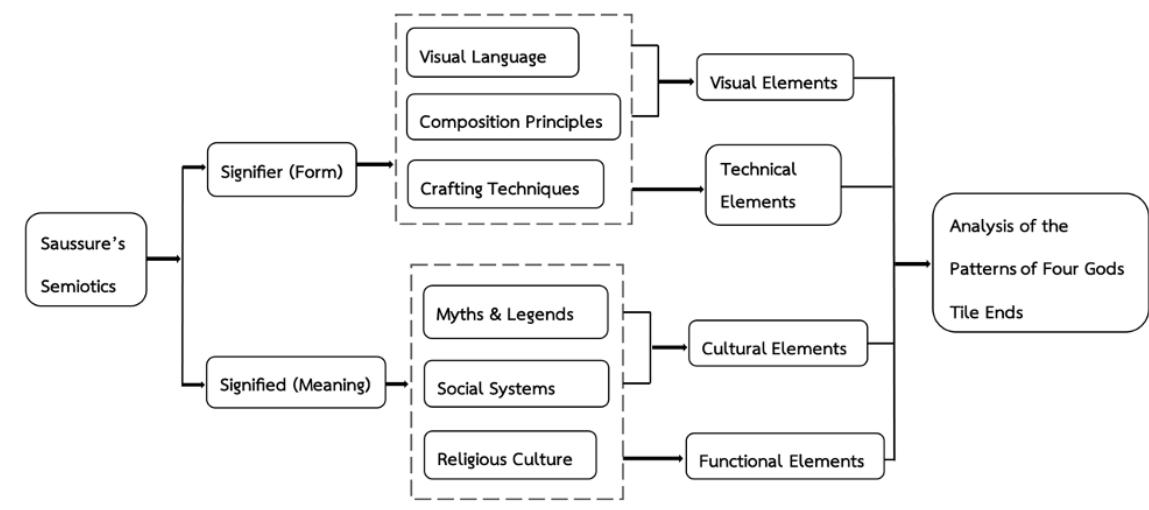
5.1. Pattern Analysis of the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs of the Han Dynasty under Saussure's Semiotic Theory

5.1.1 Semiotic Analysis of the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs under Saussure's Semiotic Theory

The Han Dynasty was an era that celebrated subtlety and elegance in art. Eave tile patterns evolved from realism to abstraction, reflecting a dignified yet simple aesthetic. Among them, the Four Divine Creatures (Four Symbols) motifs: Qing Long, Bai Hu, Zhu Que, and Xuan Wu which stand out for their vivid and exaggerated animal forms, showcasing the peak of Han Dynasty decorative tile art. These motifs not only enriched the vocabulary of ancient animal designs but also embodied cultural ideals. Major discoveries of such tile in Xi'An, once the Han capital Chang'An, provide valuable material for study. This section selects two sets of Four Symbols eave-tile from the Qin-Han Tile and Brick Museum and the Shaanxi History Museum as case studies to analyze their visual language, composition, and production techniques, thereby uncovering their aesthetic and symbolic significance. Based on Saussure's semiotic theory, signs consist of the signifier (form) and signified (meaning). The signifier includes visual elements (shape, line, material) and techniques, while the signified refers to the embedded cultural meanings which also including mythology, religious beliefs, and social values. As Zhao Yiheng (2015) noted, a sign must carry meaning to be effective. The Four divine eave tile thus act as symbolic carriers of Han spiritual beliefs: blessings, protection, and immortality and it also reflecting both artistic craftsmanship and cultural aspirations. The analytical framework for interpreting the Four Divine Creatures motifs of Han Dynasty eave tile under semiotic theory is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Pattern Analysis Framework Sheet for the Four Divine Eave Tile of the Han Dynasty Patterns



5.1.2 Analysis of the “Form” Language of the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs under Saussure’s Semiotic Theory

5.1.2.1 Modeling Language of the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs

The animal figures depicted in the Four Divine Creatures eave tile are vivid and exaggerated, with a strong sense of balance and unity in the overall composition. The design exhibits high artistic aesthetics. The decorative lines are fluid and graceful, achieving a vivid and expressive artistic effect. The Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures eave tile exhibited at the Qin-Han Tile and Brick Museum in Xi’An (see Table 2) are exquisitely crafted, with varied sizes and dynamic postures. The lively and animated figures of the Four Divine Creatures demonstrate the ornamental beauty of animal modeling through the interaction of dots, lines, and planes. In the Four Divine eave tile from the Shaanxi History Museum (see Table 2), a large central boss (nipple-shaped knob) appears at the center, representing a “dot” which symbolizes the gathering of energy. The outer rim of the tile echoes this central boss, while dynamic animal forms flow between the two. The interplay of motion and stillness further emphasizes the agility and ethereal quality of the animal imagery.

The Azure Dragon (Qing Long) tile feature two primary forms: one is a coiled hybrid creature with serpent-like features (see Table 2-No.1), and the other is a side-view beast (see Table 2-No.5). In the hybrid form, the Azure Dragon appears both dragon and snake-like, with a curved and coiled body shaped like a bow, covered in dragon scales. The head is raised at the top, with claws extended and tail curled, as if soaring through the clouds. The entire form is full of tension and conveys a powerful, awe-inspiring presence. In the side-view beast form, the Azure Dragon is shown in profile with its head and tail connected. It has a pair of horns, a slender neck, and a body covered in scales. Legs and feet are visible, and the long tail curls upward, creating a dynamic pose as if leaping into the sky.

The White Tiger (Bai Hu) and Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que) tile are generally presented in profile. The White Tiger appears fierce and robust, with an open mouth baring fang. Its body curves around the tile's center, with an upward-curling tail filling the upper portion of the tile. The White Tiger motif from the Qin-Han Tile and Brick Museum (see Table 2-No.2) is designed with wings on its back, evoking the image of a beast soaring through clouds and mist. The Vermilion Bird is depicted as a bird-like creature holding an elixir in its beak. Its head resembles a phoenix adorned with a crest; its beak resembles that of an eagle; its neck resembles a mythical luan bird, and its tail is shaped like a fish. With wings outstretched as if ready to take flight, the body is fully adorned with feathers, giving the Vermilion Bird a curling and ornate appearance.

The Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) motif is a composite of a turtle and a snake, presented in two variations: one with a turtle entwined with two snakes (see Table 2-No.4), and one with a turtle entwined with a single snake (see Table 2-No.8). The version with two snakes shows a frontal view of Xuan Wu, with the turtle sitting upright at the center and a snake coiling around each side, facing the turtle as if engaged in a struggle. This design is unique and imaginative in composition. The version with one snake depicts a side view of Xuan Wu, where the turtle is shown crawling forward while a single snake coils around its body.

Table 2

Examples of Original Patterns and Principles of Composition in the Han Dynasty Four Gods Wadang Museum

Types of Wadang	Azure Dragon (Qing Long) Tile	White Tiger (Bai Hu) Tile	Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que) Tile	Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) Tile
Serial number	N0.1	N0.2	N0.3	N0.4
Xi'An Qin Brick and Han Tile Museum				
Composition principles	"Bow"-shape composition	"S"-shaped composition	"C"-shaped composition	Not completely symmetrical composition
Serial number	N0.5	N0.6	N0.7	N0.8
Shaanxi History Museum				
Composition principles	"S"-shaped composition	"S"-shaped composition	"C"-shaped composition	Triangle composition

5.1.2.2 Formal Composition and Production Techniques of the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs

The Four Divine Creatures eave tile motifs from the Han Dynasty reflect both compositional ingenuity and advanced production techniques. Designed to fit the circular format of the tile, these motifs make sophisticated use of balance, rhythm, and negative space (liubai). The animal forms are arranged to harmonize solid and void, creating visually dynamic yet cohesive patterns. Common compositional structures include bow-shaped, S-shaped, C-shaped, triangular, and asymmetrical layouts. For example, the coiled Azure Dragon adopts a bow-shaped design with its body as the central focus, while other versions use S-shaped arrangements. The White Tiger typically features an S-curve in its body, and the Vermilion Bird forms a C-shape through the curve of its torso and tail. The Black Tortoise motifs vary: one version with one turtle and two snakes uses asymmetrical balance, while another with one turtle and one snake follows a triangular composition, with the turtle shell as the visual anchor. In terms of production, Han Dynasty eave tile evolved from earlier semicircular forms to standardized round formats with wide rims, sometimes featuring central bosses. Initially, tile were crafted in two parts: center and rim. But from the mid-Han period, a one-step molding method was adopted, streamlining the process. Techniques such as mold pressing and casting enabled artisans to achieve detailed relief effects. Curving animal bodies guided the layout of decorative elements, and fine carving techniques gave the motifs a dynamic, lively quality. From the mid-Han period onward, additional textures like dragon scales and tiger stripes were introduced, further enriching the surface detail and symbolic resonance of these mythical creatures. Together, the refined composition and craftsmanship highlight the Han Dynasty's pursuit of artistic sophistication and cultural symbolism in architectural ornamentation.

5.1.2.3 Meaning Conveyed by the Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs under Saussure's Semiotic Theory

In the Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures (Four Symbols) eave tile motifs, the Azure Dragon (Qing Long), White Tiger (Bai Hu), Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que), and Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) were seen as sacred beasts channeling cosmic energy and representing the four cardinal directions. Ancient emperors aligned palaces, gates, and towers with these directions to ward off evil and seek blessings. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, these motifs function as signs, with the signified encompassing the myths, social systems, and religious beliefs embedded in their imagery.

(1) Mythological Narratives: Early Chinese viewed animals with reverence, believing in their divine power. Combined with yin-yang and five elements theory, as well as early astronomy, the Four Symbols emerged from star constellations symbolizing the east (dragon), west (tiger), south (bird), and north (tortoise with snake). During the Han period, influenced by Daoism and the quest for immortality, these creatures were mythologized and widely used in art and architecture. Although their popularity declined in the late Eastern Han with the rise of Buddhism and lotus motifs, they remained central to Han cultural symbolism.

(2) Social Systems: The Four Divine Creatures were linked to cosmology and state ritual. Tiles bearing their images were mainly used on palaces and ancestral temples. Excavations in southern Chang'An confirm their ritual use in buildings facing corresponding cardinal directions e.g., Azure Dragon tile to the east, White Tiger to the west which reflecting cosmological planning in Han architecture.

(3) Religious Culture: The 28 lunar mansions were grouped into four celestial animals based on directional association and symbolic meaning: the Azure Dragon for nobility and weather control, the White Tiger for military power, the Vermilion Bird for fortune, and the Black Tortoise for water and protection. Under Daoist influence, they became divine guardians with official titles, such as Meng Zhang (Azure Dragon) and Zhi Ming (Black Tortoise). By the Tang-Song period, the Black Tortoise was worshiped independently, while the Azure Dragon and White Tiger became temple guardians.

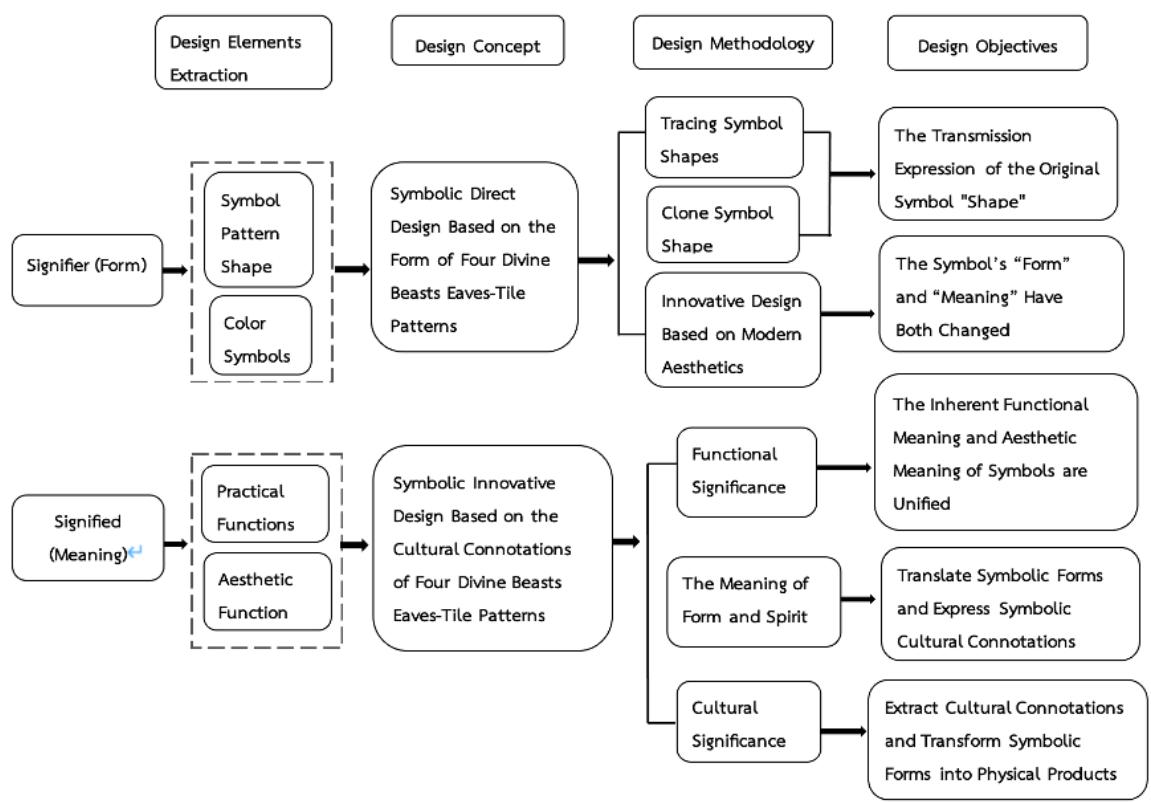
5.2. Methodological Framework for Translating Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures Eave-Tile Motifs into Jewelry Design

Han Dynasty eave tile motifs are marked by visual simplicity, lacking color, and embellishment, which limits their direct use in modern design. Field research in Shaanxi museums shows that most cultural products merely replicate these motifs onto merchandise surfaces, resulting in monotonous applications. Under contemporary aesthetic standards, a key challenge is how to apply semiotic theory to extract and reinterpret the visual forms of the Four Divine Creatures for contemporary jewelry design. This symbolic translation enhances artistic value, fuses tradition with innovation, and revitalizes Han cultural imagery.

in modern contexts. Modern jewelry design based on these motifs involves abstracting their iconic forms and colors, then reconstructing them to align with modern aesthetics. Key design components: form, color, and structure must work together to convey both visual appeal and cultural meaning. Emphasizing the relationship between signifier and signified ensures that traditional symbolism is meaningfully integrated into contemporary design narratives. There are two main conceptual approaches to extracting design elements from the Four Divine Creatures motifs: (see Table 3).

Table 3

Construction of a method for translating the Han Dynasty Four Divine Eave Tile Pattern into jewelry design



5.2.1 First Approach: “Signifier”-Based Translation (Preserving Original Meaning)

This method is rooted in semiotic theory where the “signified” (the cultural meaning) of the original motif remains unchanged, and the “signifier” (visual form) is either directly applied or innovatively redesigned under modern aesthetic standards. Designers may trace or imitate the shapes of traditional motifs, directly applying them onto modern jewelry

forms. Alternatively, they may redesign the forms based on the original “signifier” using contemporary design techniques to align with modern visual preferences. In the jewelry design process involving the Four Divine Creatures motifs, the original “signified” remains intact, and the core patterns are extracted and directly applied to form the visual elements of the jewelry. (See Table 4)

Table 4

Extraction and interpretation of the patterns of the four divine eave tiles in the Han Dynasty

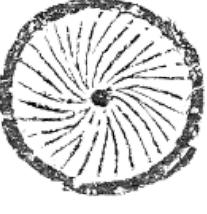
Pattern prototype source	Tile pattern prototype	Pattern name	Pattern graphic extraction (drawn by the author)	Pattern meaning and interpretation
Shaanxi History Museum		Azure Dragon (Qing Long) Tile		The chief of the four gods, the God of the East, possesses supreme authority and the power to call the wind and rain.
		White Tiger (Bai Hu) Tile		The god of the West, symbolizing majesty and power.
		Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que) Tile		The god of the south, regarded as the god of good fortune
		Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) Tile		The god of the north, the snake symbolizes fertility and the turtle symbolizes longevity.

5.2.2 Second Approach: “Signified”-Based Innovation (Extending Symbolic Meaning)

The second design approach focuses on the extended expression of the symbol's meaning, emphasizing the reinterpretation and innovation of the “signified” based on Saussure's semiotic theory. This method seeks to continue and deepen the symbolic meaning (*signifié*) of traditional motifs, applying techniques such as simplification, exaggeration, addition, and geometrization. The process begins with the extraction of symbolic patterns from the Four Divine Symbols eave tile, along with an explanation of their associated meanings. Subsequently, additional tile with culturally significant motifs are sourced. for example, from the Xi'An Museum of Qin Bricks and Han Tile to be paired with the Four Divine Symbols, enhancing the overall symbolism. such example includes the extraction of cloud motifs from cloud-patterned eave tile, which were commonly used in the Han Dynasty and often combined with abstract dragon and phoenix patterns to represent auspiciousness and rising fortune. In the later stages of jewelry design, the cloud motif's symbolic meaning is preserved while its form is redesigned using simplified and abstract methods, transforming it into a pattern element that aligns with contemporary jewelry aesthetics (See Table 5).

Table 5

Extraction and interpretation of the patterns of the four divine eave tiles in the Han Dynasty

Pattern prototype source	Tile pattern prototype	Pattern name	Pattern graphic extraction (drawn by the author)	Pattern meaning and interpretation
Shaanxi History Museum		Cloud Pattern Tile		Originating from Qin tile, the pattern symbolizes auspicious clouds, luck, and divine-human harmony, reflecting nature worship.
		Lotus Pattern Tile		Derived from Southern Dynasty tile and Buddhist culture, the pattern symbolizes purity, transcendence, sacredness, and eternity in religious architecture.
		Geometric Pattern Tile		Derived from Han tile, the pattern's simple lines reflect order, balance, and possible cosmological meaning.
		Wheel-Shaped Roof Tile		Found in Fengxiang's ancient Nan city, the wheel-shaped tile symbolizes cycles, good fortune, and wishes for well-being.

5.3. Practical Analysis of Translating Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures Motifs into Jewelry Design under Saussure's "Signifier" Theory

The Four Divine Creatures eave tile of the Han Dynasty are iconic visual symbols rich in cultural meaning, representing cosmology, spatial orientation, and auspicious protection. In contemporary jewelry design, reinterpreting these motifs through a semiotic lens revitalizes tradition and provides works with cultural depth and unique form. Guided by Saussure's semiotic theory of the signifier and signified, designers can decode traditional motifs from both visual and semantic angles to integrate them into modern design language. The signifier which means the visible, tangible form guides the extraction of patterns, shapes, and symbols in jewelry. This study focuses on the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise motifs, analyzing their transformation at the signifier level. Through techniques such as symbol extraction, material selection, and craft application, four contemporary women's jewelry pieces: a bracelet, earrings, a ring, and a necklace are developed. Together, they present a structured approach to modernizing traditional imagery through signifier-oriented design.

5.3.1 Azure Dragon Motif Translation – Lapis Lazuli Bracelet Design Practice

Azure Dragon, symbolizing the East, spring, and the wood element, is often depicted in Han Dynasty eave tile as a coiled form with horns and flowing scales. As signifiers, these visual elements are highly recognizable. In the bracelet design, dragon scales are reinterpreted as silver relief segments, paired with 8mm deep blue lapis lazuli beads that mimic the dragon's dynamic movement. The rhythmic bead arrangement enhances visual impact and continuity. Lapis lazuli's natural deep blue with golden flecks evokes Eastern mysticism and aligns with the symbolic attributes of the Azure Dragon. Matte-finished silver adds an antique texture, blending tradition with modern appeal. Elastic weaving is used to ensure both comfort and flexibility, echoing the dragon's serpentine motion. The clasp features a hidden cloud motif, enriching the design with tactile and symbolic depth, and reinforcing the connection between the signifier's visual form and the sensory experience of wearing the piece. The diagram below illustrates how the Azure Dragon eave tile motif was symbolically translated into modern jewelry design (see Figure 7).



Figure 7

The Azure Dragon Motif Translation – Lapis Lazuli Bracelet Design

5.3.2 White Tiger Motif Translation – Geometric Structure Earrings Design Practice

The White Tiger, representing the West and the metal element, symbolizes autumn, authority, and solemnity. In Han Dynasty eave tile, it is often shown in an “S”-shaped leaping pose, with flowing curves and tension serving as key signifiers. This design abstracts the “S” curve into three to five simplified geometric metal lines, forming a pair of hollow openwork earrings that appear light and dynamic. Crafted from matte-finished gold or oxidized silver, the earrings use laser cutting for precision and hand polishing for subtle light-shadow transitions. This retains the motif’s rhythm while aligning with minimalist contemporary aesthetics. Measuring 5–7 cm, the earrings are proportioned for daily wear and reflect modern women’s taste for refined luxury. By transforming the fierce traditional image into symbolic lines, the design preserves its dynamic essence while enhancing visual appeal and market adaptability within contemporary fashion contexts. The diagram below illustrates how the White Tiger eave tile motif was symbolically translated into modern jewelry design (see Figure 8).

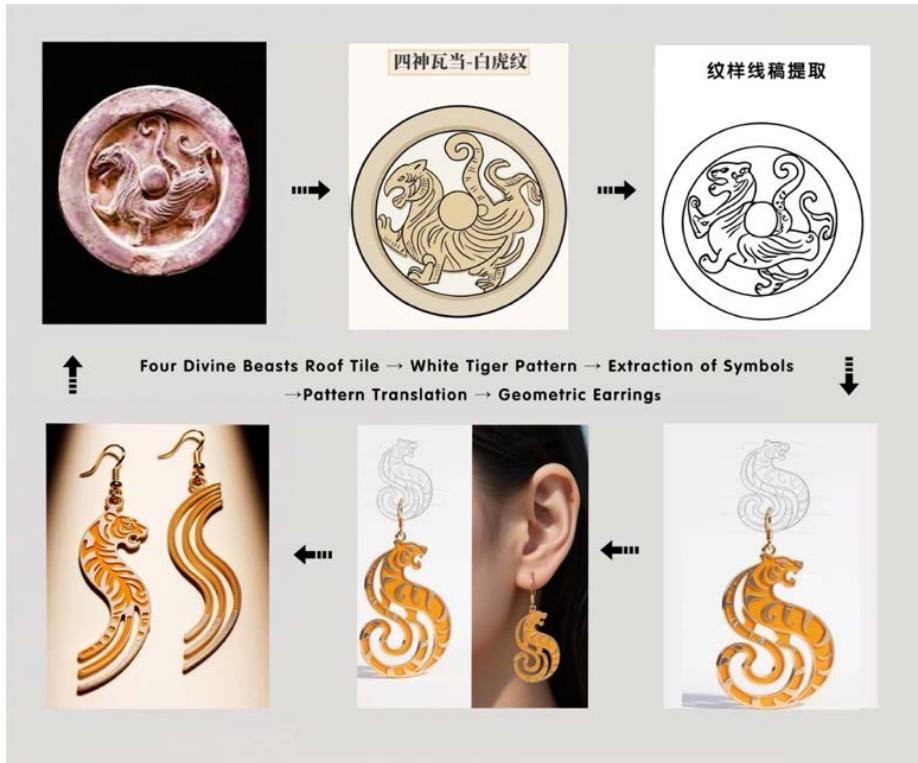


Figure 8

The White Tiger Motif Translation – Geometric Structure Earrings Design

5.3.3 Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) Motif Translation – Red Agate Ring Design Practice

The Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu), symbolizing the North and the water element, represents winter and protection. In Han Dynasty eave tile, it appears as a turtle entwined with a snake in a complex, symmetrical composition. This design abstracts key signifier features by placing a 5–7 mm red agate gemstone at the center—red symbolizing vitality and sacredness which is surrounded by a snake-like 925 silver band that coils to form a rotatable structure. The interactive rotating mechanism enhances wearer engagement and conveys cyclical continuity. The band, under 3 mm wide, ensures a refined, lightweight look aligned with modern women's taste for understated luxury. Optional embellishments include miniature diamonds or engraved lines for added visual depth. This piece transforms the static symbolism of Xuan Wu into a dynamic, emotionally resonant jewelry form, with the contrast of red agate and silver amplifying both visual impact and cultural meaning in a contemporary context. A diagram showing how the Xuan Wu eave tile motif was translated into a modern jewelry design is presented below (see Figure 9).



Figure 9

The Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu) Motif Translation – Red Agate Ring Design

5.3.4 Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que) Motif Translation – Ruby Necklace Design Practice

The Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que), symbolizing the South, fire, midsummer, and rebirth, is the most ethereal of the Four Divine Creatures. Han Dynasty eave tile often depicts its outstretched wings and flame-like feathers. This design reinterprets its layered feather structure through a central 5–8 carat oval-cut pigeon blood ruby, set within a hollow 18K gold wing frame. The dynamic feather elements sway with the wearer's motion, evoking Zhu Que's soaring grace. The color palette centers on vibrant red, complemented by gold and deep red enamel, creating a flame-like visual effect. Precision-carved biomorphic textures and micro-paves diamonds enhance detail and elegance. Symbolically, the dynamic interaction between the ruby and wing form suggests phoenix-like rebirth. The inclusion of movable parts infuses the piece with life and interactivity, offering not only visual sophistication but also a culturally immersive experience, allowing the wearer to connect with the symbolic spirit of Zhu Que in a modern, high-end jewelry context. A visual diagram showing how the Vermilion Bird eave tile motif was translated into a modern jewelry design is provided below (see Figure 10).

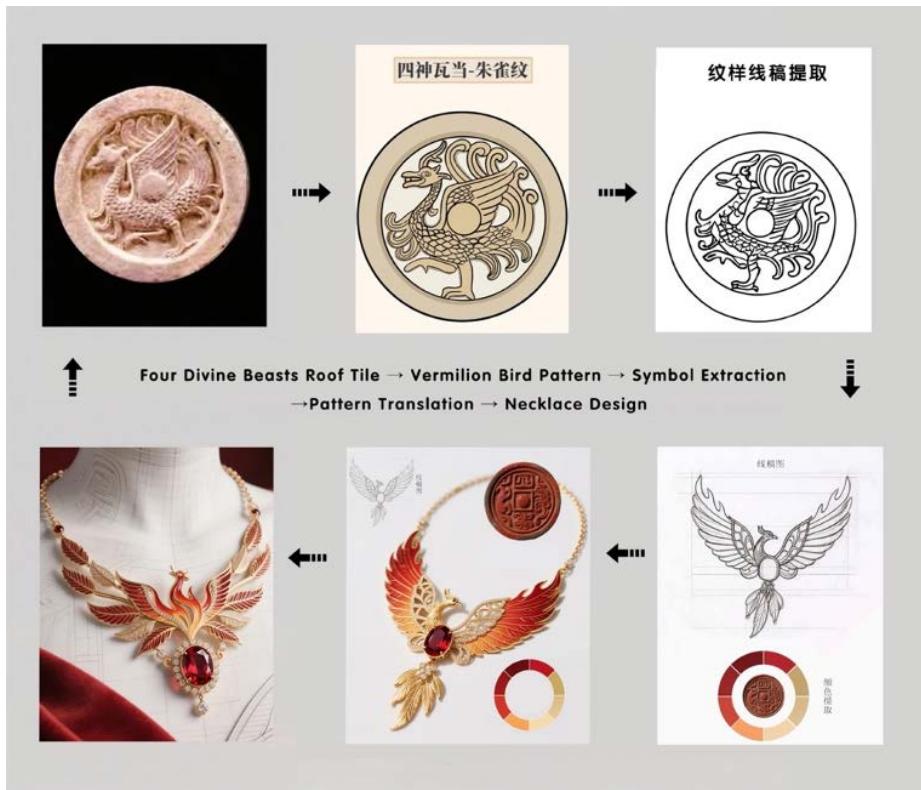


Figure 10

The Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que) Motif Translation – Ruby Necklace Design

Based on Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures eave tile, the four jewelry designs represent an innovative application of Saussure's signifier theory in contemporary jewelry. Through symbol extraction, pattern design, material selection, and craftsmanship, the works blend cultural depth with modern aesthetics. They reinterpret traditional motifs in wearable form, revitalizing symbolic language and enhancing cultural identity in a global context. More than visual translation, the designs foster a spiritual connection between tradition and contemporary users. This study affirms the value of semiotics in jewelry design and offers a practical model for creatively transforming traditional culture today.

5.4. Innovative Practice of Translating Han Dynasty Four Divine Creatures Motifs into Jewelry Design under Saussure's "Signified" Theory

Grounded in Saussure's semiotic theory of the signified, this study explores how the Four Divine Creatures motifs can be meaningfully integrated with other traditional auspicious symbols (such as lotus, geometric patterns, wheel of fortune (lunfu), and auspicious clouds (xiangyun)) to reconstruct culturally rich visual language for

contemporary jewelry design. Focusing on symbolic connotation rather than form alone, it proposes a translational method of “symbolic integration → morphological reconstruction → material symbolism”. Four jewelry designs: Azure Dragon & Lotus Bracelet, White Tiger & Geometric Earrings, Vermilion Bird Wings & Auspicious Cloud Necklace, and Black Tortoise & Wheel of Fortune Ring which serve as case studies for this process. The study introduces a three-step strategy:

- (1) Motif simplification: Geometrically abstract the Four Creatures’ imagery while retaining core features.
- (2) Symbolic integration: Combine them with traditional auspicious motifs to enrich layered meanings.
- (3) Material and craftsmanship: Employ culturally symbolic materials (jade, ruby, pearls, silver, gold) and modern techniques (laser cutting, micro-pave, rotating mechanisms) to enhance both symbolism and aesthetics.

The following sections provide detailed case analyses of these symbolic motif translations into jewelry design practices.

5.4.1 Azure Dragon & Lotus Pattern Jade Bracelet Design

The Azure Dragon (Qing long), symbolizing the East, spring, and protective vitality, is often depicted in eave tile with a soaring, sinuous form. This design abstracts its curves into a wave-like structure, paired with the lotus: an auspicious symbol of purity, nobility, and spiritual rebirth in Chinese and Buddhist traditions. Together, they convey themes of emergence and renewal. The bracelet features 8mm polished green jade beads, representing the dragon’s body and the wood element, interspersed with embossed metal lotus motifs to enrich symbolic meaning. Elastic weaving ensures comfort, with a hidden cloud-motif clasp enhancing visual refinement. The lotus components are crafted through traditional casting and modern relief techniques, adding intricate texture. The design blends strength and elegance, making it ideal for women seeking jewelry that embodies harmony between traditional culture and contemporary aesthetics. The following diagrams (see Figures 11 and 12) illustrate how the Azure Dragon eave tile motifs were extracted and simplified, how the lotus motifs were incorporated, and how the final reconstructed patterns were translated into two different bracelet designs for modern jewelry.



Figure 11
Azure Dragon & Lotus Pattern Jade Bracelet Design (Style 1)



Figure 12
Azure Dragon & Lotus Pattern Jade Bracelet Design (Style 2)

5.4.2 White Tiger & Geometric Pattern Earring Design

The White Tiger (Bai Hu), deity of the West and symbol of metal, autumn, and martial spirit, is depicted in Han Dynasty eave tile in an S-shaped leaping pose, embodying speed and strength. This design abstracts the dynamic S-curve into smooth, geometric metal lines, combining traditional animal symbolism with Han geometric motifs like grids and circles, which represent cosmic order and authority. Crafted from matte gold or oxidized silver, the laser-cut hollow earrings measure 3–5 cm for lightweight comfort. The metal sheen and abstract curves blend Eastern mystique with modern minimalism. Gold symbolizes wealth and strength, silver purity and protection, aligning with the White Tiger's elemental metal association. The design highlights the tiger's role as Western guardian and palace protector, making these earrings amulet-like cultural jewelry suited for modern urban women seeking to express confidence and resilience in both work and life. The following diagrams (see Figures 13 and 14) demonstrate how the White Tiger eave tile motif was extracted and simplified, combined with geometric patterns, and ultimately translated into two distinct modern earring designs.



Figure 13

White Tiger & Geometric Pattern Earring Design (Style 1)



Figure 14

White Tiger & Geometric Pattern Earring Design (Style 2)

5.4.3 Black Tortoise & Wheel-of-Fortune Pattern Ring Design

The Black Tortoise (Xuan Wu), guardian deity of the North, combines a turtle and snake, symbolizing winter, water, protection, and nurturing. In Han Dynasty eave tile, it appears on northern architecture sides, symbolizing household protection and peace. The Wheel-of-Fortune (Lunfu) motif, with its radiating circular design, signifies wholeness, blessing, and time's cyclical nature, complementing the Black Tortoise's protective symbolism. This design integrates the two: The Lunfu pattern forms the ring face's central motif, while the band reflects the Black Tortoise's form. The snake is abstracted into a spiraling silver line coiling the band, and the turtle shell is represented by a white pearl inlaid at the center, symbolizing guardianship and longevity. Metal engraving recreates the radiating wheel, adding dynamic movement. The band, under 3mm wide, fits ergonomically and features a rotating mechanism, symbolizing fate's turning wheel and enhancing interactivity. Craftsmanship highlights include micro-paves diamonds on silver for brilliance and luxury, while the coiled snake adds tension and protective symbolism.

This elegant ring is ideal for festive gifting, embodying deep cultural heritage and family guardianship. The following diagrams (see Figures 15 and 16) illustrate how the Black Tortoise tile motif was extracted and simplified, how the Wheel-of-Fortune pattern was integrated, and how both were reconstructed into two modern ring designs.



Figure 15

Black Tortoise & Wheel-of-Fortune Pattern Ring Design (Style 1)



Figure 16

Black Tortoise & Wheel-of-Fortune Pattern Ring Design (Style2)

The Vermilion Bird (Zhu Que), divine beast of the South, symbolizes fire, summer, yang energy, and beauty. Commonly depicted on Han Dynasty eave tile, its winged form represents ascension, purity, and rebirth. The motif often features flames and feathers to express rising energy and blessings. The Auspicious Cloud pattern (Yunwen), a traditional Chinese symbol of good fortune and heavenly mandate found in Han and Tang artworks, shares a flowing, linear form that complements the bird's soaring wings, enhancing the necklace's symbolic expression. This design centers on a 5–8 carat oval ruby or red agate, symbolizing solar energy and life's core. Surrounding it is a hollow 18K gold wing structure with layered feathers radiating outward. The movable necklace chain ends in tassels and small cloud-shaped gold pieces, creating a flame-like ascending effect. Craftsmanship employs biomorphic design principles, micro-pave diamonds to mimic feather veins, and red-to-gold enamel gradients for depth and mysticism. Hand-polished metal adds visual richness and tactile quality. The color scheme of pigeon blood red, gilded gold, and deep red enamel conveys fire's energy, nobility, and Eastern mysticism. This elegant piece suits high-end women's jewelry or ceremonial use, symbolizing rebirth, good fortune, and honor—the essence of rising from ashes and soaring through fire in Chinese culture. The following illustrations (Figures 17 and 18) demonstrate how the Vermilion Bird tile motif was extracted and simplified, integrated with the auspicious cloud pattern, and restructured into two distinct modern necklace designs.



Figure 17

Vermilion Bird Wings & Auspicious Cloud Necklace Design (Style1)



Figure 18

Vermilion Bird Wings & Auspicious Cloud Necklace Design (Style2)

Based on Han Dynasty Four Symbols eave tile motifs, the four designs use Saussure's semiotic theory of the signified to create a jewelry translation model. By integrating these motifs with traditional patterns like lotus, geometry, wheel, and auspicious clouds, the designs achieve symbolic coherence and formal diversity. Through meaningful materials, reinterpreted forms, and modern craftsmanship, they bridge traditional visual culture and contemporary design. This practice enriches cultural inheritance and broadens semiotic theory's role in jewelry design.

6. Conclusion

This study establishes a symbolic translation framework connecting traditional cultural visual symbols with contemporary jewelry design, based on Saussure's "signifier/signified" theory. Using Han Dynasty Four Symbols eave tile motifs as a foundation, it integrates modern design language, materials, craftsmanship, and semiotic analysis to create four culturally rich and aesthetically modern jewelry sets: the Azure Dragon & Lotus Bracelet, White Tiger & Geometric Earrings, Black Tortoise & Wheel of Fortune Ring, and Vermilion Bird & Auspicious Cloud Necklace.

(1) Interdisciplinary Integration and Theoretical Expansion: A key innovation is applying Saussure's semiotic theory which originally linguistic to jewelry design, transforming visual forms (signifiers) into culturally meaningful concepts (signified). This interdisciplinary method enriches jewelry design theory and offers a reference for developing visual languages in cultural and creative products.

(2) Contemporary Expression of Traditional Imagery: The study proposes a clear design process: extracting traditional motifs as signifiers, reconstructing them graphically, reinterpreting materials and meanings, and enhancing cultural symbolism as signified. Materials like lapis lazuli, jade, red agate, 18K gold, and silver, combined with advanced techniques (laser cutting, embossing, interactive mechanisms), reinforce cultural depth within modern design.

(3) Meaning Construction and Cultural Identity: Jewelry here transcends ornamentation to become a cultural identity marker. The Four Symbols' directional, seasonal, and elemental meanings foster emotional ties between wearer and piece. Integrating auspicious motifs (lotus, geometry, wheel of fortune, clouds) forms layered symbolic networks, boosting cultural belonging and spiritual resonance.

(4) Dynamic Symbolic Design and Emotional Interaction: A significant innovation is animating static traditional motifs e.g., the Black Tortoise ring's rotating band and Vermilion Bird necklace's movable wings. These interactive symbols engage wearers behaviorally, expanding traditional symbols' communicative potential and allowing signified meanings to be personally experienced and reinterpreted.

(5) Constructing a Culturally Sustainable Design Model: Through four jewelry designs, the study builds a practical, replicable system for translating cultural symbols into products. This model extends beyond jewelry to fashion, accessories, spatial design, and cultural goods, supporting traditional culture's sustainable reproduction aligned with contemporary aesthetics and market demands.

(6) Global Dissemination of Eastern Symbols: In a globalized world, this modern translation mechanism revitalizes Chinese cultural heritage domestically and provides a visual language framework for exporting Eastern symbols. Jewelry, as an intimate cultural medium, helps connect the Four Symbols' spirit with worldwide audiences, enhancing cross-cultural dialogue.

In summary, this study confirms the value of Saussure's "signifier/signified" theory in jewelry design and offers a new visual design model blending tradition with modernity. It advances jewelry's cultural regeneration, symbolic communication, consumer psychology, and social identity roles. Future research may explore the psychology of cultural meanings, cross-cultural semantic shifts, and digital tools like AI for motif recognition and translation. These advances can further rejuvenate traditional Chinese culture through new media and design languages. Ultimately, this research is both a design methodology and cultural reflection, demonstrating how traditional imagery can be not only inherited but actively reanimated guided by semiotic theory's systematic, precise approach.

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