

# The Value and Significance of Tianjin Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings for Designing Cultural and Creative Products

(Received: November 30, 2023 Revised: February 12, 2024 Accepted: April 29, 2024)

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## Abstract

Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings are one of the representative arts of Chinese culture, Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings have a rich historical background and cultural connotations. However, modernization and changes in consumer habits have posed a crisis for the survival and development of woodblock New Year paintings. This study has employed the woodblock paintings as the research object to study their development in the cultural and creative industries. This paper combined Yang Liuqing woodblock New Year paintings with modern cultural and creative industries, which contribute to the integration of culture and economy through innovative design and material application. This study adopted a qualitative

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research method, including in-depth interviews with experts, scholars, and personnel engaged in the development and sales of cultural and creative products who study Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings. This study employed a literature review and in-depth interviews, and then the study results were presented in descriptive methods and descriptions of cultural and creative product design.

**Keywords:** Artistic Features, Cultural and Creative Products, Innovative Design and Application, Woodblock New Year Paintings.

## Introduction

Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year Painting is a renowned cultural treasure in Chinese art heritage, originating from Yangliuqing Ancient Town in Xiqing District, Tianjin. It can be refined as the following. “These paintings, which began in the Ming Dynasty, have flourished throughout history, reflecting the essence of Tianjin’s historical and cultural heritage.” Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year painting has a wide range of themes and is adept at changing techniques. It contains rich humanistic culture, conveys dense information, and has a profound expression of national psychology, which is incomparable to other folk arts. It can be refined as the following. “In recent years, with the country’s increasing emphasis on cultural construction, these paintings have been listed as national intangible cultural heritage, establishing them as a prominent genre of Chinese New Year paintings.”

With changing times, evolving customs and habits, and changing aesthetic concepts, the demand for New Year paintings is gradually decreasing. The once bustling Yangliuqing Art Shop is no longer as lively, and craftsmen are exploring new paths. Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, like other folk crafts, also face challenges for survival and development. Under the impact of modern civilization, traditional Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings are facing severe challenges and tests. This includes both internal factors of the New Year prints themselves, such as the endangered materials used in traditional woodcut

prints and the loss of certain key technologies, as well as external factors, such as the impact of modern imitation technology on the production and sales of traditional woodcut prints. (Pan, 2007, p. 12) While enjoying the benefits of modern material civilization, it is important not to just complain about the consequences. On the other hand, the development of Yangliuqing woodcut printmaking is closely related to the progress of carving and printing technology. But at the same time, it also depends on the demand of the public to post New Year paintings during festivals, which are the main driving forces for the development of New Year paintings.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to the protection of intangible cultural heritage, and significant achievements have been made in the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It is a vivid witness to the continuation of Chinese civilization and an important foundation for consolidating national emotions and maintaining national unity. Protecting, inheriting, and utilizing intangible cultural heritage is of great significance for maintaining historical continuity, enhancing cultural confidence, and promoting cultural exchange and mutual learning.

It can be refined as the following. “National policies, the modern material environment, and aesthetic needs have provided new opportunities for the development of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings.” However, it is crucial to rethink and explore from within, in order to find ways to break through the inheritance of Yangliuqing New Year paintings. Simply appreciating

these prints in museums, copying them in classrooms, or studying them in books are all forms of replication, not development. True heritage should be achieved through a cycle of “production – theory - production”. (Fang, 2016, p. 19)

Integrating the culture of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings into people's lives is an important research challenge. In the era of cultural and creative industries, modern cultural and creative products will play a crucial role in preserving and revitalizing Yangliuqing printmaking culture. Every cultural and creative product embodies the culture of a city, involving policies, departments, teams, and enterprises. These products serve as a bridge between woodblock New Year paintings and consumers, integrating traditional art into daily life and conveying deeper cultural charm.

However the development of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year painting cultural and creative products also faces challenges. These include product homogenization, insufficient consumer experience, and a fragmented industrial structure. Innovation is needed in content, form, and theme to attract consumers and align with their constantly changing aesthetic preferences. At present, in-depth research on Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings is still very limited. At present, only a few master's and doctoral theses are related to this topic, and there is a gap in theoretical exploration. This research topic has contribution value and potential. Through the research and design of cultural and creative products, expand the inheritance channels of Yangliuqing New Year painting culture.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the background, origin, and historical evolution of traditional Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings.
2. To analyze the value, significance, influence, artistic characteristics, and folk beliefs of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, summarize and refine the visual elements of woodblock New Year paintings, find new design ideas, and apply them to cultural and creative product design.
3. To design a series of cultural and creative products with woodblock New Year painting character elements as the theme, incorporating new design ideas analyzed, and expanding the protection and inheritance channels of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings in different dimensions.

## Research Methods

Researchers use qualitative research methods to focus on regional data. Researchers conducted on-site interviews and research in Yangliuqing Ancient Town, with two experts studying Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, two government recognized inheritors of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings (as shown in Figure 1), and two local cultural and creative product sales personnel in Yangliuqing. It can be refined as the following. “The interviewees, aged between 30 and 70 years, represent a range of social statuses including expert, inheritor, and salesperson.” The research content includes

the value, significance, influence, and artistic characteristics of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, the current production and sales status of Yangliuqing cultural and creative products, the difficulties and development prospects in the inheritance of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, and the protection and inheritance channels of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings. It can be refined as the following. “The researchers then analyzed the data and summarized it through descriptive methods and cultural and creative product design.”



**Figure 1 The author interviewed the inheritor of Tianjin woodblock New Year paintings**

Source: (Xu, Photographer, 2023)

## Research Results

Collect a large amount of information through interviews and field research, and organize and analyze the research results.

The artistic value of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings is enormous, with its distinct artistic characteristics, diverse expressive methods, and extremely high aesthetic content, forming its own aesthetic system.

### 1. The Plastic Art of Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings

#### 1.1 Composition Features

The woodblock New Year paintings with the theme of Yangliuqing's characters, in terms of composition, place several different things from time and space in the same painting, without being constrained by natural science, expressing a supernatural form of freedom. It can be refined as the following. "To highlight the subject, sometimes only the upper body of a character is painted, effectively emphasizing the character's expression." Sometimes, due to the expansion of the scene and the increase of characters, a creative technique of "virtual and real guests, dispersed distance" is adopted to distinguish between distant and shallow levels (Feng, 2006, p. 35). The composition characteristics of Yangliuqing paintings are full, balanced, symmetrical, and rich. The work presents a general and formulaic tendency, but has a strong subjective color in the selection and arrangement of character images (as shown in Figure 2).



Figure 2 Good fortune and auspicious celebration

Source: (Xu, 2023)

## 1.2 Line Features

The line style of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings is unique, with strong expressive power, and the thickness, length, and combination of the lines are relatively coordinated. Usually, when creating, artists use lines not only as a summary outline, but also to enhance the beauty of decoration. In Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, the main part is to use a large number of decorative lines to depict the figure's posture and charm; and the secondary part is to set off and decorate the background. especially in deity- based New Year painting, “Heavenly Officials’ Blessing” (as shown in Figure 3) It does not only use a large number of decorative lines on the clothing of the main characters to highlight their beauty, but the background decoration of the entire picture also highlights the theme. The different lines in the background are combined with colors to make the entire picture look fuller.



Figure 3 Heavenly Officials’ Blessing Source:  
“Collection of Chinese Woodblock New Year Paintings:  
Yangliuqing Volume”

Source: (Feng, 2012)

### 1.3 Styling Features of Characters

The most prominent feature of the character images in the Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings is the freehand and subjective portrayal, that is, the character images in the Yangliuqing youth paintings are inspired by the aesthetic pursuit of the masses and the artistic imagination of the creators, with exaggerated and freehand features. When highlighting certain characteristics of a character to conform to the spiritual meaning to be expressed, it is necessary to adjust the proportion of the form and use exaggeration techniques to make it more vivid. Compared to other New Year’s paintings, exaggeration is more introverted. Moreover, this exaggeration is the best way to express one’s thoughts while conforming

to the character's identity. For example, in Zhong Kui (Figure 4), because he is a deity who exorcises ghosts and demons, the painter shortened his height to highlight his burly figure. He was wearing armor and wielding a long sword, as if fighting against demons. The carving on his face was even more exquisite, with a ferocious expression, which gives people a sense of justice and authority.



Figure 4 Zhong Kui Source: “Collection of Chinese Woodblock New Year Paintings: Yangliuqing Volume”  
Source: (Feng, 2012)

## 2. The Color Art of Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings

### 2.1 Color Elegance

The color of Yangliuqing character themed New Year paintings has a simple and elegant quality. Yangliuqing Painting generally uses five color schemes: red, yellow, blue-green,

pink, black, and some add purple schemes. When used, it forms a harmonious and unified picture through the size of blocks, changes in position, or the strength of chromaticity, but the colors often have a tendency towards “pink elegance”. Pink and elegant pigments should be classified and stored, ensuring their transparency and brightness during the storage process. The overall color tone of Yangliuqing character themed New Year paintings mostly leans towards high brightness (as shown in Figure 5).



Figure 5 “Joyful” “Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings”

Source: (Liu, 2015)

## 2.2 Color Uniformity

The color tone of Yangliuqing character themed New Year paintings is unified. Although Yangliuqing paintings require contrast between colors, they do not use all colors equally, resulting in a dazzling mix of colors. If there is no main color in a painting, all colors will inevitably form a balance of strength and compete with each other, emphasizing themselves and being unable to be squeezed together. Only by using a color tone

that plays a commanding role can unity be achieved in opposition. Regardless of which ever-changing color painting is chosen, it must be determined when creating a small color draft. Yangliuqing painting mostly uses warm tones, especially red tones, which is also a traditional Chinese color requirement. Red is the most commonly used color, while cool colors are used as a complement. For example, a pair of paintings titled “Attracting Wealth and Bringing Treasures” (as shown in Figure 6) are New Year paintings of the God of Wealth category. Each painting features two dolls, one literary and one martial, pushing gold and giving away wealth, with blue and purple embellishments, one on the left and one on the right. The entire New Year painting is dominated by warm red and yellow tones, with uniform and symmetrical colors. The entire painting is full of joy and joy. (Wang, 2002, p. 24)



Figure 6 “Attracting Wealth and Bringing Treasures”

Source: “Collection of Chinese Woodblock

New Year Paintings: Yangliuqing Volume”

Source: (Feng, 2012)

### 3. The Folk Value and Significance of Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings

It can be refined as the following. “Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings hold significant folk value, reflecting various aspects of traditional Chinese rural culture and social life.”

Traditional festivals and auspiciousness: These New Year pictures are usually themed with traditional Chinese festivals and auspicious elements, such as the Spring Festival, the Lantern Festival (Filled round balls made of glutinous rice-flour for the Lantern Festival), wedding celebrations, birthday parties, etc. They convey wishes for good luck, happiness, and reunion, and promote traditional auspicious meanings.

Traditional clothing and customs: The characters in New Year paintings usually wear traditional clothing, showcasing the characteristics of traditional Chinese clothing and customs, which helps to promote traditional culture and customs.

Etiquette and family values: These New Year paintings emphasize etiquette and respect for family values, such as respecting elders, family reunion, and family relationships. They convey the core values of traditional Chinese families and society.

Art Inheritance and Folk Art: Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Paintings are Chinese folk art that inherits ancient painting and printmaking techniques, helps to protect and

inherit these traditional skills, and also provides artists with the opportunity to integrate creativity and artistic expression.

Family and emotions: New Year paintings often depict emotions such as family, friendship, and love, reflecting the importance of interpersonal relationships and helping to promote the values of interpersonal and family harmony.

Overall, Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings carry rich folk values and meanings. They are important records of traditional Chinese culture and way of life, and also a folk art with strong regional characteristics. They have had a profound impact on the development of society and culture. (Lv, 1990, p. 24)

### **Conclusion**

From the perspective of the inheritance of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, their themes have always been closely related to social reality. The exquisite images contain values of good, evil, beauty, and ugliness, praise and criticize historical events, and convey the cultural ideas of patriotism, love for the nation, and safeguarding a beautiful home to us in the plainest language.

In terms of artistic characteristics, it not only has diverse creative techniques and a wide range of themes, but also has various regions and styles. In terms of cultural value, it also has a profound cultural heritage, carrying the long-standing cultural and historical information of Tianjin, and is a living

fossil of China's folk culture. It has left a profound mark in the Chinese folk art world and even in the art world, and it is a rare and enormous cultural wealth of art in China. As a carrier of Tianjin folk culture, it fully reflects the history of folk art and the true portrayal of the local economy, culture, and people's lives. Its delicate style, full visuals, smooth lines, innovative color schemes, and highly decorative artistic features have extremely high artistic appreciation and collection value from any angle. (Wang & Li, 2017, p. 11)

It can be refined as the following. “The influence of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings lies in their reflection of local culture and beliefs, offering a profound opportunity for understanding and exploring traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, this art form has positively impacted local art, culture, and tourism, facilitating the development and utilization of regional cultural resources.”

#### **4. Design of Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Painting Cultural and Creative Products**

##### **4.1 Survey and Analysis of Tianjin Tourism Cultural and Creative Products**

It can be refined as the following. “From the perspective of tourism and cultural creative product design and research in Tianjin in recent years, Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings contribute to understanding their current

development status and achievements. According to theoretical research findings, there are four main research directions:"

(1) Research on the current cultural preferences of tourism cultural and creative products: Presently, cultural preferences for tourism cultural and creative products in Tianjin are relatively weak. Many of these products lack cultural depth, leading to issues such as mutual imitation and crude manufacturing.

(2) Innovative research on the characteristics of tourism cultural and creative products: A significant portion of Tianjin's tourism cultural and creative products lack novelty and cultural depth. There is a dearth of representative cultural and creative products. Future development efforts should focus on enhancing distinctive innovation and integrating cultural elements.

(3) Market analysis and research on tourism cultural and creative products: Tianjin's market for tourism cultural and creative products is relatively closed. There is insufficient research on effective tourism cultural marketing strategies tailored to the local market environment. Addressing specific market challenges and developing adaptable marketing models are essential to increase market penetration and sales.

(4) Artistic expression in tourism cultural and creative products: Artistic expression forms the essence of cultural and creative products. Products lacking artistic value not only fail to appeal to the market but can also result in significant

economic losses for cultural enterprises. Emphasis should be placed on researching the artistic value of tourism cultural and creative products to ensure they resonate with consumers and gain market favor.

#### **4.2 Design of Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Painting Cultural and Creative Products**

The cultural and creative product design of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings aims to combine traditional artistic elements with some modern life, so as to meet people's aesthetic needs while also promoting and protecting traditional culture. By fully understanding user needs and preferences, designing cultural and creative products that meet user expectations for Yangliuqing New Year paintings will help attract more users and enhance the product's market competitiveness.

##### **Idea sketch**

Product design series of soft ceramic dolls

Design concept: The Yangliuqing doll themed woodblock New Year paintings are themed around vivid and lovely children, using bright colors to often symbolize auspiciousness, happiness, and good wishes. The traditional woodblock printing technique inherits a long tradition of handmade craftsmanship, endowing New Year paintings with unique texture and cultural value. In the design, the round face and vivid body movements of the doll were preserved, and some auxiliary accessories such

as fish and musical instruments were designed using soft ceramic materials in combination with modern aesthetics. Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings often reflect the idea of “harmony between heaven and man”, and the design also embodies the idea of harmony.

Material selection: Clay figurines are a traditional handicraft in the Tianjin area, usually made of clay or mud. This cultural and creative product is made from the most famous local clay in Tianjin, as it reflects local culture and makes the product more distinctive.

Soft clay doll design		
Element	Inspiration	Sketch
Dolls		

Production:



Figure 7 Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year picture  
creative product production process

Source: (Xu, Photographer, 2024)

Final effect:



Figure 8 Tianjin Yangliuqing woodblock New Year picture creative products

Source: (Xu, Photographer, 2024)

#### Analysis of the Work

It can be refined as the following. “Creating a cultural and creative product inspired by the theme of Yangliuqing New Year Painting’s “Child Holding Fish” using soft clay material from Tianjin Mudman merges traditional folk art with modern culture, showcasing distinct characteristics and values:”

1. Integration of Cultural Inheritance and Innovation: This product not only preserves the traditional craftsmanship of Tianjin Mudman but also integrates it with the timeless theme of Yangliuqing New Year Painting. This fusion of traditional culture

with modern artistic concepts promotes the inheritance and appreciation of cultural heritage.

2. Artistry and Aesthetic Appeal: The use of soft clay enhances the three-dimensional form and vibrant colors of the “Child Holding Fish” doll, elevating its visual appeal. Meticulous craftsmanship ensures each detail contributes to its artistic allure, captivating viewers’ attention.

3. Emotional Resonance and Values Portrayal: Representing a classic motif from Yangliuqing New Year Painting, the “Child Holding Fish” doll symbolizes joy and beauty in life. Crafted from soft clay, it vividly captures the scene, evoking emotional connections and conveying aspirations for a better life.

4. Practicality and Market Potential: Beyond its artistic merit, the “Child Holding Fish” doll offers practical use as a decorative item in homes or offices, or as a thoughtful gift. This dual appeal enhances its commercial viability and market attractiveness.

5. Cultural Confidence and Brand Development: Introducing such cultural and creative products fosters confidence in traditional Chinese culture and enhances the brand image of artistic goods. Through effective domestic and international promotion, it enhances visibility and prestige for Tianjin Mudman, stimulating growth within related industries.

In summary, the creation of a cultural and creative product featuring the theme of “Child Holding Fish” from Yangliuqing New Year Painting using soft clay material from Tianjin Mudman not only possesses artistic and aesthetic appeal but also carries market potential and cultural value. It contributes to the integration and development of traditional folk art with modern cultural industries.

## Research findings

Through in-depth investigation and analysis, this study has drawn the following main research findings and conclusions:

1. Studying the background, sources, and historical evolution of traditional Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings with character themes helps to gain a deeper understanding of various aspects of Chinese traditional culture, artistic traditions, and social history. It has a positive impact on cultural protection, inheritance, and the promotion of social development.
2. This study analyzed the value, significance, influence, artistic characteristics, folk beliefs, and other aspects of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings based on field investigations and theoretical research, and improved and supplemented academic materials. This study also helps to preserve and inherit the Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, and provides reference and guidance for subsequent production.

3. Designing cultural and creative products with woodblock New Year painting character elements as the theme can inherit and promote traditional culture, stimulate the development of local cultural and creative industries, attract a wider consumer group through innovative design, enhance local awareness, promote cultural exchange, stimulate the potential of creators, and endow products with unique historical and cultural value, increase added value, and inject new vitality into the local economy.

### Research suggestions

1. Have a deep understanding of cultural background: When designing cultural and creative products, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of the history and cultural background of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings. Understanding its origin, traditional style, and related cultural connotations can help better integrate this traditional art into modern cultural and creative products.

2. Innovation and modern elements: While retaining traditional elements, it is necessary to consider how to integrate innovation and modern elements to make cultural and creative products more attractive, which can be achieved through design techniques, material selection, or functional innovation.

3. Cooperation with local communities: There is a need to cooperate with traditional producers of Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings, local communities or related organizations

to gain a deeper understanding of their production techniques and cultural background. This cooperation helps to better integrate local cultural elements while promoting community development.

4. Market research and target positioning: It is necessary to conduct market research before designing cultural and creative products to understand the needs and market trends of the target audience, so as to determine the positioning of the product to ensure its competitiveness in the market.

5. Sustainability considerations: To consider the sustainability of cultural and creative products, including material selection, environmental friendliness of production processes, etc., we should focus on sustainable development , which is in line with modern society's concern for environmental protection and sustainability.

These suggestions aim to encourage future research to explore more deeply the combination of design in Yangliuqing woodblock New Year paintings and cultural and creative products, while emphasizing cultural inheritance, innovation, and sustainable development.

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