



From Tomb to Trend: Artistic Legacy and Contemporary Design Applications of Marquis Yi of Zeng's Lacquerware

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Abstract

Background and Aim: With the booming development of the jewelry market in China, consumers' demand for cultural depth and artistic value has been increasing. However, the industrialized production model has led to the prominent issue of design homogenization. Traditional craft arts, with their unique materials, techniques, and cultural connotations, have become an important resource to break through the design bottleneck. This study aims to deeply explore the aesthetic value of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng and examine the innovative application pathways of its artistic characteristics in contemporary jewelry design.

Materials and Methods: Taking the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng as the research subject, this study employs three methods: literature research, visual analysis, and field investigation. It systematically sorts out the artistic characteristics in terms of production techniques, decorative methods, color expression, and pattern designs.

Results: The research finds that the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng demonstrates the composite application of diverse materials in its production techniques. In terms of decorative methods, the combination of painting, carving, and inlaying techniques showcases a high level of craftsmanship. In terms of color expression, it presents a unique visual tension. As for the pattern designs, they contain rich cultural connotations. These artistic characteristics, through cross-media translation of materials and techniques, modular transformation of decorative methods, symbolic translation of color systems, and narrative reconstruction of pattern designs, can provide inspiration and innovative ideas for contemporary jewelry design.

Conclusion: This study elucidates the artistic characteristics of lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, encompassing composite material applications, combined decorative techniques, color systems, and pattern narratives, offering critical insights for contemporary jewelry design. Through multifaceted approaches and modern technologies, the research conducts applied simulations for transforming these artistic features into modern design, which not only preserves the vitality of traditional craftsmanship but also imbues contemporary design with cultural profundity. These findings underscore both the aesthetic and symbolic value of traditional lacquerware while presenting concrete implementation strategies for its innovative adaptation in modern jewelry design practice, thereby establishing a practicable paradigm for the integration of traditional craftsmanship and modern design.

Keywords: Ancient Craftsmanship; Lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng; Contemporary Jewelry Design

Introduction

With the continuous improvement of consumer spending levels, the jewelry market in China is experiencing rapid growth. According to the "2023-2024 China Jewelry Industry Development Status and Consumer Behavior Changes Monitoring Survey Report," the retail value of jewelry products in China reached 331 billion yuan in 2023, with a growth rate of 9.8% (iiMedia Research, 2023). Modern consumers' increasing pursuit of individuality, cultural depth, and artistic value has made jewelry not only an adornment but also a symbol of cultural expression and aesthetic taste. However, with the popularization of industrial production models, the homogenization of jewelry design has become more severe. A large number of products have become formalized and commercialized, lacking cultural connotations and artistic value (Jiang & Yu, 2013). Overcoming this limitation has become an urgent issue. Against this backdrop, traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage are gradually becoming important resources for innovation in contemporary jewelry design.

In the system of ancient Chinese crafts, the lacquerware craftsmanship of the Warring States period is undoubtedly one of the most representative artistic categories. Among them, the lacquerware excavated from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, with its exquisite craftsmanship, rich decorative styles, and profound cultural connotations, is hailed as the pinnacle of Warring States craftsmanship. These lacquerware pieces





not only reflect the aesthetic taste of the aristocracy of the Zeng State during the Warring States period but also showcase a highly mature lacquer art technique. Their artistic characteristics and design concepts can provide rich inspiration for contemporary jewelry design (Li, 2023).

Although recent academic research has conducted in-depth studies on the cultural value and craft characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, these studies have mostly focused on archaeology, craft history, or cultural studies (e.g., Lü, 2023), with a lack of research on transforming its artistic features into modern jewelry design. Furthermore, existing jewelry design research has paid relatively scattered attention to traditional lacquerware craftsmanship, mostly limited to the reference of individual decorative elements, without establishing a more comprehensive research framework (Li, 2023). This research gap not only limits the in-depth exploration of traditional lacquerware art but also hinders its practical application in contemporary design.

To fill this gap, this study takes the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng as the research subject, analyzing its production techniques, drawing characteristics, color expression, and pattern designs, and identifies the artistic features of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. It further explores how to integrate these features into contemporary jewelry design. The study aims to deeply explore the aesthetic value of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng and investigate the path for the integration of excellent traditional culture and modern design. It seeks to connect archaeology, art research, and design practice, offering new ideas for the modern transformation of traditional craftsmanship.

Objectives

1. To study the historical background, production techniques, and decorative features of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, and analyze its artistic characteristics.
2. To explore how the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng can be integrated into contemporary jewelry design, and investigate the innovative application paths of traditional craftsmanship in modern design.
3. To explore the role of traditional craftsmanship in advancing sustainable, culturally informed design practices.

Conceptual Framework

This study includes the following two key aspects:

First, an analysis of the historical background and craft characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. Through archaeological literature and physical materials, the study systematically examines its production techniques, decorative methods, color system, and pattern connotations, clarifying the artistic characteristics and value of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng.

Second, an exploration of the path for the modern transformation of the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. Based on the needs of contemporary jewelry design, this study investigates the innovative application paths of traditional craftsmanship in modern jewelry design, focusing on materials, techniques, decoration, color, and patterns.

To further clarify the concepts and methods of the study, the researchers have created a conceptual framework (Figure 1):



Lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

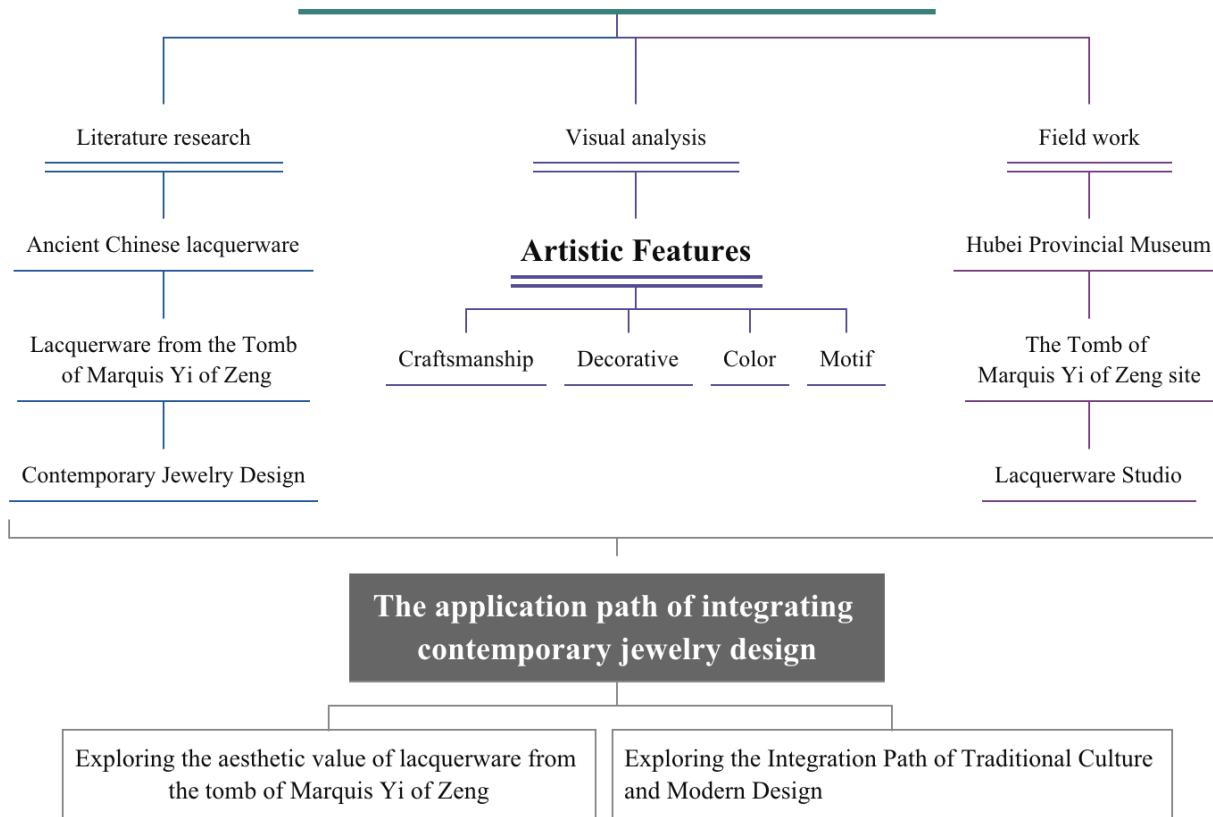


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher

Methodology

1. Literature Review Method

By reviewing archaeological reports, studies on the history of craftsmanship, and contemporary design literature, this method clarifies the historical background, technical characteristics, and academic controversies surrounding the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. The focus is on analyzing primary materials such as the “Brief Report on the Excavation of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng in Suixian, Hubei” and combining the research of well-known scholars in the field, such as Wang Shixiang (王世襄), to establish a classification framework for the artistic characteristics of lacquerware.

2. Visual Analysis Method

Based on iconology and semiotics theory, this method conducts a qualitative analysis of the patterns, colors, and decorative techniques of the lacquerware. Through detailed comparisons of artifact images obtained from field investigations and image searches, the core logic of its visual language is distilled, providing support for feature analysis and modern reinterpretation.

3. Field Investigation Method

This study employed field investigations to systematically examine 21 representative lacquer artifacts at the Hubei Provincial Museum, the Suizhou Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng site, and related restoration studios, with a focus on material textures, craft details, and preservation status. For expert

interviews, purposive sampling was adopted to conduct semi-structured interviews with five key informants, including archaeologists, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, and restoration specialists specializing in Zeng Hou Yi lacquerware, to document tacit knowledge (e.g., natural lacquer layering techniques).

Literature Review

1. Ancient Chinese Lacquerware

Lacquerware is crafted using natural lacquer as the primary coating material, through processes such as coating, carving, and inlaying. (Figure 2) Natural lacquer is a resin extracted from the lacquer tree, which possesses properties such as moisture resistance, high-temperature tolerance, and corrosion resistance, granting lacquerware its unique texture and durability.

The craft of ancient Chinese lacquerware has a long history, dating back to the Neolithic period. The lacquered objects unearthed from the Hemudu site (河姆渡遗址) indicate that the ancient Chinese people mastered the technique of lacquering as early as approximately 8,000 years ago. Lacquerware gradually matured during the Shang and Zhou dynasties, reaching its peak during the Warring States, Qin, and Han periods. (Wang, 1983) Lacquerware is not only a gem of ancient Chinese craftsmanship but also an important carrier of Chinese culture, reflecting the wisdom and aesthetic values of the ancient people.

Yang Rui argues that in contemporary jewelry design, lacquerware craftsmanship, with its unique texture and rich cultural connotations, has gradually gained favor among designers. The combination of traditional lacquer art and modern design can breathe new artistic life into jewelry. (Yang, 2016)



Figure 2 Geometric Pattern Lacquerware from the Warring States Period, Collection of the Palace Museum, China

Note: Retrieved from <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/lacquerware/228836.html>

2. Discovery of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

The excavation of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng is a significant event in both Chinese and world archaeological history, providing valuable material evidence for the study of the history, culture, and craftsmanship of the Warring States period. In 1978, archaeologists discovered this tomb at Leigudun Dongtuanpo (擂鼓墩东团坡) in Suizhou, Hubei Province. The tomb belongs to Marquis Yi of Zeng, the ruler of the State of Zeng during the Warring States period. It was built in 433 BCE and is one of the largest and most clearly dated Warring States noble tombs discovered in Hubei Province to date. (Hubei Provincial Museum, 2023)

The structure of the tomb is grand, shaped like the character “Pu” (Chinese word “卜”), with the tomb pit carved into red gravel rock. It is divided into the main burial chamber and four side chambers, covering a total area of approximately 220 square meters. (Figure 3) (Suixian Archaeological Excavation Team, 1979) Chen Chun argues that the discovery of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng not only fills a gap in the early archaeological research of the Warring States period but also provides important material evidence for the study of Warring States culture, Chu culture, and the development of craftsmanship. The artistic and historical value of the artifacts unearthed is extremely high, and it has profound implications for multiple academic fields, including archaeology, history, art history, and astronomy. (Chen, 2004)



Figure 3 The tomb is in the shape of the character "Pu" (Chinese word “卜”)

Note: Retrieved from <https://www.KGZG.CN>

3. Unearthed Lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

A total of 15,404 artifacts were unearthed from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, covering a wide range of categories, including bronze ware, lacquerware, silk textiles, astronomical instruments, and more. Among them, the lacquerware group is one of the most representative types of artifacts from the tomb, comprising various vessels and furniture, such as lacquered tables, lacquered stands, and lacquer boxes. (Suixian Archaeological Excavation Team, 1979) These lacquerware pieces exhibit an exceptionally high level of craftsmanship, with artisans applying multiple layers of lacquer to achieve smooth, durable surfaces. (Figure 4)



Figure 4 Mandarin Duck Shaped Lacquer Box Unearthed from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

Note: Photographed by the Author, 2023.



The unearthed lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng not only provides us with invaluable materials for studying the lacquerware craftsmanship of the Warring States period, but also offers important insights into ancient Chinese art, culture, and social systems. Liu Qian suggests that the decorative style of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng not only reflects the artistic aesthetics of the Warring States period but also mirrors the religious beliefs and ceremonial system of that era. (Liu, 2013) The exquisite craftsmanship and rich cultural connotations of these lacquerware pieces make them an important bridge between the ancient and the modern, offering endless inspiration and insight for contemporary art and design. Li Bo asserts that the artistic features and craftsmanship of these lacquerware pieces continue to hold significant reference value in contemporary design, particularly in the application of metalworking and decorative materials. (Li, 2023)

4. The Current Development of Contemporary Jewelry Design

Contemporary Jewelry Design has been a continually innovative form of design since the mid-20th century, characterized by constant advancements in materials, craftsmanship, cultural concepts, and artistic expression. Unlike traditional jewelry, contemporary jewelry design is marked by a strong emphasis on innovation. It does not necessarily use precious materials, but rather focuses on the evolution of new aesthetics, meanings, and processes. (Scarpitti, 2021)

Zhang Wendi argues that contemporary jewelry design places greater emphasis on the expression of design concepts, highlighting personalization, cultural integration, and interdisciplinary design. This design form not only focuses on ornamental and functional aspects but also expands the boundaries of jewelry through symbols and cultural representations, making it a medium for artistic expression and a reflection of social culture. Contemporary jewelry design demonstrates innovation and diversity in many aspects, becoming an important bridge connecting tradition and modernity, as well as art and technology. (Zhang, 2013)

In terms of material usage, contemporary jewelry design breaks the traditional constraints of precious metals and gemstones, widely incorporating non-traditional materials such as resin, ceramics, wood, textiles, and even recycled materials. At the same time, contemporary jewelry design also shows a trend toward diversification in craftsmanship, with the introduction of modern technologies such as 3D printing, laser cutting, and digital modeling, providing designers with broader creative spaces. (Jiang & Yu, 2013)

Culturally, contemporary jewelry design draws inspiration from traditional cultures, combining historical symbols with modern aesthetics. For example, many designers incorporate elements from Chinese traditional patterns, African woven totems, and Indian classical jewelry techniques, creating works with a global aesthetic. This cultural fusion not only imbues the jewelry with deeper cultural significance but also makes it a medium for cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, contemporary jewelry design emphasizes personalized expression, reflecting the identity, emotions, and values of the wearer through unique shapes, colors, and material combinations. (Skinner, 2013)

In summary, contemporary jewelry design has evolved from its traditional ornamental function into a multidimensional field that integrates artistic expression, cultural heritage, and technological innovation. It is no longer just an item of adornment but an art form and cultural symbol. In this context, the artistic features of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng may provide new inspiration for contemporary jewelry design. Therefore, a deep study of the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng will not only contribute to the preservation of ancient craftsmanship but also provide essential cultural resources and technical support for innovation in contemporary jewelry design.

Results

1. Artistic Characteristics of the Lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

Through literature review and analytical investigation, the study identifies the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, which can be primarily observed in the following four aspects.





1.1 Craftsmanship: The Combination of Diverse Materials and Superb Techniques

Research indicates that the craftsmanship of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng demonstrates extensive exploration and innovative use of materials during the Warring States period. Based on existing archaeological materials, the base substrates of the lacquerware from the tomb include a variety of materials, with wood being the most common, alongside bamboo, copper, lead, tin, bone, horn, rattan, and leather, forming a composite system of diverse material applications.

In terms of production, the wooden base lacquerware utilizes traditional techniques such as carving, scraping, and chiseling. The base structure is thick and robust, reflecting the primitive and utilitarian nature of lacquerware production during the Warring States period. Bamboo base lacquerware, on the other hand, combines woven bamboo strips with lacquer coating, serving both functional and decorative purposes. For example, the lacquered bamboo panpipes unearthed from the tomb are entirely coated in black lacquer, with red and yellow lacquer applied to create intertwined rope patterns and triangular thunder motifs, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship of bamboo-based lacquerware. (Figure 5)



Figure 5 Lacquered Bamboo Panpipes Unearthed from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

Note: Photographed by the Author, 2023.

Leather-based lacquerware, such as the painted lacquer shield with dragon and phoenix motifs, though decayed, still retains clear decorative patterns on the lacquer surface, highlighting the fine craftsmanship of leather-based lacquerware. (Figure 6) Metal-based lacquerware is exemplified by the bronze chime frame, which integrates lacquer painting with bronze casting, demonstrating cross-material craftsmanship innovation.

This composite application of diverse materials not only enriches the expressive forms of lacquerware but also reflects the Warring States artisans' sophisticated mastery and innovative use of materials. Through the clever combination of different materials, the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng showcases the diversity and complexity of lacquerware craftsmanship during the Warring States period.





Figure 6 Painted Lacquer Shield with Dragon and Phoenix Motifs

Note: Photographed by the Author, 2023.

1.2 Decorative Features: Composite Techniques of Painting, Carving, and Inlay

Researchers have discovered that the decorative features of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng are centered around multi-layered lacquer painting, combined with carving and partial inlay techniques, which showcase the diversity and complexity of lacquerware decoration during the Warring States period.

Firstly, the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng displays a unique artistic style in its application of colors. Depending on the object, these lacquerwares use multi-layered lacquering techniques, ranging from simple to complex, making the most of the limited color palette. Red, black, yellow, and other colors were used to create vivid color contrasts and intricate patterns, demonstrating an exceptionally high level of craftsmanship and a refined production process.

Secondly, carving is one of the most artistically distinctive methods in the craftsmanship of the lacquerware from the tomb. Techniques such as openwork, relief, round carving, and incised carving were employed. The carving technique was primarily used for wooden base lacquerware, combining three-dimensional carving with flat painted surfaces, thus producing rich decorative effects and a unique artistic impact.

While inlay techniques are less common in the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, turquoise inlay can be seen on the lacquerware with a bronze base, fully displaying the decorative potential of composite materials in these objects. Researchers have summarized the above decorative features in the table below to present their findings. (Table 1)

Table 1 Table of Decorative Features

Decorative Techniques	Techniques Characteristics	Example Image	Explanation and Source of the Example Image
Painting	The painting technique primarily relies on multi-layer lacquer application, where natural lacquer is repeatedly applied to the wooden base to create a rich visual effect.		<p>The image shows a lacquer coffin from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, which uses multi-layer lacquer techniques for painting. The “bird-man” image (shown in the lower part of the image) is the most distinctive feature, reflecting the culture and art of that time.</p> <p>Source: Image from the website (https://www.jianshu.com). This object is currently housed in the Hubei Provincial Museum.</p>
Carving	Carving techniques include through-carving, round carving, and intaglio carving, which complement the three-dimensional and flat decorations of the lacquerware.		<p>The image depicts a carved lacquerware (a vessel for holding wine). It is carved from a single piece of wood, with techniques including intaglio, bas-relief, and round carving.</p> <p>Source: The image was taken by the researcher. This object is currently housed in the Hubei Provincial Museum.</p>
Inlaying	<p>Inlaying refers to the technique of embedding other materials into the surface of the object. These decorative materials can be metals (such as gold and silver) or non-metals (such as jade, pearls, ivory, shells, etc.).</p>		<p>The image shows a bronze cup from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng (a type of cup used for holding meat sauce and vegetables). The base is made of bronze, with turquoise inlaid into the surface using raw lacquer and then polished smooth.</p> <p>Source: Image from the website (https://baike.baidu.com). This object is currently housed in the Hubei Provincial Museum.</p>

These decorative techniques not only reflect the artisans' fine control over decorative effects during the Warring States period but also reveal the high maturity of lacquerware craftsmanship at the time. Through the comprehensive application of painting, carving, and inlay techniques, the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng showcases the richness and diversity of lacquerware decoration during the Warring States period.

1.3 Color Representation: Visual Tension of Black and Red Contrast with Gold Accents

Through color analysis and literature research, scholars have discovered that the color scheme of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng primarily features black and red as the dominant tones. Black sets a solemn foundation, while red enhances visual vibrancy, with gold accents adding a sense of luxury. This contrasting black-and-red color scheme not only reflects the noble and mysterious aspirations of the aristocratic class during the Warring States period but also aligns with the technical characteristics of lacquerware production at the time.

For example, the outer coffin of the tomb owner is painted with red lacquer as the base, with black and gold patterns depicting symbols of rank. (Figure 7) The inner coffin, in vermilion lacquer, is adorned with mysterious motifs that reflect the cultural traits of the Chu region. The chemical stability of the color (such as cinnabar red lacquer, which does not fade after thousands of years) and its symbolic meaning

(black representing nobility, red symbolizing vitality) together construct the aesthetic preferences of the Warring States aristocracy. (Figure 8)



Figure 7 The Outer Coffin of the Tomb Owner

Note: Retrieved from <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GA9MANAC05432091.html>



Figure 8 The Inner Coffin of the Tomb Owner

Note: Retrieved from <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/oAXhKMjrRyVqJg?hl=zh-CN>

This color scheme not only demonstrates the refined control over color aesthetics during the Warring States period but also reflects the profound understanding of the symbolic significance of colors in society at the time. Through the ingenious use of colors such as black, red, yellow, and gold, the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng showcases the unique charm of color art in lacquerware from the Warring States period.

1.4 Pattern and Motif: Geometric, Animal, and Mythological Themes in Warring States Culture and Aesthetics

Research has revealed that the patterns and motifs found in the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng reflect the culture and aesthetics of the Warring States period. These primarily include geometric patterns, animal motifs, and mythological symbols, which illustrate the values, religious beliefs, and advanced craftsmanship of the State of Zeng during this era.

Geometric patterns, such as the key fret, thunder patterns, cloud motifs, and spiral designs, demonstrate the concepts of order and eternity through their regularity and continuity. Animal motifs, such as dragon and phoenix patterns, tiger motifs, deer designs, and bird images, symbolize nobility, auspiciousness, and protective power. Mythological symbolic motifs, such as shape-shifting divine beasts, strange birds, and figures with human faces and animal bodies, reflect the religious belief system of the State of Zeng, expressing reverence for divine protection and ancestor worship. To provide a clearer understanding of these features, researchers have compiled a table that organizes several representative patterns from the lacquerware of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. (Table 2)

Table 2 Representative Patterns from the Lacquerware of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

Patterns and Designs	Drawings
Geometric Pattern: Thunder Pattern	
Animal Pattern: Tiger Pattern	
Mythological Pattern: Human-Faced Beast Body Pattern (“鸟人纹”)	

The narrative logic behind these patterns not only highlights the exquisite craftsmanship of artisans in the Warring States period but also reflects the cultural values and religious beliefs of society at the time. Through the combined use of geometric, animal, and mythological motifs, the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng showcases the rich cultural connotations of Warring States period lacquerware design.

In summary, by systematically analyzing the artistic features of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, researchers have found that its craftsmanship, decorative features, color representation, and pattern motifs all demonstrate the advanced level of lacquerware craftsmanship during the Warring States period. These artistic characteristics not only reflect the aesthetic pursuits and cultural meanings of the era but also provide important insights and inspirations for the development of future arts and crafts.

2. The Application Pathways of the Artistic Characteristics of the Lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng in Contemporary Jewelry Design

Research has shown that the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng exhibit exceptional artistic value and cultural connotation in terms of craftsmanship, decorative techniques, color expression, and pattern motifs. In the field of contemporary jewelry design, these characteristics not only provide rich sources of design inspiration but also offer the potential for innovative transformation and sustainable development of traditional crafts through cross-media translation and the integration of modern technologies. Through an in-depth study of the artistic characteristics of the



lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, this paper proposes the following four application pathways, aiming to explore new directions for the fusion of tradition and modernity.

2.1 Cross-Media Translation of Material Craftsmanship: The Composite Reconstruction of Multimaterial Systems

In terms of material craftsmanship, the multimaterial system of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng provides possibilities for cross-media translation in contemporary jewelry design. Its composite material application approach of “wood as the primary base, supplemented by bamboo, leather, and metal” breaks the limitations of single-material design traditionally found in jewelry.

For example, the crafting technique of wooden base lacquerware could be adapted by combining lightweight wood substrates (such as sandalwood or black walnut) with precious metals (such as silver or titanium alloy). This could be achieved through laser engraving or 3D printing technology to finely reconstruct the base structure. This application of composite materials not only retains the tactile qualities of traditional lacquerware but also enhances the durability and modern appeal of the jewelry. Additionally, the tactile characteristics of leather-based lacquerware could be replaced by environmentally friendly faux leather materials (such as plant-based PU), combined with the semi-translucent effects of lacquer coatings, to design earrings or bracelets that embody the texture of lacquerware. Furthermore, the lacquer painting technique used on the bronze chime frame could be extended to silver or titanium alloy jewelry surfaces, employing oxidation coloring techniques to simulate the black-red contrast effect, thereby enhancing the jewelry’s corrosion resistance and visual tension.

This pathway not only offers ideas for the modern transformation of traditional crafts but also inspires the composite development of other similar techniques, such as the cloisonné enamel (景泰蓝珐琅) with metal bases and wire-based craftsmanship.

2.2 Layered Transformation of Decorative Techniques: Modular Design of Painting, Carving, and Inlaying

In terms of decorative techniques, the painting, carving, and inlaying methods used in the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng can be transformed into a modular design language in modern jewelry design. The layered logic of the lacquerware’s painting and the extraction and simplification of carving techniques can offer more flexible decorative approaches for contemporary jewelry design.

For example, UV resin could replace traditional lacquer, and by applying multiple layers of black, red, and gold sprays, a sense of depth typical of lacquerware painting could be simulated. Additionally, laser etching technology could be employed to present red cloud and thunder patterns on the surface of a pendant, with partial gold detailing to enhance the three-dimensional effect. Furthermore, the through-carved patterns of lacquerware (such as dragon-shaped bas-reliefs) could be transformed into three-dimensional reliefs on the jewelry’s surface through 3D modeling and CNC carving technology, achieving both lightweight and modern expressions.

In the field of inlay techniques, the turquoise-inlaying method used on bronze artifacts could be referenced, combining gemstone inlaying with lacquer surface filling. For instance, turquoise fragments could be embedded into the surface of a ring with a black lacquer base, with red lacquer outlining the pattern, creating a dialogue between ancient and modern materials. This modular design not only reduces the complexity of traditional decorative techniques but also enhances their feasibility for mass production, offering a paradigm for the modern transformation of other traditional decorative methods (such as the layered mineral pigment painting in Dunhuang murals).

2.3 Symbolic Translation of the Color System: Contemporary Narrative of Black and Red Contrast

In terms of the color system, the black and red color scheme of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng and its symbolic meaning provide a pathway for symbolic translation in contemporary jewelry design. By integrating modern color psychology, a culturally symbolic color scheme for jewelry can be constructed.





For example, a series of matching jewelry pieces (such as wedding rings or earrings) could use matte black titanium metal as the base, paired with red enamel or ruby inlays, enhancing the visual contrast and metaphorically invoking the aesthetic connotations of “nobility” and “vitality” in the Warring States period. Meanwhile, the golden symbolic motifs in lacquerware (such as rank indicators) could be transformed into detachable decorative components, such as necklace pendants combined with gold-plated cloud and thunder pattern charms, which users could freely combine according to the occasion, allowing for a personalized expression of cultural symbols.

In addition, oxidation processes could be applied to treat the surface of metals, simulating cinnabar red lacquer, ensuring durability and preventing color fading over long-term wear. This pathway not only enhances the cultural recognition of the design but also provides a method for the translation of other traditional color systems.

2.4 Narrative Reconstruction of Pattern Meanings: Semantic Regeneration of Geometry, Animals, and Mythology

In terms of patterns and motifs, the abstract design of the geometric, animal, and mythological patterns in the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng can achieve a contemporary resonance with traditional culture. For example, the orderliness and continuity of its geometric patterns can be transformed into standardized, modular units that can be spliced together. Through parametric design, personalized jewelry patterns can be generated. Various motifs could be abstracted and reshaped into links for bracelets, allowing users to customize and arrange them according to their preferences. The dynamic curves of animal motifs (such as the dragon and phoenix designs) can be integrated with smart materials (such as temperature-sensitive color-changing metals) to design interactive jewelry. For instance, the dragon-shaped motif on a brooch could change color gradually in response to body temperature, symbolizing “vitality” and representing the Warring States culture. Moreover, the deformable mythical beast patterns on the lacquer coffins can be transformed into abstract symbols and combined with augmented reality (AR) technology to facilitate interaction between the jewelry and the wearer. That is, when the wearer scans the mythical bird motif on a necklace with their smartphone, an animation would trigger the telling of the belief story of the State of Zeng, enhancing the cultural immersion.

The researcher has summarized and compiled these four application directions into a table. (Table 3)

Table 3 Application Pathways Summary

Application Pathways	Core Logic	Application Concepts
Cross-Media Translation of Material Craftsmanship	Draw inspiration from the diverse material system of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, combining it with modern jewelry design needs to explore the integration of traditional and new materials.	1. Wood and Metal Composite Application: Combine sandalwood, black walnut, and precious metals, with laser engraving or 3D printing to create structural bases. 2. Biomimetic Material Innovation: Replace leather with eco-friendly faux leather materials, incorporating lacquer coating. 3. Metal Base Lacquer Craft: Apply oxidation coloring on silver or titanium alloy surfaces to simulate the black and red contrast effect traditionally seen in lacquerware.
Layered Transformation of Decorative Techniques	Extract the layered logic of painting and carving techniques, transforming them into modular, replicable modern decorative language.	1. Simplified Layered Lacquer Application: Use multi-layer spraying of UV resin to replicate the layered effect found in lacquerware paintings. 2. Digitalization of Through-Carving and Relief Carving: Use 3D modeling and CNC carving to present three-dimensional reliefs. 3. Transfer of Inlay Craft: Combine gemstone inlay with lacquer surface filling to bring a contemporary twist to ancient techniques.

Symbolic Translation of Color Systems	Focus on the black and red color scheme, combining modern color psychology to create a culturally symbolic color palette.	1. Minimalist Expression of Black and Red: Use matte black titanium metal paired with red enamel or rubies. 2. Functional Transformation of Gold Accents: Incorporate detachable gilded decorative components that can be easily added or removed. 3. Chemical Stability Extension: Use anodizing techniques to simulate the durability of cinnabar red lacquer, extending its application in modern jewelry.
Narrative Reconstruction of Pattern Designs	Deconstruct the narrative logic of patterns, using abstraction and functional design to achieve contemporary resonance of cultural meaning.	1. Order of Geometric Patterns: Transform cloud and thunder patterns, as well as swirl patterns, into modular components using parametric design. 2. Emotionalization of Animal Patterns: Combine dragon and phoenix patterns with smart material designs for interactive jewelry. 3. Metaphoric Transfer of Mythological Patterns: Use AR (augmented reality) technology to create virtual and physical interactions, making the mythical patterns come to life in modern contexts.

In conclusion, the application paths of the artistic features of the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng lacquerware in contemporary jewelry design are manifested not only in the cross-media translation of material techniques, modular transformation of decorative methods, symbolic translation of color systems, and functional reconstruction of patterns, but also in their provision of valuable examples for the integration of traditional crafts with modern design. It is hoped that through the exploration and practice of these paths, the vitality of traditional culture can be preserved, infusing contemporary jewelry design with new energy and depth, and thus promoting the sustainable development of traditional crafts in modern society.

Discussion

This study, while exploring the integration path between traditional crafts and modern design, has raised the following issues that warrant further discussion:

1. Balancing Technological Intervention and the Authenticity of Traditional Craftsmanship

Although technologies such as 3D printing and laser engraving have enhanced the replicability and efficiency of traditional decorative techniques, their potential to dissolve the “handcrafted” nature may diminish the emotional value of the craft. For example, the layered effect in lacquerware painting originates from the artisan’s repeated coating with natural lacquer, but while UV resin spraying can replicate the visual effect, it is difficult to replicate the tactile sensation and time traces inherent in the material itself. How to retain the “human warmth” of craftsmanship while applying technological methods requires further exploration.

2. The Contradiction between the Universality and Locality of Cultural Symbols

The patterns and color schemes in the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng lacquerware are deeply rooted in the regional culture and belief system of the Warring States period. Direct transplantation of these elements into contemporary jewelry design may face semantic dissonance. For example, the orderliness of the geometric thunder patterns may be simplified into purely decorative elements in a modern context, losing their symbolic meaning of “eternity.” Future research may combine semiotic theory to explore universal principles for abstracting and translating patterns, aiming to balance traditional meaning with contemporary aesthetic demands.

3. Challenges of Material Innovation within a Sustainability Framework

The proposed alternatives, such as faux leather materials and plant-based PU, though environmentally promising, still fall short in durability and chemical stability compared to traditional lacquer. Moreover, the integration of precious metals and composite materials may increase the difficulty of recycling. Future research should adopt a lifecycle assessment (LCA) approach to systematically analyze



the ecological benefits of new materials, to achieve a synergy between the innovation of traditional crafts and green design.

In conclusion, the modern transformation of traditional crafts involves not only technological or formal innovation but also the establishment of a multidimensional dialogue on cultural logic, ethical values, and ecological responsibility. This process requires both practical exploration within the design discipline and theoretical support from fields such as archaeology, material science, and sociology to construct a more inclusive and critical system for the regeneration of traditional crafts. Future studies might explore audience reception of jewelry inspired by traditional lacquer motifs, examining how meaning is interpreted by different demographic or cultural groups.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic analysis of the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng and its inspiration for contemporary jewelry design, draws the following core conclusions:

First, the artistic characteristics of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng are primarily manifested in the composite application of diverse materials, the combined decorative techniques of painting and carving, the color system of black and red contrasts with golden accents, and the cultural narrative logic of geometric, animal, and mythical motifs. These characteristics not only reflect the elite's extreme pursuit of craftsmanship and aesthetic taste during the Warring States period in the State of Zeng, but also reveal the multiple symbolic meanings of lacquerware as a cultural carrier, including hierarchical order, religious beliefs, and cosmic concepts.

Second, the study proposes four paths for the modern transformation of traditional craftsmanship: cross-medium translation of material techniques, modular and layered transformation of decorative techniques, symbolic translation of color systems, and narrative reconstruction of motif meanings. By combining modern technologies (such as 3D printing, laser engraving, and smart materials) with design concepts (such as parametric design and interactive expression), this research aims to effectively realize the contemporary translation of lacquerware's artistic features, injecting innovative vitality into traditional craftsmanship.

The study demonstrates that the aesthetic value and craft logic of the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng can provide a creative paradigm for contemporary jewelry design that integrates both cultural depth and functionality, thereby promoting the sustainable inheritance of traditional craftsmanship and the localized expression of modern design. Ultimately, this study positions lacquerware as a vital design archive, bridging millennia of artistic innovation with the expressive needs of contemporary wearers.

Recommendations

The researcher suggests that future studies and practices could deepen exploration in the following directions:

1. Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies

A comparative analysis between the lacquerware from the Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng and lacquerware from Japan, as well as Renaissance lacquer arts in Europe, could be conducted to examine the logic of modern transformation of traditional crafts in different cultural contexts. By extracting universal innovative pathways, this could promote a unique expression of Chinese lacquerware culture in global design dialogues.

2. Digital Preservation and Innovative Communication

High-precision 3D scanning technology could be used to establish a lacquerware motif database. By integrating augmented reality (AR) to develop interactive exhibitions, viewers could trigger historical narratives of lacquerware by scanning jewelry motifs with their smartphones. Additionally, exploring the application of blockchain technology in copyright protection for lacquerware could ensure the cultural ownership of traditional elements in digital communication.





3. Cultural Industry and Market Integration Research

In-depth analysis could be conducted on the commercialization potential of lacquerware's artistic features in fields such as high-end custom jewelry and cultural and creative derivative products. The "intangible cultural heritage + brand" model could be explored, with strategies like cross-border collaborations and limited-edition releases to enhance market value, forming a positive cycle between cultural preservation and economic benefits.

4. Policy Support and International Cooperation

It is recommended that the government establish special funds to support lacquer art innovation projects, promote international designer residency programs, and facilitate mutual learning in craft techniques between China and foreign countries. Through platforms such as UNESCO, Chinese lacquerware craftsmanship could be included in the global agenda for the revival of traditional handicrafts, thereby enhancing its international influence.

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