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In this essay I will be discussing three key words that are in relation to my studies, surface pattern. I believe colour, culture, and symbolism comes hand in hand in making art. In doing so I will be exploring these three key words by looking at Chinese culture from their story telling within its artistry.

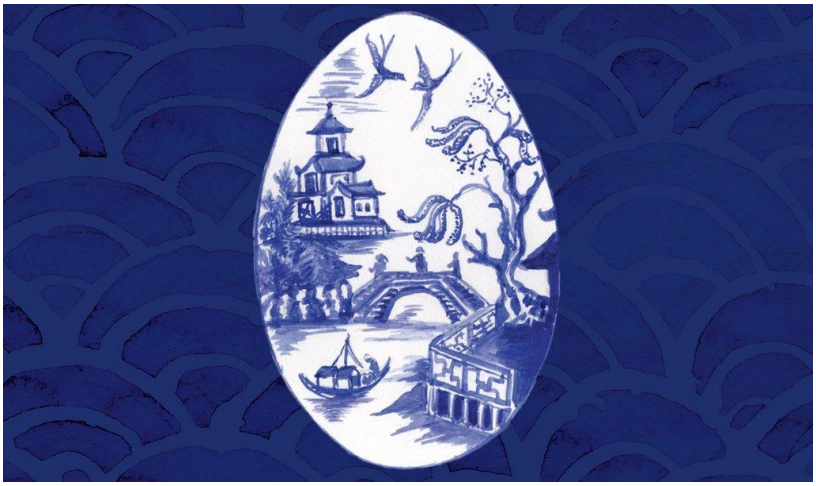

Fig 1: Willow pattern

What is pattern? The Oxford English Dictionary ("pattern") definition is: "A repeat decorative design." It is thought that patterns are for decorative reasons only but there are hidden stories within them". One of the most popular patterns that we are familiar with is inspired by the Chinese culture called the willow pattern. It was said during the 18th century that the designs were based on lacquerware, silk and porcelain which travelling from China to Britain. Due to the high demands of these beautiful designs it became popular and developed an art movement called chinoiserie (mola team, 28/01/2017).

What is chinoiserie? The Oxford English Dictionary ("chinoiserie") definition is: "A decorative style in western art, furniture, and architecture, characterized by the use of Chinese motifs and techniques". Chinoiserie was a help in developing pottery in its time which led it to be the iconic ceramic of today. It is famously known for its blue and white colour design of prints made up of imagery depicting Buddhists, birds, trees, landscapes and pagodas from Chinese porcelain. It is said that the pattern was intertwined a romantic story of star crossed lovers eloping together (mola team, 28/01/2017).

The legend of the story tells a tale of a father and daughter that lived under an apple tree in a wonderful pagoda. Where the pagoda was a bridge, which is where the willow tree dropped. Next to that was an elegant fence which is where the daughter was promised a wealthy merchant but instead fell in love with her father's clerk (Beach Combing, 13/12/2019). *"The lovers eloped across the sea to an island cottage and when her father found them to kill them, the Gods transformed them into a pair of birds*" (Beach Coming, 13/12/2019).

Fig 2: Swallow tattoo design

Despite the fact it doesn't state what bird the Gods transformed the lovers into, it does depict a bird (fig one) which looks awfully similar to a swallow bird. Swallow's originated back to legends of sailors. It is said that "*swallow tattoos were used historically by sailors to show off their sailing experience"* (small tattoo, 02/2017). An example of this, during the 1900, they would have a barn swallow tattoo symbolising they had sailed 5000 miles. Legend says that they would have a tattoo done before the start of their travels and a second swallow at the end (fig 2), "*upon return to their home port, making them a symbol of a successful journey"* (small tattoo, 02/2017). Some may say that this legend is true to the willow pattern story as the two lovers managed to escape before the father found them to kill them. It was stated in the story that the lovers eloped to an island cottage which means they were at land. It is believed that the birds don't travel long to sea meaning "*when sailors saw a swallow they knew that land was near, carrying a message of hope"* (small tattoo, 02/2017). This could be interpreted as God was seen as the symbol of hope portrayed in the description.

In most cultures the swallow bird is known for representing freedom and peace. However in Persia it symbolises loneliness and separation. Birds are commonly looked at a commodity of your loved ones spirit. This is said as "*if a sailor drowns, swallows carry his soul home to heaven"* (small tattoo, 02/2017). In contrast to that, they are known for being the bird of love as they mate for life meaning they have a sense of devotion and loyalty. Thus proving in different cultures mean different things. In East Asia it illustrates "*unfaithfulness and were described in legends as flying through the house while carrying tidings of displeasure and bad luck from the Gods"* (small tattoo, 02/2017). This may suggest that the daughter in the story betrayed her father by not going with the man she was promised to.

Due to the fast growing popularity of the willow pattern, in the Victorian era round 1837, it became accountable of its own song:

"Two pigeons flying high

Chinese vessel sailing by

Weeping willow hanging o'er

Bridge of three men maybe four

Chinese temples stand

Seem to take up all the land

Apple trees with apples on

A pretty fence to end my song" (mola team, 2017).

Fig 3: Chinese zodiac

The Oxford English Dictionary ("symbolism") means: "the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities." The Chinese culture has always been known for using imagery of animals as symbolism used as a way of determining your personality traits through Chinese astrology. Figure three represents 12 zodiac signs which includes: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat/sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig (Samantha Vincenty, 01/08/2021). It is said that the year you were born determines what zodiac sign you will be. The mythology behind the zodiac signs create the order they go in. It is said that an emperor announces a grand race, "*the order of 12 animals to be determined by their finishing time"* (Samantha Vincent,01/08/2021).

It was stated in the race that the rat cheated as early on it had realized that no one could elude the ox, on course the intelligent rat made a decision to hop onto the ox's shoulder until it was time to cross the river which resulted him in winning. Thus the reasons why the rat is the first animal in the Chinese zodiac. As guessed the ox came second while the other ten animals fought their placement in how they fared in the race. In addition to this, it is revealed that the personality traits of the rat consists of: Ambitious, charming, talkative, resourceful,

private, frugal, critical (Samantha Vincent, 01/08/2021). It seems as the rat is one of the most respected animal as according to one world nations online it states *"A rat represents fertility, reproduction, wealth (since the species proliferate quickly and abundantly and always finding hoards to eat)"* (w.n.o, rat, Chinese zodiac). This is an interesting thought on how the rat is portrayed in the Chinese culture as this is not the case in Britain. It is view as an animal that is dirty or below us as *"rats may be symbols of poverty, decay and disease"* (Paul Mullins, 23/02/2021).

The Chinese Dragon is an iconic staple within its culture, better known as Lung, Long or Loong. This mythical creature is well known in Chinese folklore which consists of poetry, songs, puppetry, dances and tales. These shows can be done at festivals in the Chinese new year. Red is a popular colour especially around that time of events. It's believed that *"red or vermilion, corresponding with fire, symbolizes good fortune and joy"* (Wikipedia, 10/05/2021). This suggest that's why the dragon is red as they are known to breath fire. It is a colour that symbolizes good luck and expresses happiness which is why its forbidden at funerals. On the other hand red can bee seen as a negative affiliation In south Africa as red is seen with grief. It is reported by shutter stock that *"The red section of the country's flag represents the bloodshed — both in terms of violence and sacrifice — that occurred during the country's struggle for independence"* (shutter stock, 30/10/2020).

"Generally blue or azure and green is associated with health, prosperity, and harmony. The old term is *qing*. Azure was used for the roof tiles of the Temple of Heaven as well as its ornate interior and a number of other structures to represent heaven" (Wikipedia, 10/05/2021). This reinforces the willow pattern story as the ceramic was blue and the use of the word harmony brings the idea that the two star crossed lovers could be enlightened by the sense of peace. In addition to this your mind will automatically think of the sky and sea as it states *"Blue transcends cultural boundaries and is considered a colour of calm worldwide"* (shutter stock, 30/10/2020). It is said that gentle waves wash ashore soothes us which that's what makes us associate it with the colour blue

However the colour green is associated with infidelity which brings discomfort for Chinese catholic bishops as when the colour is worn on a hat it suggests an idiom for cuckold (Wikipedia, 10/05/ 2021).The Oxford English Dictionary ("cuckold") definition is: "A man whose wife is sexually unfaithful, often regarded as an object of derision". Furthermore, this could bring on shame onto the family as the Chinese culture are not tolerable of disloyalty resulting them to be possibly shunned. This was due to what the hat symbolized.

This leads me to discuss Ingrid Lee. She is an author and designer who talks about how colour stimulates our emotions conveyed through the act of joy. In a ted talk she takes us through a journey of trying to understand what is the core meaning of joy and factors in that colour Is a huge roll that plays within it. Lee first begins with discussing the first part of her research was

trying to figure out where does joy come from. In order to investigate this she asked people what brings them joy and within her research, as a society we collectively said similar things. Lee saw a pattern and these were the things that was repeatedly said : "*There were things like cherry blossoms, and bubbles, swimming pools and tree houses, hot air balloons, and googly eyes and ice cream cones especially the ones with the sprinkles"* (YouTube, 11/06/2018).

Lee studied these images and noticed a common theme where the objects displayed pops of bright colour, round things and symmetrical shapes. Anyone can experience joy as it is expressed through physical attributes. Lee describes this from a designer perspective in relation to aesthetic. Where does the term aesthetic come from? "*The word aesthetics derives from the Greek aisthetikos, meaning of sense perception"* (the basics of philosophy, 2008-2021).

Fig 4: Bioscleaver house – lifespan extending villa

Following this, architecture Arakawa and poet Madeline Gins partner up and conducted a social experiment to create an apartment building that could reverse aging. They tried to make an environment that made people feel youthful and as depicted in figure four colours were heavily involved in doing so. It is described as a childhood dream as according to the online space letter there were *"52-colour shades used throughout 3,400 sq ft the East Hampton property invigorate the eyes, and furniture is designed almost like a playground"* (news, property, Betty Wood). Lee brings attention to the matter that "*People working in more colour offices are actually more alert, more confident and friendlier than those working in drab places"* (YouTube, 11/06/2018). This suggests that colour stimulates people making them better workers as they are engaged for longer length of time.

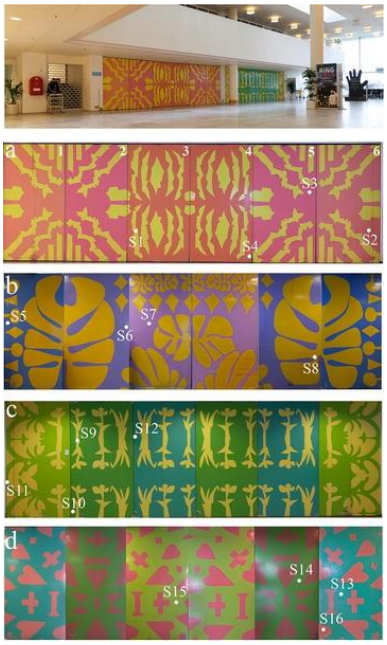

Fig 5: folding doors

Fig 6: Herlev hospital room

An example of who uses colour in an intelligent way is a Danish artist, Paul Gernes. He is commonly known for decorating colourful public spaces in Denmark. Herlev hospital was one of a kind as it was the first ever polychrome hospital in the world. Gernes most famous art pieces were the folding doors from 1976 which have never been restored (the medicine of colours, 2003). His use of bold and dramatic colours painted within geometric patterns and simplistic shapes reinforces Lee's theory on what stimulates the feeling of joy.

Gernes essentially took a gloomy and dull space and transformed it by giving it a purpose. Most hospitals are painted white leaving the buildings to feel lifeless and dismal. It is perceived as sterile as it associates with purity. He knew that colours influence peoples emotion and used it to impact their staying time in hopes of comforting them as he believed *"colours could have a stimulating effect on hospital patients in favour of distraction from their pain and suffering"* (the medicine of colours, 2003). The term Tabula rasa comes to mind when discussing this topic. The Oxford English Dictionary ("Tabula rasa") definition is: "An absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals; a clean slate." It stems from a Latin phrase but "*originates from the Roman tabula, a wax-covered tablet used for notes, which was blanked (rasa) by heating the wax and then smoothing it"* (Smith, Sir Williams, 1898). Gernes demonstrates this by taking a blank canvas and filling the hospital full of vibrant shapes and patterns creating an environment where it can give the patience a outlook on hilarity. It allowed them to have a new space that would have been deemed as mundane giving it a new lease of life.

In summary, I have talked about my chosen three key words by discussing the beautiful story of the willow pattern on how its imagery illustrates a powerful story of hidden messages within its pattern through culture. This meaning I was able to blur the lines to understanding

the Chinese culture shown by symbolism. I discussed the importance of coloury theory by talking about colours representing different meaning a different analogies. It was then a exploration of analysing how the human mind can be stimulated by the use of colours looking at architecture Arakawa and artist Paul Gernes on how they use colour in an interior space, thus bringing me to my dissertation question *'Can symbolism be used as a language tool just made up of colour and imagery?*

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Figures:

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Fig 5: folding doors, available at Analysis of Poul Gernes' painted folding doors at Herlev Hospital | Heritage Science | Full Text (springeropen.com), (accessed 20/05/2021)

Fig 6: Herlev hospital room, available at Pinterest, (accessed 19/05/2021)