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Faculty of Design and Architecture

Department of Graphic Design

Li Xuqiang

Research on the Application of Cizhou Kiln Art Elements in Animation Character Design

Master's Thesis submitted for the degree of **Master**

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The qualification work contains the results of independent research.

The use of ideas, results, and texts of other authors is properly referenced.

Signed by: Li Xuqiang F2B9138528634E...

_____ Full Name

(signature)

Scientific Supervisor: Anna Makarova,

PhD in Art Studies, Senior Lecturer

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ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis submitted for the degree of Master, specialty B2 Design, Educational and Professional Program "Visual Communication Design." — Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts. Kharkiv, 2026.

This thesis covers the topic of the transformation of the essence of Cizhou kiln ceramics through animation character design. While providing an overview of the literature, researching the forms of representing Cizhou kiln, the work explains some aspects of the cultural context of Cizhou kiln, types of vessels, decorative features, and visuals that were employed in the crafts of this kiln.

The plot of the original animation entitled "A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire" presents a comprehensive connection of five ceramic vessels with their characters. The following character-vessel pairs can be distinguished from the plot: Lin Yue and yuhuchun bottle with the orchid pattern; Li Shouzhen and an eight-dimension pillow with the bamboo pattern; Yao Cheng and a big ceramic jar with the image of a dragon; Xiao He and a black glaze meiping with a motive of a lotus; Mr. Chen and a meiping covered with peony kaolin motifs. The developed drawings contain rotations of the vectorized character, express chart drawing, layout schemes, and graphic development.

It has been proved that to translate ceramic art into the character design the artist needs to find specific visual cues while ensuring that the movements of the character comply with the aesthetics of Cizhou kilns ceramics. The author presents a framework that can help to implement folk art in contemporary animation design practices.

Keywords: Cizhou kiln; animation character design; artistic elements; visual translation; stylized 3D animation.

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INTRODUCTION

Co-generation research holds great significance since the outsider culture plays the role of an influencer instead to break it into tribes relying on inherent aestheticism to develop unit hierarchies that are mutually socialized and self-sufficient. True "nationalization" demands more than simple grafting classical motifs onto modern figures; rather, it demands profound engagement into the Animation's inherent principles of movement. Digital 3D tools, while offering some avenues into traditional art forms, cannot usurp the place of conscientious design.

The Cizhou kilns represent a hugely important example of folk ceramic heritage in northern China. It was officially made part of the first national list of intangible cultural heritage due to its firing techniques in 2006. Its white ground with black-painted designs, multitude of vessel forms, and opulent forms provided refreshing inspiration into character design. Nonetheless, the current animation studies pertaining to traditional culture have, till now, failed to explore the formatting of inanimate ceramic vessels into human cartoon figures; this creates the basis of inquiry for the present study.

Purpose of Research: Using "A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire" as a case study, it intends to discuss how the essence of Cizhou kiln art-such as vessel shapes, ornamental patterns, color schemes, and texture-can be infused into animation character design.

In accomplishing this objective, a wide range of objectives will be around:

Evaluate the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of Cizhou kiln art and its stylistic features;

Classify visual elements from the five prototypes representative of Cizhou kiln vessels;

Suggest systematic approaches to translating ceramic elements into animation character design;

Execute the suggested erase in-character design practice for the animation project;

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Evaluate the design outcomes explicitly and summarize applicable principles for future reference purposes.

Object of study- The artistic elements in Tizhou kilns and the functionalities of such in ceramic visual design.

Subject of the study-The modes and procedures of the transference of the element of Cizhou kiln into the character design of animation illustrated in the project "A thousand Years of Kiln Fire".

Research methods: literature study, formal analysis, comparative analysis, and design practice.

Research is very relevant and practical; it offers a systematic approach to enriching animation character design with traditional elements of ceramic art. The following examples, i.e., character design and process chart for the design of Cizhou kiln, will serve as examples for other similar cultural adaptations undertaken by the designers. Besides, the use of digital media would preserve its intangible cultural heritage through the reinvigoration of traditional crafts.

The entire thrust of the thesis is divided into an Introductory chapter, three other chapters, conclusions, a reference list with 30 items, and two appendices, summing up to around 8000 words. Chapter 1 provides a literature review and Wen introduces research methods. Chapter 2 discusses the design theory and practice of Cizhou kiln elements and its diverse applications. Chapter 3 proposes a design framework and its practical applications. Appendices showcase visual references and character design works.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE ISSUE AND RESEARCH METHODS

1.1 Review of Literature on Cizhou Kiln Art and Animation Character Design

Many researchers have been engaging with Cizhou kiln art for a significant period of time, as it is absolutely rooted in the field of Chinese ceramics. Liu Zhiguo tracked the development of scholarly projects concerning Cizhou kilns with particular respect to the response of their producers to the market demand for different types of ceramics. He noted that people's demand in certain periods had an impact not only on the shape of the vessel but also on its decoration. Zhang Ziying's research on ornamental motifs and ceramics pillows allowed him to put the most distinctive designs used in that area into a certain order and classification. Instead, Wang Shubing investigated how a particular shape of a pillow influences the presentation of different themes by means of painting, thus contributing to the studies of Cizhou kiln phenomena.

The work by Hou Zhigang and Lan Siqi concerned the ideas people had about folk-kiln ceramics in the context of the Song and Yuan dynasties. With the increase in production and the involvement of merchants, the gap between "folk" and "fine ceramics" was progressively shortened. According to Qin Dashu, the study of the history of white-ground black painted decoration at Cizhou kiln starts from the stages of applying slip and mixing pigments, up to the firing process which encourages one to achieve crisp black-and-white color contrasts. The idea suggested by Yang Shibin who has considered the folk ceramic phenomena from the viewpoint of materials, techniques, and decorative patterns is that what is ordinarily termed unrefined folk ceramic products are actually a deliberate artistic approach as regards craft production.

Gao Ying contributed to the study of Cizhou kiln inscriptions by making inquiries into song lyrics and poetry written on ceramics made in the form of pillows, while Ye Zhenmin studied the Dangyangyu kiln in the context of the Cizhou tradition. The research done by Pang Hongqi showed that the studies of Linshui kiln could bring more additional information as to the number of locations

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from which Cizhou ceramics appeared originally. Finally, Chen Hui and his research team targeted the fish motif present in Cizhou kiln designs and presented a scheme depicting the evolution of the application of this motif that took place throughout the centuries.

Hence, it’s obvious that Cizhou kiln can be of exceptional researchers’ interest that goes much further than mere black-and-white contrast. It’s only possible to consider vessel types, purposes, decorative layout, and environment in details without losing sight of the present status of Cizhou kiln studies and the scope of its existing development, as such discussions are primarily concerned with art history and archaeology and do not concentrate on the applied essence of the subject matter.

This research approaches the subject of using ceramic vessels and their patterns for making animated features in a different way. Much of the earlier work on preservation of intangible cultural heritage involves museums and documentaries, but in this case the approach differs. The intention is to bring the aesthetic of handicrafts into animation and gain a position in the sphere of visual culture. The methodology of this research adds something new—the framework for relating different profiles of vessels and their patterns with specific parameters of human body, costumes, and animation color schemes. It is not just copying traditional approaches. The new technique manages to preserve the visual language of Cizhou kilns and makes it possible to bring this visual language into a new medium without losing its essence and depth of meaning.

The studies listed above serve as the foundation for further development of animation design principles. Bai Jie, Li Tie and Shi Tao compiled manuals and textbooks that describe the techniques for drawing characters, bringing their face to life, and designing costumes. Wang Xue and Zhao Jing focused on the methods of including cultural elements into character design. Lei Yu and Zhang Gang considered the possibility of creating national aesthetics in animation based on cultural roots. Xu Siyue refers to animated films as the means of preserving intangible cultural heritage, while Liu Siyu develops the idea of folk art and its influence on character design. While the previous studies open the way for the application of cultural elements in animation they lack practical specificities that should pave the way for relating Cizhou kiln vessels to human activity.

Meanwhile, this research takes into account the findings of various studies and the principles in the sphere of character design. Lasseter studied the traditional

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principles of animation taking into consideration the objective of bringing any character to life through the principles of anticipation, exaggeration, and posing, among others. Thomas and Johnston analyzed the distinctive features of animation performance. Similarly, Williams focused on particular techniques of animation. Wells and Furniss examined the influence of animation on the representation of different issues. Finally, Bancroft and Tillman studied the importance of character design in terms of character personality, parameters, etc. All these studies provided the basis for this research methodology.

While transformations have been studied for various forms, there are virtually no studies that discuss how using a non-human model, such as a ceramic vessel, can impact human bodily proportions. In addition, it is not possible to know except theoretically whether the decorative elements of the vessel will hold their meaning once applied to a moving representation. The first issue is the transition from one kind of object to another and the scale's modification. No technique exists for mapping the ceramic design meant for thermal resistance onto a framework of bones and joints. The second issue is associated with media variation. For example, an object that used to sit on a stable and bendless ceramic surface must now take advantage of bending and twisting knees, elbows, and shoulders. This transition presents challenges not covered by the earlier studies and it is precisely these challenges that the study addresses.

1.2 Research Methods

The approach used in the work is literature research, which is based on three significant areas. The areas are Cizhou kiln ceramics, animation character design theory, and traditional culture in animation. This sets the cultural backdrops and surroundings for the guide, as well as provides opportunities for further scrutinization.

The next method of formal analysis employs the visual analysis to notice transitions in the forms of vessels, main motifs, black and white contrasts, and surface features. All five vessels under consideration are analyzed separately in terms of the forms, structures and materials as well as critical design and decorative elements used in character design.

At the same time, the comparative analysis method is primarily aimed at distinguishing the vessel types, including bottles, jars, and pillows, as well as

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decorative techniques like painting, incising, and carving and character design propositions. Through the comparative features, this method allows overcoming some challenges concerning visual transference and adaptation.

The last used approach is the design practice approach that allows bringing the findings of the formal analysis and literature review into practice by turning them into specific designs of characters in the animation project titled "A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire." The process includes working on the ideas and sketches of characters.

Conclusions to Chapter 1

This In this chapter, the works of scholars regarding Cizhou kiln art, character design, and traditional culture have been analyzed. The influence of Cizhou kiln ceramics has already been assessed. There are many developments in the theory of animation character design. However, it is necessary to underline that there is no extensive literature on the transformation of ceramic shapes into animated creatures. Therefore, the work sets an ambitious aim of exploring the tips of transforming inanimate ceramics into animate characters. The chosen methods allow covering the whole range.

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CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF DESIGN THEORY AND PRACTICE

2.1 Cultural and Aesthetic Characteristics of Cizhou Kiln Art

Cizhou kiln ceramics appeared and developed in southern Hebei, with Guantai and Pengcheng as their major production centers. Unlike imperial ceramic production, Cizhou wares originate from folk culture. This is evident in the fact that people used these objects in everyday life: vases, jars, bathtub, bowls, and even ceramic pillows did not just take up space in the house. People used them for eating, storing grains, or sleeping with them.

Besides that, Cizhou pottery is distinguished because of its decoration. Cizhou wares are characterized by lively patterns—scenes from the life of people, animals, nature, as well as poetic texts. All these elements contribute to the idea of beauty. Therefore, Cizhou ceramics represent not just the decorative style that is called “rough and vigorous” but, above all, fit into everyday life—useful objects that serve to satisfy the needs of people.

In addition to this, Cizhou kilns are remarkable for their beautiful forms and shapes. It is possible to say that the shape of the object dictates its decorative elements. It is possible to take a meiping vase as an example here since the different parts of the vase, as its neck, shoulder, belly, and base, create different zones and correspondingly different decorations of the object.

At the same time, the artisans were good at using the materials. For example, black pigment made of white clay is used to decorate the surface of the pot. By using carving techniques, a craftsman can create different effects.

However, it should be mentioned that Cizhou kilns are renowned in the region. The artisans often called their pieces by family name or mark since these wares were not an individual creation but a product of the cooperation of traditional techniques as well as of local business networks.

The aesthetics of the Cizhou kiln can be appreciated in a number of ways that the different aspects of the aesthetic of the Cizhou kiln can be laid out clearly. It must be mentioned that the first thing to talk about is the practical use of the wares. However, form and decoration are closely related in this case, as decoration cannot

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be viewed as separate from form. The surface of the piece serves as the basis for decoration rather than a vice versa. For example, if we take meiping again, we see that the mouth, shoulder, body, as well as the base, make up different zones of the piece while they are connected in a sense. In the case of a ceramic pillow, on the other hand, the top, sides, and edges of the piece are used differently in everyday life and aesthetically.

In fact, the process of creation was the same for the potters—these people started with deciding for what purposes a piece of pottery was created. To illustrate, it was decided first whether this thing would be used for wine, grain, or rest. After that, the potters decided about decoration—the potters made sure that the decoration was suitable for the surface of the pottery. As a result, there was no strict symmetry in the decoration of the Cizhou kiln potters--the decorations are flexible and fitted for all parts of the pottery.

Let’ s turn to decorative elements. Using black color against the white background, the decorators made images by using brushes. Another effective technique involved incising and chopping the picture out of the surface. For instance, the Cizhou kiln workers are noted for their awesome skills of painting the flowers and animals, which proves to be easy take into consideration the fact that people work with a huge number of products every day. Poor quality could be represented as a sign of folk painting.

Now one can examine the cultural and regional aspects of the work of folk kilns. In fact, every folk kiln was tied with the network of folk gia. For instance, you could find “made by the zhang family” everywhere. In fact, styles were transmitted within a certain region.

During the Song and Jin dynasties, Cizhou kiln art achieved great progress and obtained a set of formal patterns for future designs including decoration techniques. The white-ground black-painted technique reached its peak in developing decorative patterns, from simple floral motifs to complex decorative motifs on ceramics. The incising and carving techniques developed coincidingly and thus made patterns stand out due to the revealed colors beneath the layer of the slip and glaze.

Cizhou kiln art continued developing from the Yuan period and on, as the potters began to use new materials, and adapt themselves to new tastes and requirements of the market. The popular patterns changed over time; some of them vanished while the others became popular, as the core technologies remained unchanged. Cizhou ceramics gained a standardized look during the Ming and Qing

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periods. The former loose painting was substituted by strict and simple patterns. Today, Cizhou kiln techniques are revived by artists who use the old masterpieces and local knowledge as the source of inspiration.

The need for historical continuity in terms of design is that it helps to realize that skills and crafts are preserved by actual making and transferring of these crafts and skills. Cizhou kiln should not be regarded as some antiquities, but rather as the representation of everyday life, and the working process can help to create a character that represents this heritage. What matters in this way is that Cizhou kiln is not dormant but alive and developing each year.

2.2 Classification and Formal Features of Cizhou Kiln Artistic Elements

Cizhou kilns made many kinds of earthenware, but three categories are of particular interest. First, it’ s the bottles—like yuhuchun and meiping—that change shape from the top down—from the mouth to the neck to the shoulder, body and base. Second are jars, which also show some continual transformation throughout their bodies, but they’ re much more massive due mainly to their shoulders and bodies. Third, it’ s ceramic pillows, which are neither rounded like the two previous kinds of vessels but have sharp angles and flat surfaces instead—upper part, walls, and base, almost giving them an architectural look.

Mentioning the proportions, these three vessel types can’ t be lumped into one group because of their great differences in such parameters as the widest part and the height-to-width ratio, and the way one part of their shape transitions into another. Each kind must be dealt with separately.

The ornamental design employed in these Cizhou earthenware types is worth mentioning. The study borrows some classical botanical images, such as orchid grass, bamboo, lotus and scrolling peony. Orchid grass is an example of slim and long leaves which serve to capture one’ s attention, while bamboo is more complex with its leaves clustered in certain groups and varying density levels. The lotus stands out for its many layers of petals and a large flower core inside. Scrolling peony combines a bold center flower with curling and twisting branches.

The major animal design is the dragon as its energy is reflected in its constantly turning body that never stays still. The figures, objects and stories shown on the pillows are organized in particular ways, and a central panel is

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framed by fine borders. Not only do inscriptions beautify the surface of the pillows; they also help to organize the surface and make it more structured.

In terms of decorations, Cizhou kilns were famous about their white-ground black-painted technique. The idea behind it is that first a layer of white slip is put on the clay piece before firing, patterns are drawn over it with iron pigments and then the transparent glaze is applied over the painted piece.

As for incised figures, it’ s a technique of making incisions into the surface. With respect to carved designs, they are shallow reliefs turned into decorations by cutting the surface. The use of black glaze and brown motifs opens up new possibilities for the artist, allowing him to use colors that look different but are not black-and-white.

In the context of 3D character making, it means that painted patterns are transformed into figures, but incised decorations are made with the use of normal maps—something else should be used for making shallow reliefs instead.

This research has identified five selected vessel types that include a yuhuchun bottle with brown painted orchid design on a white background; an eight-sided pouch with black bamboo design on white; a large vessel with dragon design on a white background; a meiping with black glaze and engraved lotus pattern; and a meiping with black carved scrolling peonies on a white background. Each of the vessels mentioned here uses a different combination of vessels, designs and techniques.

2.3 Strategies for Applying Cizhou Kiln Elements to Animation Character Design

Consider the way that viewers observe animated characters on the screen. Most people see a very brief glimpse of a character: the outline, primary colours, and a few gestures. Because of this, fast movements of a character, or sideways turning or any lighting changes affect patterns and details visually from the screen and ultimately render them out of focus/visible. Therefore, you cannot solely depend on a detailed drawing to convey a character. They must also be identifiable at a distance.

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Within an animated series, all characters create a coherent visual identity as part of a universe, but should maintain their uniqueness. They should present a varied range of…

Variation in Body Shape, Clothing, Silhouette, and Accessories should allow for individual identities of each character.

If you wish to demonstrate cultural significance, allow the method of how a character behaves through decision-making rather than relying on conversational voice-over.

Converting Vessel Forms into Character Designs, in developing Character Design, you first acknowledge the function of the vessel. Then, reduce the silhouette of the vessel to a shape that is easy to see/find. Next, alter the shape to make it fit the format of a human form and consider how a human moves. Finally, determine if people will accept your design as both a character and the vessel on which it is based.

Should you create a design that is based upon a ceramic vessel, and that design resembles that vessel too closely, your character will lose its fluidity and natural motion. In such situations, you will need to keep the rhythm of the vessel's shape and reconfigure it to fit human anatomy as to function as a believable character.

Your source material should inspire your design, but not limit you; hence if designing a slender, tall character from a bottle, you could still carry through the vertical lines of the bottle but shouldn't affix the top and/or bottom of the bottle onto the character—you still need to make that character function as a believable figure.

The character Costumes by using Decorative Motifs is not a decorative choice nor is it as simple as selecting pretty patterns; rather it is an engineering feat to achieve the aforementioned within five steps. For each main character, a single

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principal decorative motif must first (1) identify the origin of the motif, and: (2) establish the placement of that motif upon the Costume, (3) understand the visual purpose of that motif, and (4) determine the ability of that motif to function and move appropriately with the wearer.

Each character will receive one primary motif and any additional elements will serve to separate areas visually but should not introduce an additional primary motif. Design consistency is paramount for the pattern across the entire front, back and side of the character's Costume.

A flower should not suddenly move vertically or a new decorative element magically appear when the character rotates, as this will alter your reader's ability to comprehend what that character represents visually. Additionally, Motifs must take into consideration the shape of each Costume Panel and any joints between panels at their Seams of Construction (Joint Cross-Over) and allow for Movement to occur so that the design does not warp awkwardly. You will not achieve desirable results through simply stretching Motifs to fit Moving elements in the Costumes without taking into consideration fit or pliability.

Colors and Textures are Not Just for Visuals; They Are Part of the Story!

When you stick to time-honored color and crafting effects, you're not merely reproducing the past; you're tapping into a shared experience of culture. For example, the color black and white has an immediate effect on how we feel about something. Additionally, Textures & Materials: Different Types of Fabric/Textiles, Tools and Vessels. Each of these provides us with a different reminder of craft.

Instead of trying to achieve an exact reproduction of the old mineral pigments, this research creates a "Design Palette based on the visual impression." In other words, it provides values of colors digitally, based on what they actually appear as in renderings, rather than using "historical glaze formulas." The focus here is on creating the "feel," not ticking off the historic boxes.

In terms of Texture, different types of medium create different rules. In Painted Decorations, Decoration turns into Solid Flat Graphics on Textile. Details and Glaze Effects are Created for Ceramics, like the Key Meiping Example, and only

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come through when photographed and shot up close. It's important not to make the character decoration compete with the craftsmanship—let the texture speak for itself, and allow the viewer to focus on what matters.

How Do We Use Visual Recombination in Our Work?

First, Look at the Big Picture: Establish the Head-to-Body Ratio and Clothing Outline. Once you have established the silhouette, place the Motif & Color, and ensure that you track the Origin of Each Element. After you verify all of that, check that the tools and bags match with the character's profession.

Breaking Down the Design Process

When assessing the design, you should think of three questions: 1) Can You Tell Who This Character Is at a Glance? 2) Can You Explain How This Character Connects to Its Reference or Prototype? 3) Does It Make Sense for the Story What This Character Is Doing? Each question will yield a different type of response; don't combine them.

Don't Fall Into The Trap of Over-polishing An Image At The Expense of Crafting It Properly. A Perfectly Formed Character Is a Failure if Steps Have Been Skipped in the Craft Process. A Designer May Claim Inspiration From a Particular Source, But That Doesn't Mean the Audience Will Connect the Dots. The Work And Audience Response Will Prove or Disprove the Designer's Claim.

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Figure 1-1. Yuhuchun bottle with brown-painted orchid decoration (Lin Yue prototype)



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Figure 1-2. Eight-sided pillow with black-painted bamboo decoration (Li Shouzhen prototype)



Figure 1-3. Large jar with black-painted dragon decoration (Yao Cheng prototype)

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Figure 1-4. Black-glazed meiping with incised lotus decoration (Xiao He prototype)

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Figure 1-5. White-ground black-painted meiping with scrolling peony (Mr. Chen prototype)

You need to consider the cultural context when you take the elements of Cizhou kilns and interpret them; they’ re not simply beautiful patterns but represent a culture rich with meaning in Chinese popular folklore. For example, the peony represents wealth and beauty. The lotus represents purity and elegance. Dragons embody strength and power. Bamboo represents strength and integrity.

Therefore, when you use the above motifs as part of the designs for a costume character, it is essential to connect the character’ s heritage or cultural background, as portrayed through the decorative forms and designs of the character. A businessman using a meiping vase with peonies represents wealth, while bamboo pillows signify strength and integrity in an older craftsman.

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From this perspective, visual design transcends the mere reproduction of established motifs but becomes integrated into the character’ s story in support of the character’ s purpose.

The functions of animation and the inherent limitations of animation also determine the manner in which designers apply their cultural references when designing costumes. Costumes must be distinctive and unique regardless of whether the actor’ s character is at rest or moving about in various positions or ways; therefore, animators cannot clutter up their costumes with too many details or busy patterns because everything will become visually confusing and chaotic. Instead, they use large, bold designs on the non-moving areas of the costume. This has been around since ancient times, within the context of the Cizhou kilns: their artists utilized bold and simple brush strokes while painting curved vessels, enabling audiences to easily discern the designs even from across the room. This type of bold native aesthetic—quick grabs rather than intricate details—fits within animation perfectly; costumes must function for the audience seated in an auditorium or on an animated series.

Conclusions to Chapter 2

This chapter has looked at the culture and aesthetics of Cizhou kiln art; it has outlined and classified the artistic attributes by using: (1) the vessel type (which determines visual width and weight); (2) decorative motifs (that help direct layout/composition), and (3) glazing colour (helps determine light/dark of the completed object); and (4) texture used gives an indication of how to treat different types of materials. When you translate these into animation, the focus of the animation must remain on how to create the illusion of human anatomy in terms of the narrative/situation and not simply reproduce the exact ceramic piece. In doing so, you keep the essence of the original culture while still allowing continuity of movement and fitting into the modern story. Chapter 3 follows this thesis, as it unifies all of the above ideas in the design concept for A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire.

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CHAPTER 3

DESIGN PROPOSAL

3.1 Concept and Narrative Design

A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire describes how Yao Cheng, the craftsman, works at the Cizhou kiln heritage centre. Mr. Chen, an entrepreneur, engages him to create a meiping for him that is black-glazed and decorated with carved and incised lotus patterns. Yao Cheng struggles to get the shape, decorative layers, and a fired look to all be correct at the same time, and eventually gives up after trying multiple times. While on a break, Yao Cheng dreams about how an ancient craftsman called Li Shouzhen worked. After waking up, Yao Cheng's life takes a turn for the better and he joins forces with Lin Yue (a research assistant) and Xiao He (an apprentice). Through hands-on experimentation and improvements to each individual step of the process, Yao Cheng and Lin Yue are finally able to create the meiping.

This story blends together the three components that make up the creative process. There are no supernatural elements to this story - no parallel timelines or spirits that rise from pots, no time travel - although the workshop that Yao Cheng dreams about exists in the real world, it is grounded in the real world through the methods and materials used to create pottery. You can tell because the sound and appearance of the pottery wheel, the way the potter uses his hands to shape the clay, and the movements of the lotus flowers all resemble some of the imagery found in the pottery created by Li Shouzhen and others.

At the end of Yao Cheng's dream, he does not have access to a historical formula to follow to create that piece of pottery. Instead, Yao Cheng has visualised what he has seen and used that information to develop a series of objective visualisations that could be tested using what he already knew. Each of the five prototypes for vessels has either inspired one of the characters or been incorporated into the meiping itself, but the majority of the plot focuses on the creation of one meiping. This focus allows for many cultural references to be identified without straying from the main theme of the story to highlight all five artifacts. The result is a clear narrative that provides an authentic picture of a vibrant culture.

The core of this story is a struggle between tradition, innovation and the relationship between hands-on craft and careful research. Yao Cheng has spent his

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career developing his skills as a potter, and is a master. Still, when he is given an historical artifact that he cannot reproduce with the knowledge he has accumulated over his career, he finds himself at a loss to replicate the original form. Lin Yue, the research assistant, steps into Yao Cheng's shoes. He produces operational data and takes very careful notes, but Lin Yue does not have his own experience working with clay.

As a result, Yao Cheng and Lin Yue's relationship becomes strained. Xiao He, the apprentice, is caught in this middle ground. As he progresses, he finds that both observing and performing the production process is necessary; observing alone will not give him all the information that he needs to understand the production process. Mr. Chen is distinctly separate from the other three characters. He enters into a contract with Yao Cheng and forces them to look at their work through a commercial lens rather than through a traditional perspective.

All four of these perspectives collide within the story. The frustration of the master, the research and thoroughness of the researcher, the awe of the apprentice, and the demands of the client to remain true to their historical energy contribute to the difficulty in recreating the original pieces of pottery. The tension created by these challenges is what drives the story forward.

The story is peaceful and reflective rather than filled with turmoil. There is an element of warmth and intimacy due to the natural light found in the contemporary creative space where the story unfolds. The dream sequences create an ethereal and stylised quality to the story, merging the past and present. The dream does not provide concrete messages from Li Shouzhen (the ancient craftsman of the dream) to Yao Cheng. However, what Li does hold as a reminder of his teachings through his method of holding his tool, the position of his body as he works with the clay, and the intensity of his attention he gives to the process are all examples of how the tradition is essential to the ongoing recreation of Cizhou Kiln. The traditions carried through each step from generation to generation continue to be reborn in each new set of processes.

The similarities between the characters and the vessels created by them are evident in their respective designs:

Lin Yue is a contemporary researcher. Imagine her standing. Tall and thin, her dress cascades downward, following the curve of the yuhuchun body. The brown yuhuchun with an orchid design mirrors Lin Yue's clothing. Patterns of orchid grass decorate her clothing, providing a direct visual connection to the vessel.

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Li Shouzhen is the dream craftsman. He is muscular and compact, dressed in a work uniform with straight lines. The eight-sided pillow with bamboo patterns evokes his physical build. The flat shapes and angular forms of his clothing are reminiscent of the pillow, and bamboo patterns flow down his shoulders and around his arms.

Yao Cheng is the contemporary master craftsman. He has a strong upper body and is heavy-set, mirroring the weighty quality of the large jar with a dragon motif. The presence and mass of the jar can be seen in the way he stands in his craft. Curved dragon motifs glide along the edges and sleeves of his outer garment.

Xiao He is the young apprentice. He moves quickly and effortlessly in a short-sleeved jacket that appears to echo the black-glazed meiping with incised lotus patterns on its body. The posture of Xiao He is similar to that of the meiping's shape, and the meiping pattern is reproduced on the lines of the young man's outer jacket.

Finally, Mr. Chen is the business owner who owns the work. He is a professional man with a fitted suit that closely resembles the meiping with a peony pattern. The scrolling peony patterns on Mr. Chen's tailored suit mirror the elegance of the vessel.

Each character captures the essence of the vessel they have created, and each character's design choices reflect the style and spirit of their respective vessels. In addition to the similarity in appearance, the design storytelling represented in the clothing represents the essence of the vessels.

3.2 Character Design and Visual Translation

The visual interpretation of every character follows the systematic methodology that has been outlined in Chapter 2. First, the prototype of the vessel is studied in terms of its silhouette, structural zones, main motifs, and color schemes. Those are incorporated into human body and clothing. Finally, the design is checked for clarity, coherence of motifs, and suitability in terms of actions.

The comparison of the vessel and character boils down to three fundamental rules. First, the silhouette matters above everything else. The character should have the shape and posture corresponding to a particular vessel's dimensions; this will

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ensure that the connection remains obvious even when we work with simple sketches or small-size frames. Secondly, motifs are not randomly brought into the design. They are stuck in solid places on the body, such as shoulders or chest panels, rather than on moving parts of the body. This is how we can keep the motif looking fresh and sharp and avoid it going blurry through the character's movements. Finally, the colors are arranged in a hierarchy; first of all, we start with the vessel's palette, which is modified later for the purposes of modern clothing. The main color of the vessel appears in the basic color of the outfit, while the color of the motif works for details.

For example, in the case of Lin Yue, whose design is based on the yuhuchun bottle with an orchid motif, the vessel's S-curve gives the character her tall and slender shape followed by smooth lines of her long dress. The orchid's leaves, characterized by their slimness and directionality, are put on the collar and the panels of the dress. In terms of colors, the brown and white hues that are present in the vessel's palette turn into warm earthy colors of modern clothing, retaining elegance in clothing.

As for Li Shouzhen, his design is reminiscent of the eight-sided pillow with bamboo motifs. The flat top and straight sides of the pillow shape Shouzhen's angular outfit. The bamboo leaves are placed diagonally on his shoulders and collar, creating a nice decorative effect that reminds us of the pillow.

With regard to Yao Cheng, his design is inspired by the large jar with a dragon motif. The dragon's silhouette and twists turn into the twisting sleeves of the character, while the panels are smooth and peaceful. The design reflects the massive size and power of the jar.

Xiao He’s gown is inspired by the black-glazed meiping with the lotus design; her dress merges the shapes of the vessel and maintains the elegance and slenderness of it. The motifs representing the lotus are simple striped designs on the black fabric of the gown. In this way, the original colors and patterns are preserved, which leads to the message that the black-glazed meiping remains important for the design of the character.

In case of Mr. Chen, his inspiration is the peony meiping that has a long scrolling flower motif on it. The elegant form of meiping is reflected in Mr. Chen’s suit. The white botanical motif thus turns into elements of his black suit, which is an interesting combination of the traditional elements and modern business style.

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All five characters look unified, although each of them has a distinctive appearance of her/his character. The proportions are based on human anatomy but go beyond this basic configuration avoiding unrealistic exaggerations typical for cartoonish illustrations of mythic themes. These designs correspond to the story world, which has a realistic base. The characters work in their workplace rather than in a world of myths.

The materials have been chosen for their representational values: skin and fabric look rather plain while ceramics and tools made of metal look shiny. The props of the character are the most important elements of the scene. The clothes do not attract more attention than is necessary but instead, they show the theme matching the scene concept.

With the help of colors, the design of the characters fits together. The colors are quite plain, and combined with some black and white hues help to draw attention of the viewer to the characters and their works.



Figure 3-1. Character design: Lin Yue (yuhuchun bottle / orchid motif) turnaround sheet

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Figure 3-2. Character design: Mr. Chen (peony meiping / scrolling peony motif) turnaround sheet

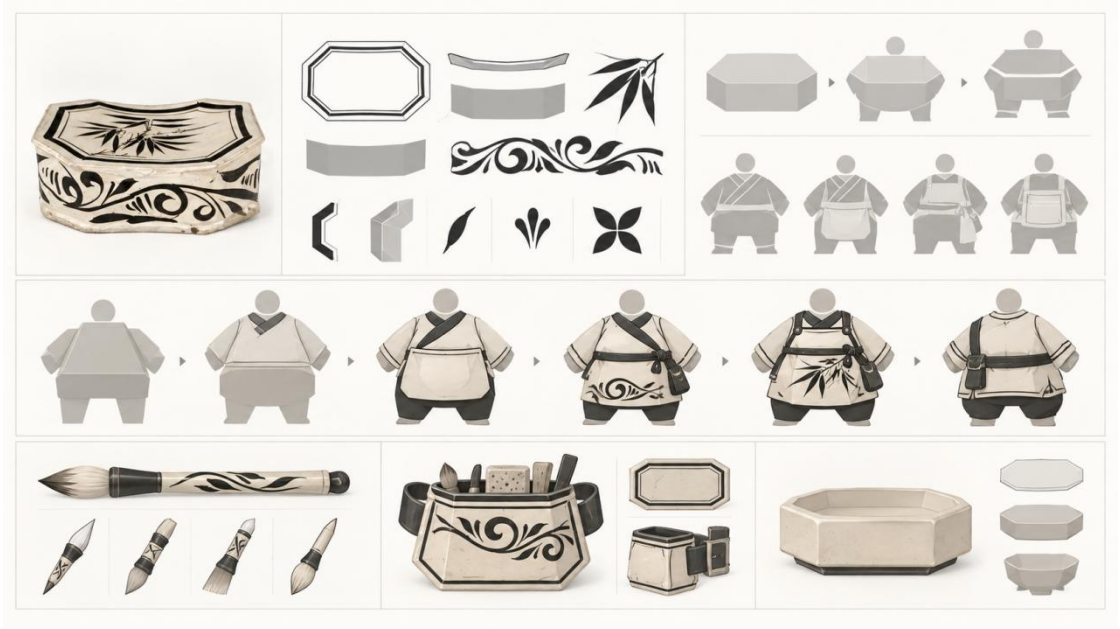

Figure 3-3. Character design: Li Shouzhen (eight-sided pillow / bamboo motif) turnaround sheet

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Figure 3-4. Character design: Yao Cheng (large jar / dragon motif) turnaround sheet



Figure 3-5. Character design: Xiao He (black-glazed meiping / lotus motif) turnaround sheet

3.3 Practical Implementation and Design Outcomes

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The undertaking has produced a variety of character design assets for the five protagonists including front view designs, numerous rotating views, expression sheets, and important action poses. Applying a stylized 3D animation style in their designs, figures take on somewhat exaggerated shapes and textures of materials. Even with a single color scheme of earthy tones and black-and-white, characters differ from each other due to their shapes, body types, and patterns of clothing.

As for environment design, three key environments have been created: the contemporary workshop of the Cizhou kiln heritage center, the ancient kiln workshop from the dream, and the modern Chinese-style outdoor tea courtyard. The environments are created in such a way as to facilitate the actions of the characters and the plot development. For instance, the workshop of the kiln provides all necessary tools and arrangements for the sequences with ceramic production. Essentially, the visuals show how the stages of development of each character from the vessel prototype to the final design can be visually documented.

At the same time, environment design is reflective of the Cizhou kiln aesthetic. The contemporary heritage center workshop reflects this concept with the help of the use of clean modern architecture, along with more neatly arranged ceramic stuff for decorative purposes. As for the ancient workshop, its environment is decorated with much warmer light to accentuate the hand-made, tactile character of the environment. On the other hand, the courtyard is a peaceful setting that connects different people. All three environments use a unified material palette—wood, clay, plaster, fabric—along with some accents in black and white colors made of ceramic.

Considering the design results, it is possible to highlight some peculiarities among them in accordance with the categories discussed in Chapter 2. First, it is impossible to confuse Lin Yue with someone else because of her tall and slim appearance, Li Shouzhen with his compact body build, Yao Cheng's wide body type, Xiao He's low and compact appearance, and Mr. Chen's sturdy posture. The second thing is that the connection between the characters can be seen due to shape, basic motifs, or colors illustrating it. The third aspect is that all five characters' designs correspond to their roles.

One of the major shortcomings of this study is that it has still not been tested in the form of a continuous production of animations and an evaluation by viewers. The prototypes have been confirmed through the illustrations and the turnaround sheets but their behavior when seen in movement, i.e. whether the motifs can be perceived as such, if the silhouettes can be distinguished in varying lighting

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conditions, and whether the viewers can recognize the characters based on their vessel references, has to be examined through animation and viewer testing.



Figure 3-6. Environment design: ancient Cizhou kiln workshop (daytime, dream sequence)



Figure 3-7. Environment design: contemporary Cizhou kiln heritage center workshop

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Figure 3-8. Environment design: contemporary Chinese-style outdoor tea courtyard



Figure 3-9. Character group image: the five main characters of A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire

Conclusions to Chapter 3

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This chapter has proposed a design plan for A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire, bringing the theoretical principles from Chapter 2 into actual character and environment designs. The five characters, each associated with one distinct prototype of a Cizhou kiln, illustrate the practical implementation of the proposed visual translation methods. It has been shown that the forms of ceramic vessels, their decorative design, and colors can be applied in the field of character design in animation if the process follows the strict sequence involving prototype analysis, element extraction, human figure adaptation, and checking of conformity. The findings of this project are that proper cultural translation in character design requires the combination of the fidelity to the visual image being converted and the requirements of animation production, rather than just putting traditional patterns on standard character bases.

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CONCLUSIONS

1. Cizhou kiln works intend to provide rich information essential for character design because it is composed of three major vessel forms (bottles, jars, pillows), many decorative types (botanical, animal, figure, geometry), and many craftsmen techniques. The essence of the aesthetic character of Cizhou kiln is deeply rooted in folk traditions such as everyday practicality, decorative diversity, and craftsmanship that makes it very different from imperial cultures and gives many peculiar features for applying it in modern designs.

2. Arranging elements from ceramic vessels into a character design needs a complicated and multi-layered process where the methodology consists of four main steps—establishing function, constructing abstract silhouette, adapting anatomy of a human figure, and realization of the method. Vessel shapes provide understanding of proportions and silhouette, decorative designs are translated into patterns of clothing, estimation of color working out the color scheme, and understanding craft details is necessary for making surfaces correctly done.

3. The case studies of five character designs from "A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire" demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed way of cultural transformation. Each character and its vessel prototype show that successful cultural transformation depends on: (a) better selection of elements that are visually significant and can transform, (b) better selection of stable surfaces for placing the motifs on, (c) maintaining stylistic coherence while preserving individual character traits.

4. Multiple directions for future work are determined in the research. First, the character designs must be tested through animation productions to verify the effectiveness of the motifs. Second, the viewers should be examined if they can link the newly created characters to their vessel prototypes. Third, the study can be applied to other folk cultures and to other styles impacted by folk traditions, working out a wider concept of building cultural contexts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A (analogues)

A.1 Displayed Vessels and Field Research Photographs



Figure A-1. Exhibition research: a round box and a bottle-shaped vessel

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Figure A-2. Exhibition research: a dragon-decorated basin and a ceramic pillow with figurative decoration



Figure A-3. Ceramic-pillow references: a pillow with figurative decoration and the appearance of a bamboo-decorated pillow

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Figure A-4. Reference for the form and composition of a jar with figurative decoration

A.2 Documentation of Contemporary Decorative Processes

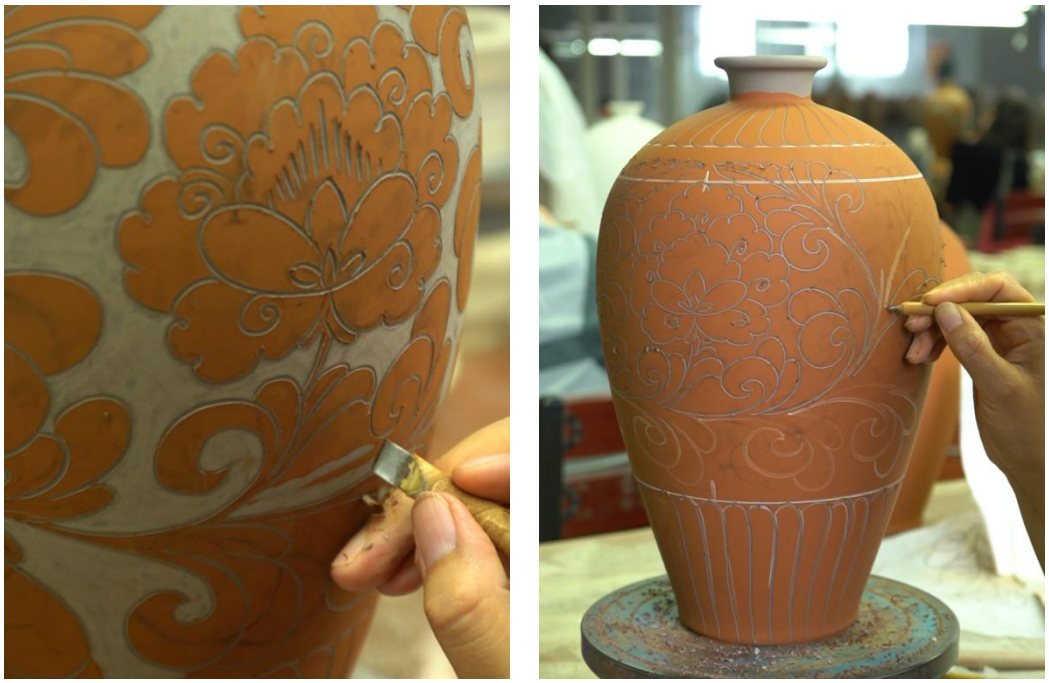

Figure A-5. Details and overall view of contemporary vessel decoration in progress

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A.3 Motifs and Comparative Visual-Compositional Material



Figure A-6. Bamboo-and-bird and fish motifs: composition of branches, leaves, fish, and curves

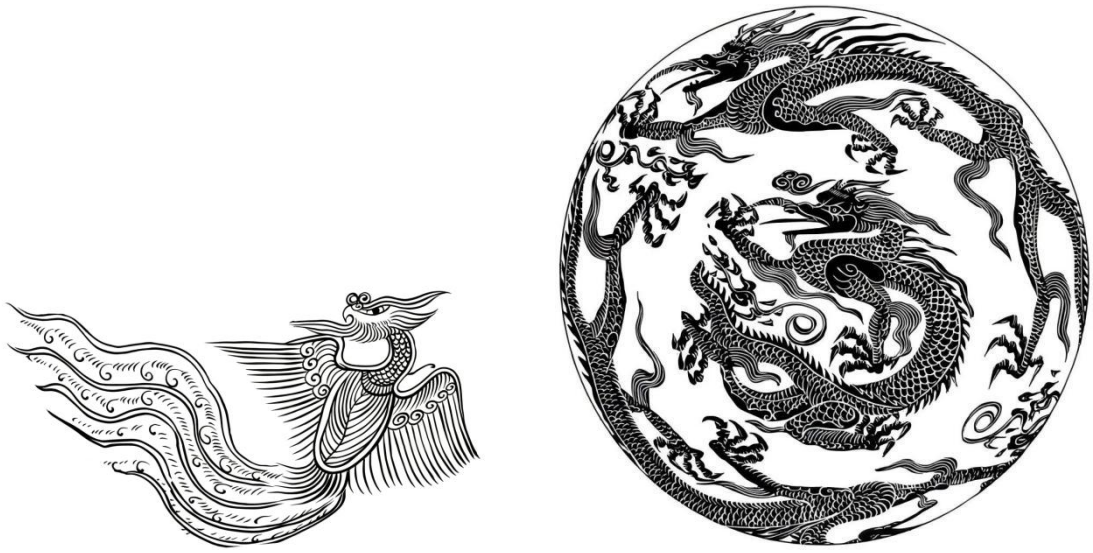

Figure A-7. Dragon-motif compositions: band-like and circular arrangements

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Figure A-8. Peonies and flowering branches: layers of petals and turning stems



Figure A-9. Lotus and scrolling foliage: central flower form and swirling lines



Figure A-10. Scrolling floral and peony motifs: repeated patterns and central blooms

Design Reference Prototypes of the Five Principal Vessels

B.1 Lin Yue: Yuhuchun Bottle with Brown-Painted Orchid-Grass Decoration on a White Ground

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Figure B-1. Design reference for Lin Yue: yuhuchun bottle with brown-painted orchid-grass decoration on a white ground

B.2 Li Shouzhen: Eight-Sided Pillow with Black-Painted Bamboo Decoration on a White Ground

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Figure B-2. Design reference for Li Shouzhen: eight-sided pillow with black-painted bamboo decoration on a white ground

B.3 Yao Cheng: Large Jar with Black-Painted Dragon Decoration on a White Ground

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Figure B-3. Design reference for Yao Cheng: large jar with black-painted dragon decoration on a white ground

B.4 Xiao He: Black-Glazed Meiping with Incised and Carved Lotus Decoration

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Figure B-4. Design reference for Xiao He: black-glazed meiping with incised and carved lotus decoration

B.5 Mr. Chen: Meiping with Black Carved-Away Scrolling-Peony Decoration on a White Ground

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Figure B-5. Design reference for Mr. Chen: meiping with black carved-away scrolling-peony decoration on a white ground

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APPENDIX B (sketch and project proposal)

C.1 Lin Yue: Prototype and Character-Design Process



Figure C-1-1. Lin Yue: observations of the yuhuchun bottle form and decorative details

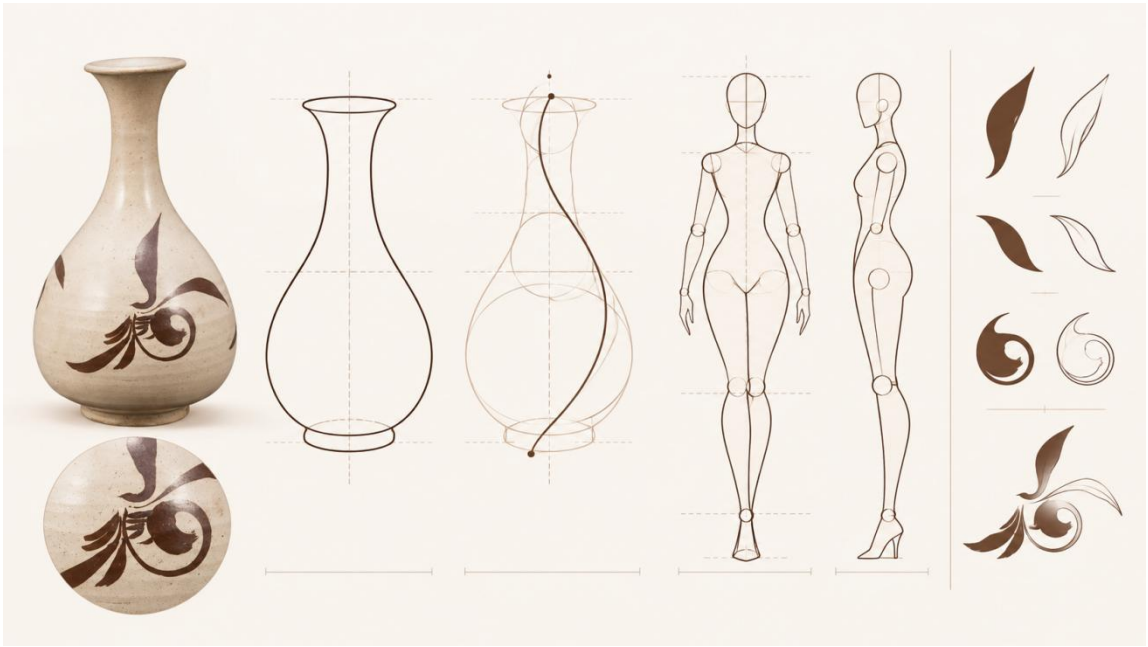

Figure C-1-2. Lin Yue: comparison of vessel curves and the human silhouette

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Figure C-1-3. Lin Yue: development of the orchid-grass motif and garment divisions



Figure C-1-4. Lin Yue: character form, turnaround views, and static poses

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Figure C-1-5. Lin Yue: details of facial features, costume motifs, and accessories

C.2 Li Shouzhen: Prototype and Character-Design Process



Figure C-2-1. Li Shouzhen: observation of the upper and side decoration of the eight-sided pillow

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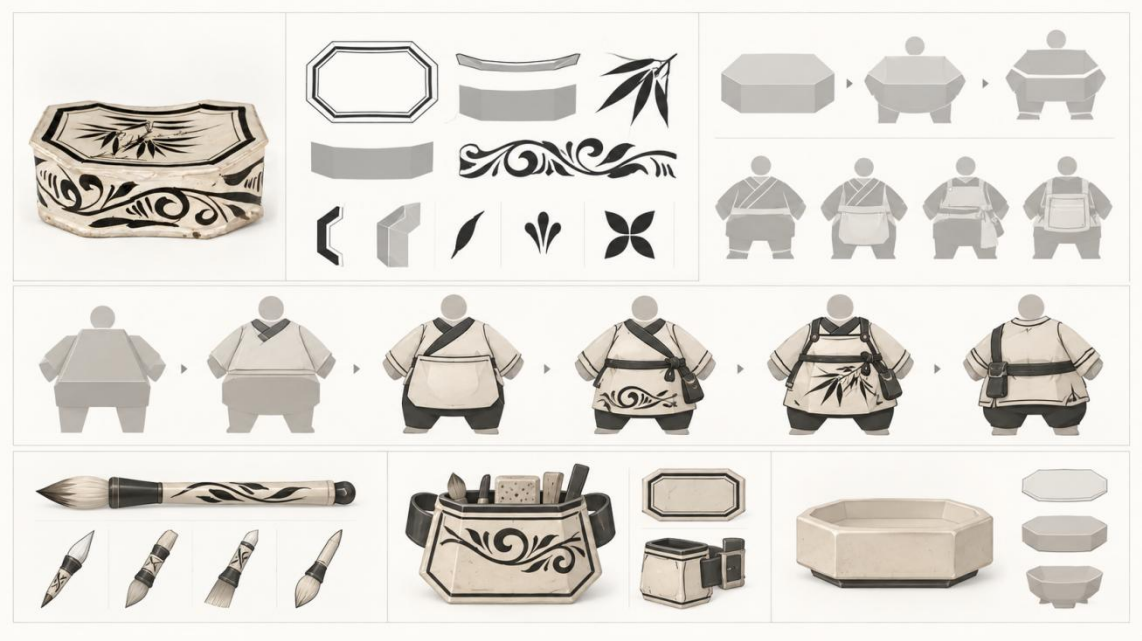

Figure C-2-2. Li Shouzhen: development of a geometric silhouette and the craftsman's garment structure



Figure C-2-3. Li Shouzhen: integrating bamboo-leaf motifs with the apron and other costume details

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Figure C-2-4. Li Shouzhen: the craftsperson's static poses and rear-view details

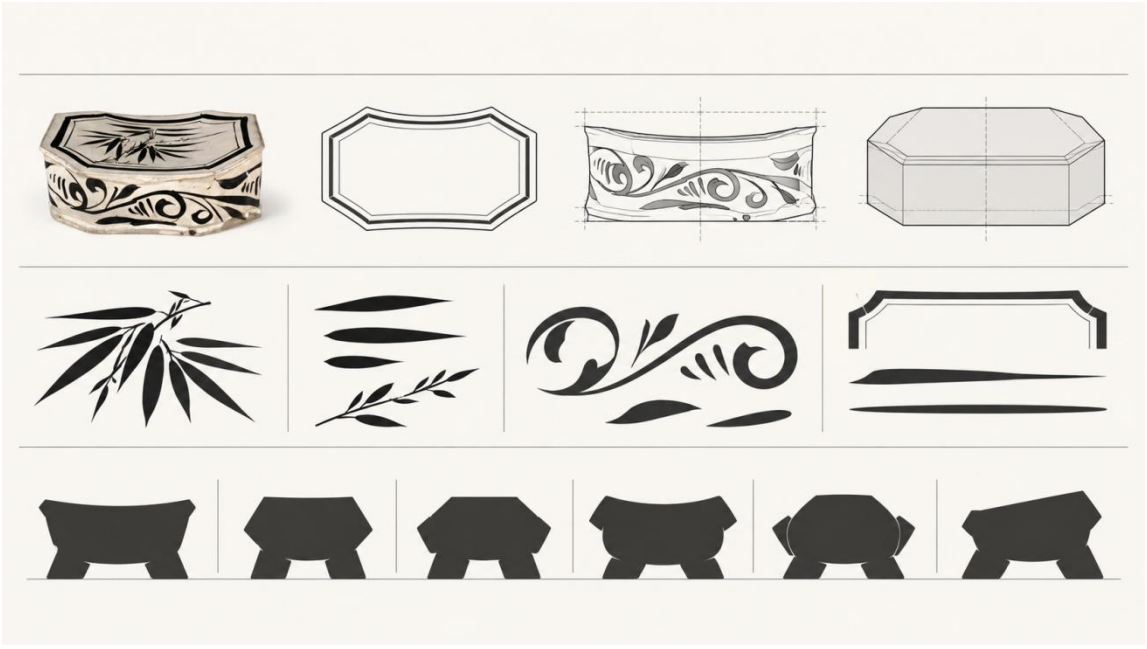

Figure C-2-5. Li Shouzhen: extraction of the pillow silhouette and secondary graphic elements

C.3 Yao Cheng: Prototype and Character-Design Process

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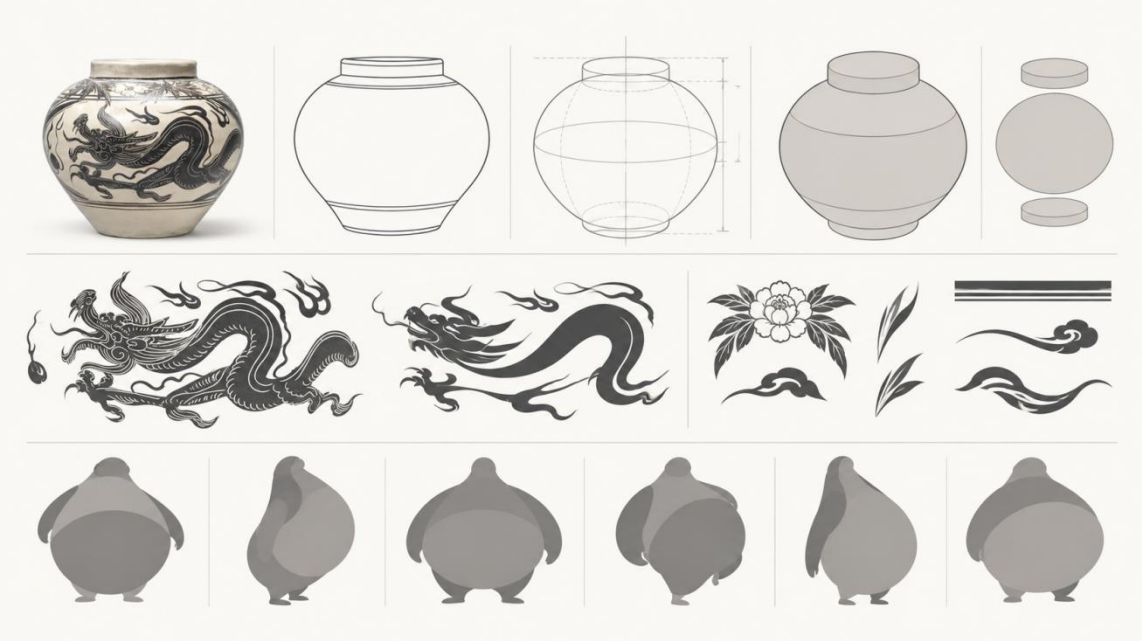

Figure C-3-1. Yao Cheng: extraction of the dragon-decorated jar's silhouette and sense of mass



Figure C-3-2. Yao Cheng: details of the dragon motif and vessel-form references

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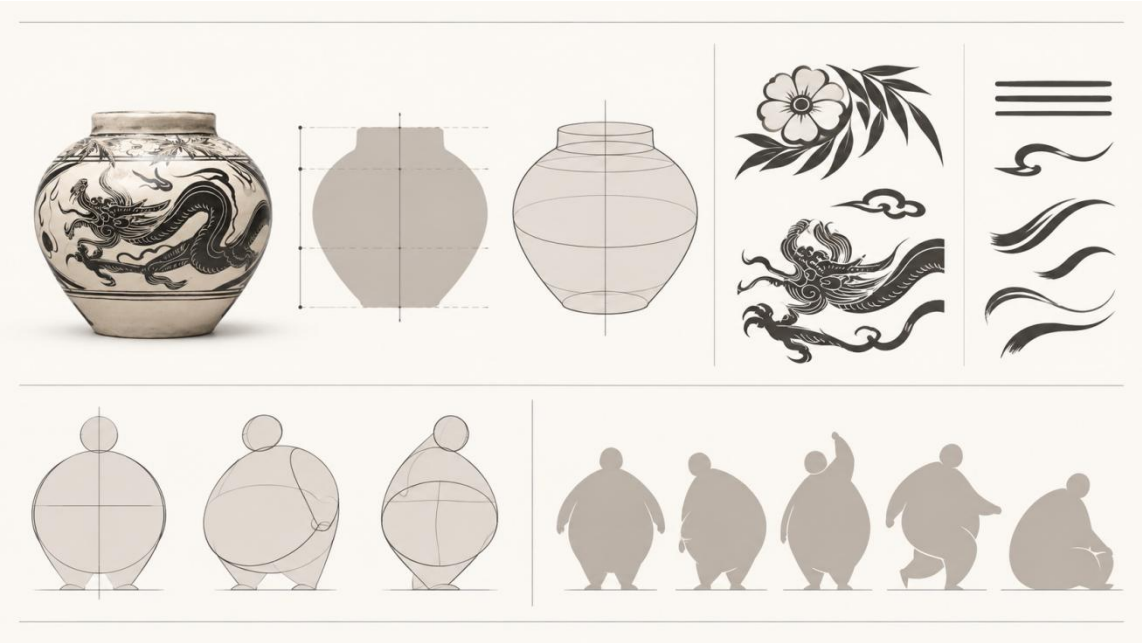

Figure C-3-3. Yao Cheng: development of jar proportions into a rounded human silhouette



Figure C-3-4. Yao Cheng: exploration of character proposals and prop decoration

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Figure C-3-5. Yao Cheng: details of the final dragon motif on the sleeves and accessories

C.4 Xiao He: Prototype and Character-Design Process



Figure C-4-1. Xiao He: references for the black-glazed meiping form and motif details

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Figure C-4-2. Xiao He: development of vessel contours into a young character's body form



Figure C-4-3. Xiao He: overview of clothing, backpack, tools, and other design elements

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Figure C-4-4. Xiao He: comparison of silhouette and pose proposals



Figure C-4-5. Xiao He: final details and static movements of the young character

C.5 Mr. Chen: Prototype and Character-Design Process

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Figure C-5-1. Mr. Chen: the appearance of a peony-decorated meiping and reference motif details



Figure C-5-2. Mr. Chen: development of the meiping silhouette into an elongated human figure

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Figure C-5-3. Mr. Chen: formal recombination of peony motifs on suit panels



Figure C-5-4. Mr. Chen: details of garment motifs, accessories, and the main character image

Final Character Designs and Group Images

D.1 Lin Yue: Main Visual and Front, Side, and Back Views

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Figure D-1. Lin Yue: main visual and front, side, and back turnaround views

D.2 Li Shouzhen: Main Visual and Front, Side, and Back Views



Figure D-2. Li Shouzhen: main visual and front, side, and back turnaround views

D.3 Yao Cheng: Main Visual and Front, Side, and Back Views

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Figure D-3. Yao Cheng: main visual and front, side, and back turnaround views

D.4 Xiao He: Main Visual and Front, Side, and Back Views



Figure D-4. Xiao He: main visual and front, side, and back turnaround views

D.5 Mr. Chen: Main Visual and Front, Side, and Back Views

Docusign Envelope ID: 76E87C90-638F-81B0-8297-A76D71C916B7



Figure D-5. Mr. Chen: main visual and front, side, and back turnaround views

D.6 Group Images and Promotional Compositions of the Five Characters



Figure D-6. Group poster: landscape composition one

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Figure D-7. Group poster: landscape composition two



Figure D-8. Five-character group image: portrait composition

Alternative Views of the Main Environments in A Thousand Years of Kiln Fire

E.1 Interior Workshop at the Contemporary Cizhou Kiln Heritage Center

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Figure E-1. Contemporary Cizhou kiln heritage-center workshop: overall daytime view



Figure E-2. Contemporary Cizhou kiln heritage-center workshop: supplementary daytime working-area view

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Figure E-3. Contemporary Cizhou kiln heritage-center workshop: nighttime working area and lighting atmosphere

E.2 Ancient Cizhou Kiln Ceramic Workshop in the Dream



Figure E-4. Ancient Cizhou kiln workshop in the dream: overall courtyard-workshop view

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Figure E-5. Ancient Cizhou kiln workshop in the dream: supplementary side view of the working area



Figure E-6. Ancient Cizhou kiln workshop in the dream: supplementary moonlit view

E.3 Contemporary Chinese-Style Outdoor Leisure Tea Courtyard

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Figure E-7. Contemporary Chinese-style outdoor tea courtyard: overall courtyard and leisure furnishings



Figure E-8. Contemporary Chinese-style outdoor tea courtyard: evening view of the tea table and reclining chairs

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Figure E-9. Contemporary Chinese-style outdoor tea courtyard: supplementary view of the courtyard and tea table