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Research Article • DOI: 10.2478/ftee-2023-0016 FTEE • 31(2) • 2023 • 56–64

# Hidden Messages: Connotation analysis of Textile Trademarks in the Republic of China (1912-1949)

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**Abstract**
This study analyses trademarks of the textile industry issued between 1912–1949 in the Republic of China, revealing the trademarks' art features and hidden messages. The trademarks' images and information folders were critically examined within their historical context. The work, by analysing the themes and patterns of the trademarks, revealed that the people-oriented conception, humanistic spirit, nationalist sentiment and the multiple connotations of era development were behind the trademarks, which answers questions about the social connotations of textile trademarks of the Republic of China and also gives us some guidance to understand how to use these connotations for innovation trademark design to inherit better traditional culture in the future.

**Keywords**
the Republic of China, textile trademarks, connotation analysis, hidden messages, innovative design.

## 1. Introduction

As trademarks, their prototype originated from people's worship of totem. In the past, craftsmen printed signs or "marks" on their artworks or practical products, thus forming special signs or symbols which are recognized visually [1].

In the period of the Republic of China, after nearly half a century of development, our national commerce and textile industry began to step into the stage of growth and expansion. With many brands and enterprises emerging at that historic moment, a large number of trademark symbols were designed.

In the Republic of China, the first Trademark Law, promulgated by the Bei Yang government in 1930, stipulated that "trademarks shall be made of an especially significant combination of words, figures, signs, colours, etc...[2]". It was the first time that the Republic of China legislated for regulations on the elements of trademark design for commodity enterprises.

However, during the period of the Republic of China, influenced by Western industrial civilization and boosted by the self-help and self-improvement consciousness of the Westernization movement, China's industry and commerce has risen and developed. The textile industry is an important part of modern Chinese national industry and commerce and the trademark is a means of its promotion, whose design ideas, form and thought present the cultural conception and connotation value of the Republic of China.

Till now, academic research on trademarks not only has focused on legal issues such as trademark systems, but also on artistic characteristics, which include the colour, theme and composition of trademark design [3-7]. However, these studies do not add analytics to explore the social background of forming trademarks (R.O.C. textile trademarks). The study of connotation meaning behind textile trademarks is often disregarded.

Research objectives: (1) to present the visual characteristics of trademarks by researching trademarks of the textile industry in the Republic of China; (2) to make an analysis of the multiple connotations and cultural characteristics behind the textile trademarks on the basis of the social background in the Republic of China; (3) to try to do some innovative design for modern textile trademarks based on the textile trademarks of the Republic of China, so as to provide references on how to reflect tradition and modernity in trademark design in the new era.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Materials

On one hand, this article is based on the physical textile trademarks donated to the Folk Clothing Museum in Jiangsu province, China, on the other hand, on the collection of textile trademark images in different classic newspapers and magazines during the period of the Republic of China, such as the Liang You Journal, Ji Lian Society Journal, and Yong'an Journal, and as well as on the references to relevant literature records. This paper collected a total of 243 textile trademark images, which are highly representative physical evidence.

### 2.2. Research Methods

(1) **Element classification.** The preliminary research steps involved reviewing the collection of textile trademarks in the Republic of China from 1921 to 1949. Three elements of textile trademarks were found: "Chinese traditional element trademarks", "Western



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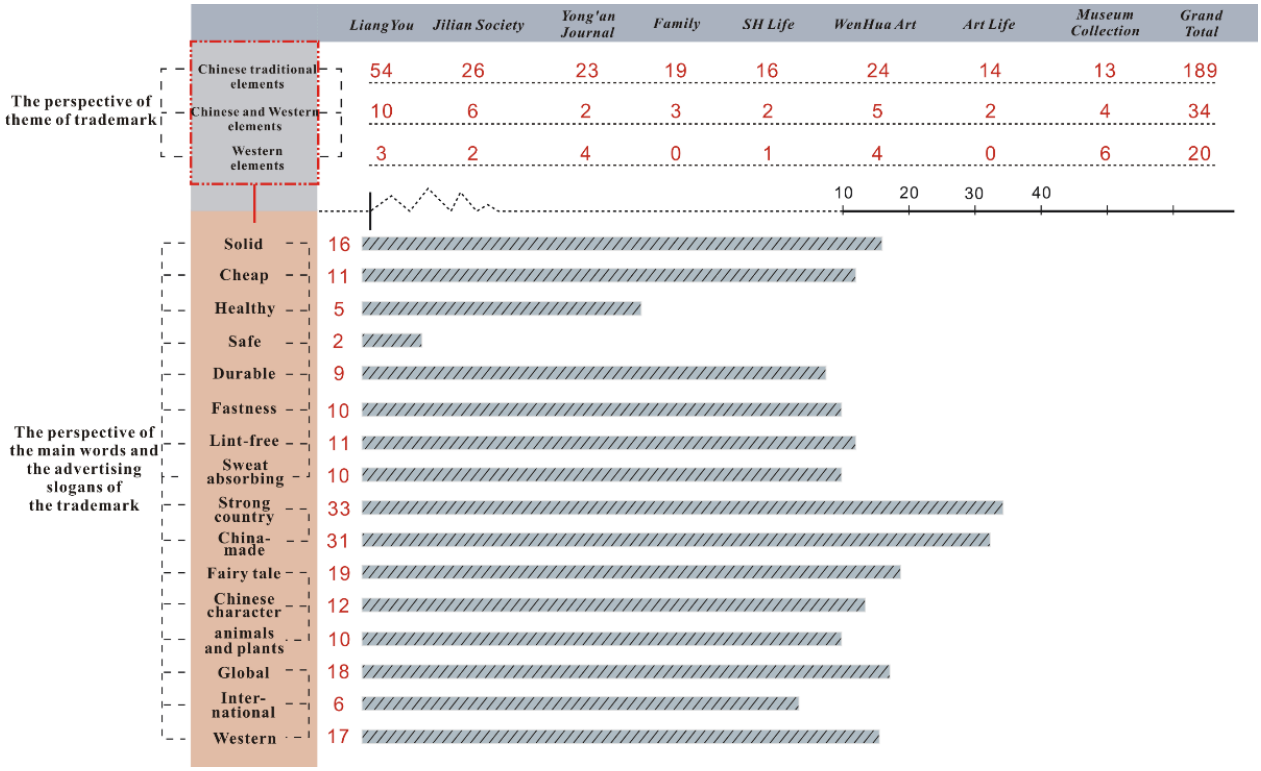


*Fig. 1. Research of textile trademarks (Drawn by the author)*

element trademarks" and "Chinese and Western integration trademarks", so as to determine the general trend of classification of the hidden connotation of textile trademarks. (2) **Morphological analysis.** Design methodology was used to analyse the trademarks through their slogans, frames and patterns (Since the textile trademarks of the Republic of China have been preserved and circulated for several decades, they no longer have their original colours, so colour is not included in this study). (3) **Line draft drawing.** A computer was used to sketch line drawings to reproduce the textile trademarks so as to try to discover more details about the trademarks through the immersive design process. (4) **Literature reading**. Literature related to the social features of the Republic of China and textile trademarks was studied those books helped to understand and explain the reasons for the formation of the textile trademarks.

## 3. Results

This paper collected a total of 243 textile trademark images. From the perspective of themes of trademarks, there are 189 images with Chinese traditional elements (such as Chinese words, Chinese living scenes, traditional Chinese artifacts or Chinese legends), 20 images with Western elements (such as Western historical figures, English letters, Western classical artifacts or Western architectural sculptures), and 34 images with Chinese and Western elements combined. From the perspective of the advertising slogans of the trademarks, key words such as "solid", "cheap", "domestic", "traditional" and "international" were identified (shown in Figure 1).

By sorting out the names of textile trademarks and advertising slogans attached in the period of the Republic of China, it was found that there are functional descriptions such as "firm", "cheap", "healthy", "safe", "durable", "colorfast", "hairless" and "sweat absorbing", accounting for 32.5% of the total number.

For example, the trademark "Ying Ting" (shown in Figure 2A) of the Shanghai Huafu Hat Factory combines "eagle" with "airship". Although it is expressed in the way of a traditional line drawing, it contains the quality metaphor of "hard" for all kinds of hats (because the Chinese pronunciation "Ying Ting" can have different meanings; it could be "eagle and airship", and "hard and solid"), and contains the slogan of "durable and practical". In many textile trademarks, words such as "strong and durable" and "never fade" are often promoted (shown in Figure 2B). Another example, the "Jian Gu" (shown in Figure 2C) shoe brand, is printed with an "arrow" and "drum" by the Shanghai Yisheng Rubber Factory. The Chinese pronunciation "Jian Gu" could be "arrow and drum", but it also could have the meaning "solid". The gauze cover printed with a "Butterfly" (shown in Figure 2D) by the Shanghai Tianguang Automobile Factory is another case. They all select daily objects as brand patterns, as well as use homophonic puns to stimulate people's recognition of the demand for "invincible" products ("butterfly" and "invincible" are similar in Chinese pronunciation).

For 243 textile trademark images, we can also find that there are traditional Chinese descriptions such as "dragon", "喜, [si:] (The Chinese character Xi)" accounting for 26.3% of the total number).

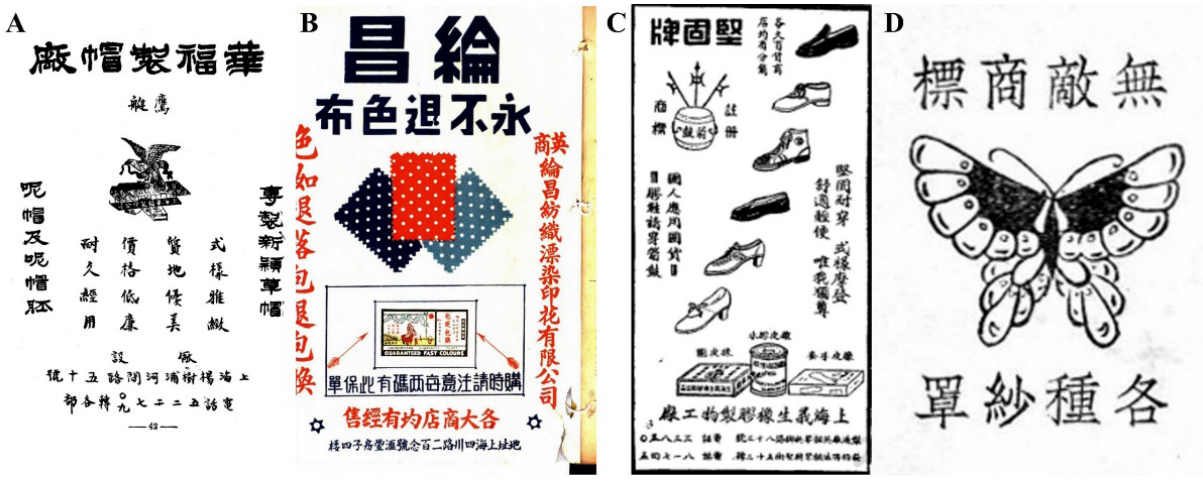


*Fig. 2. (A) "Ying Ting" brand from Shanghai Huafu Hat Factory; (B) logo carrying the slogan "never fade"; (C) "Jian Gu" shoe brand from Shanghai Yisheng Rubber Factory; (D) "Butterfly" gauze brand from Shanghai Tianguang Automobile Factory*

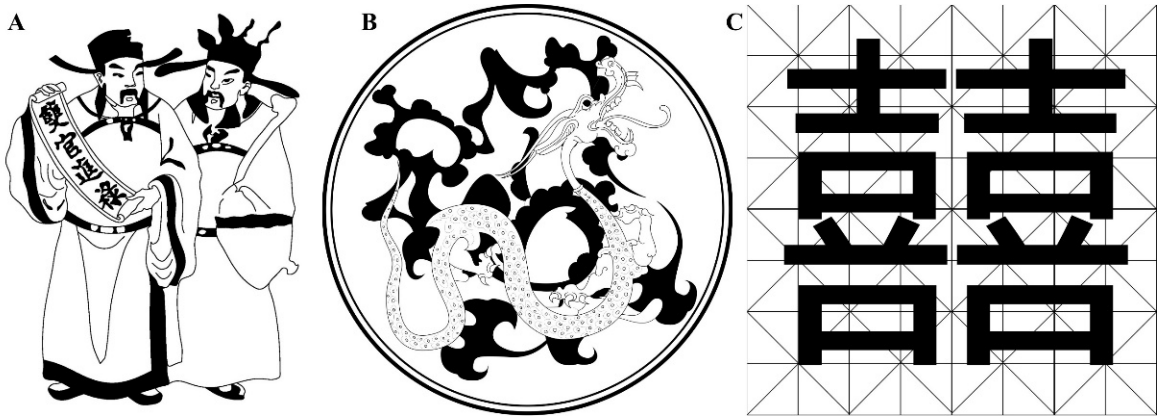


*Fig. 3. (A) "Shuang Guan Jin Lu" cotton brand from Rui Sheng American firm (drawn by the author); (B) "TuanLong" silk stocking brand from China No.1 Knitting Factory (Drawn by the author); (C) "Shuang Xi" brand from Zhen Chang Cotton Textile Mill (drawn by the author)*

The cotton brand of "Shuang Guan Jin Lu" (shown in Figure 3A) used by Ruisheng, an American firm, adopts the concepts of "福禄寿喜, [fu:] [lu:] [shou] [si:]", meaning fame and fortune in Chinese. It combines folk art and themes to get closer to people [48]. The "Tuan Long" brand (shown in Figure 3B), designed by the China No.1 Knitting Factory shows the "dragon" in the myths and legends of ancient China with line drawing. The dragon pattern is placed in the circle, and the picture is surrounded by clouds to form a circular "Tuan Long", which symbolizes auspiciousness and happiness with traditional myths and legends. Another example is the "Shuang Xi" brand (shown in Figure 3C) of the Zhenchang Cotton Textile Mill, which uses traditional Chinese characters such as "Xi" (meaning good fortune in Chinese) to express people's strong desire for a prosperous life.

In addition, it is remarkable that there are two special ways of expression for textile trademarks in the period of the Republic of China, accounting for 22.2% of the total number of the textile trademarks we collected. "National goods", "standard national goods" and "complete national goods" were frequently used in many textile trademarks of national goods in the same period. Most of them appear in the form of publicity words at the top or bottom or on both sides of the trademark.

For example, the "Xi Bao San Yuan" (shown in Figure 4A) brand from Li Dao Feng Hao printed slogans on cotton such as "promoting national goods" on both sides of the trademark to show the identity of national goods. Another one is to stimulate people's love for local goods with national aspirations and theme patterns with national characteristics. For example, the colour cloth trademark "Qi Yu Brand" (shown in Figure 4B). The main body of this trademark is symmetrically distributed on both sides with the sun and dark clouds, and a striking "red column" is placed in the middle. The "sun" and "dark clouds" are metaphors of the times, containing patriotic feelings. Another example are trademarks with national political colours like the "Great Hero" (shown in Figure 4C) of the Shanghai No.1 Weaving Factory. With the theme of a war horse, the national capitalist's ideal of "saving the country through industry" is expressed through metaphor. Of course, during this period, there were

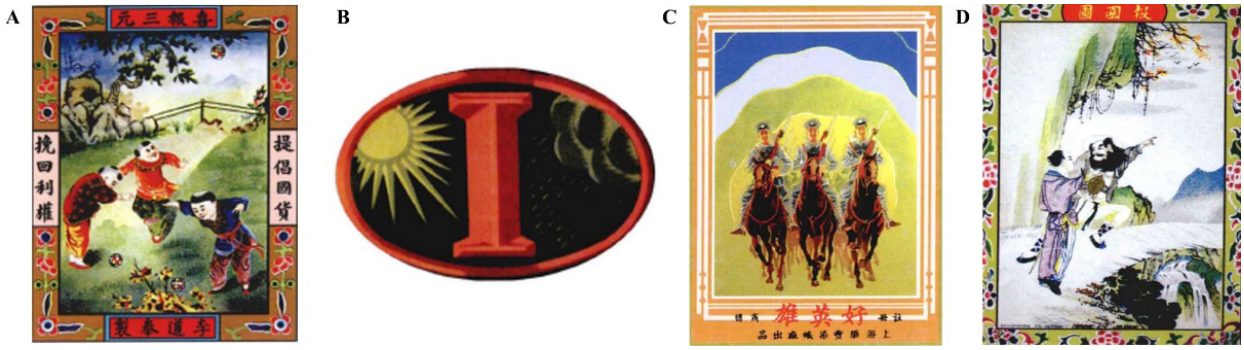


*Fig. 4. (A) "Xi Bao San Yuan" brand from Li Dao Feng Hao; (B) "Qi Yu" brand from Shanghai Daxin Factory; (C) "Great Hero" brand from Shanghai No.1 Weaving Factory; (D) "Bao Guo" cotton brand*

*Fig. 5. (A) picture of real product ("Gu Jin" clothing brand - Textile and apparel trademark collections from Folk Clothing Museum of Jiangnan University); (B) image of sketching (drawn by the author); (C) "Sheng Li" knitted underwear brand from "Ren He" Weaving Factory (drawn by the author); (D) "Earth" worsted brand from Shang Hai Yu Min (drawn by the author); (E) picture of real product ("Hong Xiang" clothing brand - Textile and apparel trademark collections from Folk Clothing Museum of Jiangnan University); (F) image of sketching (drawn by the author); (G) picture of real product ("Fei Xing Di Qiu" from "Mei Jin He" Foreign Firm); (H) image of sketching (drawn by the author)*

also textile trademarks with classical characters, such as the "Baoguo" brand (shown in Figure 4D) "Baoguo" means serve the country faithfully. It is one of the most famous historical allusions in China. Before someone became an official, his mother tattooed the words "serve the country faithfully" on his back, which was often used to educate and inspire patriotism among young people.)

Last but not least, there are internationalized descriptions such as "global", "international" and "Western", accounting for 18.9% of the total number.

For example, the clothing trademark "Gujin" (shown in Figure 5A and 5B) from the Folk Clothing Museum of Jiangnan University. In the selection of theme, this trademark not only uses the font design of Chinese characters "Gujin", but also artistically transforms Western English to make a Chinese and English letter combination design. There are also some other textile and clothing trademarks, such as flower socks "Kangfu Brand", "Kelemen Brand" and "Huili Brand". From the original English naming of these trademarks, "Comfort", "Clermont" and "Warrior" are translated by homophonic words with beautiful meanings in Chinese. The Chinese meaning of beauty, wealth and prosperity reflects the acceptance of Western civilization. Taking the knitted underwear trademark "Sheng Li" (shown in Figure 5C) used by the Ren He Weaving Factory as an example, Eastern and Western elements are mixed in the design. The main body uses the image of the goddess of victory and a lion, as well as the Chinese character "Ren He". Below the main body is the deformation of the medieval sculpture style with Western heraldry, and Western figures are slanted on the base to carry the round visual centre of the trademark. Through the symmetrical layout, it fully reflects that in the late Republic of China, with the continuous combination of Western culture, the trademark design broke through the limitations of traditional auspicious themes. As an another example, in the trademark theme pattern, there are visual symbols marked with the "Earth" pattern (shown in Figure 5D) to express an international sense, such as the clothing trademark "Hong Xiang" (shown in Figure 5E and 5F) brand from the Folk

Clothing Museum of Jiangnan University and the cotton brand "Fei Xing Di Qiu" (shown in Figure 5G and 5H).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. People-Oriented Connotation of Emphasizing the Practicality

During the period of the Republic of China, with the stimulation brought by the Western economies and the entry of the industrial civilization lifestyle, the national bourgeoisie gradually grew, while the Chinese and Western cultures collided fiercely. As a philosophical and literary movement, originating in Italy and spreading to other European countries in the second half of the 14th century, the humanistic function exerted a subtle influence on people's social lifestyle through the collision of culture, which has changed in clothing, food, housing, use and transportation. In the change of the textile use-pattern, it is reflected in emphasis from basic physiological satisfaction to practicality, and from cumbersome to simplicity. To some extent, these changes of people-oriented consciousness reflect the development and changes of the textile industry in the period of the Republic of China [59]. Rong Zongjing, a pioneer of national industry, once recalled: "Food and clothing are needed by people. Flour mills and textile mills are responsible for solving the problem of food and clothing [610]." During the period of the Republic of China, Jiuli Gonghe Bao said: "The materials of clothes are made of domestic products, mainly solid and simple [711]." It shows that people-oriented connotation played an important role in the social development of the Republic of China. With the advent of the industrial civilization lifestyle, people abandoned gorgeous textile clothes of the past, paid more attention to humanistic needs, cared about whether they were durable, strong, safe and of good fit, and they had a deeper understanding of the combination of practicability and aesthetics. Thus, we can see a large number of such words with practical functions related to people's values or lifestyle in the Republic of China, such as the trademark "Ying Ting" of the Shanghai Huafu Hat Factory (Because the Chinese pronunciation "Ying Ting" can have different Chinese meanings. It could be "eagle and airship", as well as "hard and solid") that we mentioned above. People use indirect metaphor, not only for commercial reasons, but also to emphasize practical people-oriented connotation, which is one of the important value components behind the expression of textile trademarks.

### 4.2. Humanistic Spirit Connotation of Returning to Tradition

Why could we find textile trademarks with traditional Chinese elements? During the period of the Republic of China, national entrepreneurs increasingly realized that "national" goods integrated with the traditional humanistic spirit could have unexpected effects of competing with Western goods. For example, there is still a large amount of traditional Chinese culture and art in towns with low-level modernization. In order to inform buyers about their brand and to improve buyers' perceptions of this brand [812], enterprises start with Chinese traditional folk customs and culture, and vigorously publicize them, so as to stimulate people's desire to buy. It can be seen that "national identity is manifested as cultural identity under the control of national ideology. This kind of cultural identity is characterized by the distinctive ethnic group, race, language, religion and living habits to which we belong, so as to shape the national character [913]." As a result, traditional trademark publicity, which focuses on reflecting the unique aesthetic taste and artistic feelings of Chinese people, comes one after another. By seeking design quality with national attributes, these trademarks try to conform to the social and cultural changes, and at the same time, meet the traditional demands and cultural identity of Chinese people, highlighting the humanistic spirit connotation. Through the deep search of traditional folk culture (Chinese fairy tales, Chinese characters, Chinese living scenes etc.), these trademarks stimulate the aesthetic personality rooted in the hearts of Chinese people, and express the humanistic spirit connotation of returning to tradition.

### 4.3. The National Emotion Connotation of Saving the Country by Industry

Throughout the history of the Republic of China, the great changes of social development caused increasing social conflicts and further destruction of China's self-sufficient natural economy. Some awakened Chinese began to regard the development of national capitalism and support for own Chinese goods as an important means to save the nation from crisis. It was recorded in a newspaper about the sketching of the uniform in the Republic of China: "The full dress is made of domestic silk, and in black. The formal dress is made of domestic wool [1014]." In 1926, the Social Welfare Tientsin newspaper was also published: "in order to promote the use of domestic clothing materials [1115]". The voice of "save the country through industry" started to grow. "Advocating domestic goods" became the direct embodiment of strengthening independent ability and expressing patriotic feelings at that time. Under the influence of "saving the nation by industry", we can find many trademarks decorated with slogans of "promoting national goods" on both sides to show the identity of national goods. In addition, trademark designers also tried to use paintings of historical figures and events ("Bao Guo" brand), showing the heroic feelings of industrialists who wanted to serve the country with industry and participate in the construction of the country. It also reflects the special role of the national emotion connotation in economic and political communication in the period of the Republic of China.

### 4.4. The Era Development Connotation of Mutual Learning of Civilizations

From 1840 to the period of the Republic of China, after more than half a century of civilization development, from the closed door to the prosperity of national

industry and commerce, the continuous exchange between Chinese and Western civilizations made "mutual learning" very common and mature. In addition, due to the wide spread of the theory of free and equal development of the Western bourgeoisie, Chinese intellectuals, while introspecting and contradicting themselves, spontaneously came up with the idea of eliminating the current disadvantages and practicing Western civilization in enterprise management [1216].

According to Eileen Chang's A Chronicle of Changing Clothes, "Most of the inspiration of fashions in the early years of the Republic derived from the West. It was a commotion unprecedented in the long history of a land of moderation and harmony [1317]." At that time, there was a tendency that men wore women's shoes and women wore men's jackets, and there was also a trend that Chinese and Western clothes were integrated. As an important carrier of clothing culture, textile trademarks also brought forth new ideas in design, with "Western", "international" and "fashionable" trademark advertising slogans emerging in an endless stream. In the middle and late period of the Republic of China, it even began to have the image of high-tech things at that time. In addition to the Earth, there were airplanes, ships and steam trains, which were frequently used in the trademark image. For example, the cotton brand "Fei Xing Di Qiu" of the Meijinhe Foreign Firm embodies the theme of the times' progress and the development of science and technology, and implies advanced industrial civilization. This visual form with global fashion depicts a grand trend map of the Republic of China. While feeling the development pulse of the times, it also shows the era development connotation of the mutual learning between Chinese and Western cultures. The integration of Chinese and Western elements shows the national textile industry's sense of the times and the positive attitude of leading the world, and injects the era development connotation of borrowing Western culture for our own use [1418].

## 5. The Innovative Design

As mentioned above, on the whole, the trademarks in the period of the Republic of China have four different connotations, such as the people-oriented concept, humanistic spirit, nationalist sentiment and the multiple connotations of era development. In this paper, some of them were selected and applied to design new trademark logos for the present.

As regards modern trademark design, researchers and designers have proposed various ideas in the past on how to design a good trademark. For example, in 2013, Erik Hans Krause (1936) in the paper "Trademarks and Symbols" explained about "what is the most important for making trademark design nowadays". He thought that "there is hardly any other species of design which has to be as flexible as the trademark; it may be reduced to half an inch, and yet is supposed to retain its character as part of a gigantic poster." Besides, he also considered "the clearly defined requirements for a trademark design to determine the choice of the interpretation of the subject. The solution requires broadest imagination as well as precision of thought, a rather unusual combination [1519]." Guo Chong, a Chinese scholar, examined the relationship between trademark design and culture, emphasizing that the creation of a new trademark shall be built on both a spiritual and aesthetic foundation, and that the designers must refine the cultural spirit and, meanwhile, pay more attention to the unity of visual images. Thus, the purpose of trademark design can be realized [1620]. Therefore, we not only adopted connotations exclusive to textile trademarks in the times of the Republic of China, but also paid special attention to issues relating to the theme of design, the corresponding products and innovative ideas when designing modern trademarks for these times.

One of the purposes of designing a trademark is to connect it with product quality, or even to make them mutually supplementary. As one report said "Our findings indicate a positive effect of quality and trademark on product innovation. There is a synergistic effect of quality and trademark on product innovation [1721]." Therefore, in our first design, we utilized the people-oriented connotation of emphasizing the practicality, a feature of trademarks in the times of the Republic of China. Meanwhile, we strengthened people's value recognition of the connotation through homophony.

For example, we adopted a "top hat" (shown in Figure 6C) as the product for the trademark, and combined the word "sword" (we pronounce it in Chinese as [jian]) (shown in Figure 6A) and "warship" (we pronounce it in Chinese as [ting]) (shown in Figure 6B). Eventually, we named the overall design "坚挺, [jian] [ting] " (meaning stiffness in Chinese), thus endowing the connotation of stiffness to the product. This is also an attempt to enable consumer association with the lasting stiff texture when seeing the trademark (shown in Figure 6D and 6E).

The other two trademarks are for clothes. But they may still have some differences. For the first trademark, we adopted humanistic spirit as its design connotation, utilizing Chinese elements. For the other trademark, we applied the era development connotation of mutual learning of civilizations as its design premise, integrating Western elements with Chinese ones.

The first trademark is for Qipao (a traditional garment in China, called Cheongsam). We create an oriental visual symbol by adding different Chinese elements into the design. Patterns such as auspicious clouds and dragons are used to convey the stately feature of this traditional Chinese dress, which matches the viewer's general concept of qipao (shown in Figure 7D and 7E).

When it comes to the details, we borrowed the silhouette of the classic design of qipao, making it the main body (shown in Figure 7B), and matched it with auspicious clouds and dragon patterns. It is worth noting that we tailored the dragon pattern and integrated it into the placket, forming an overlapping front with the right part on the top, which ends with the dragon pattern (shown in Figure 7A). And we decorated the slit

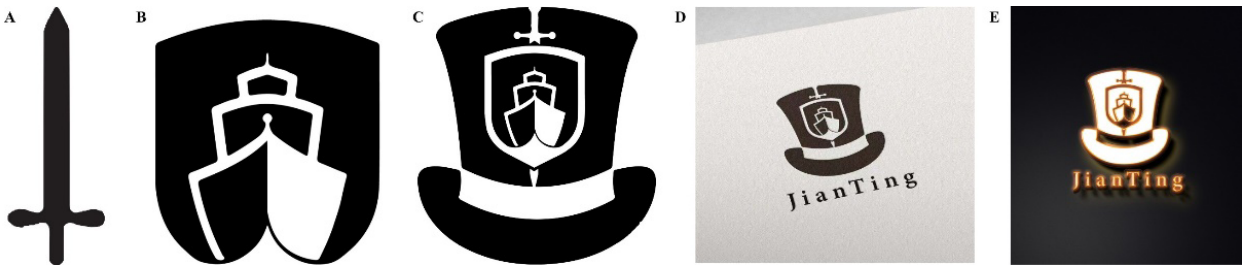


*Fig. 6. (drawn by the author) (A) sword; (B) warship; (C) "top hat"; (D, E) design sketch of the "Top hat" trademark*

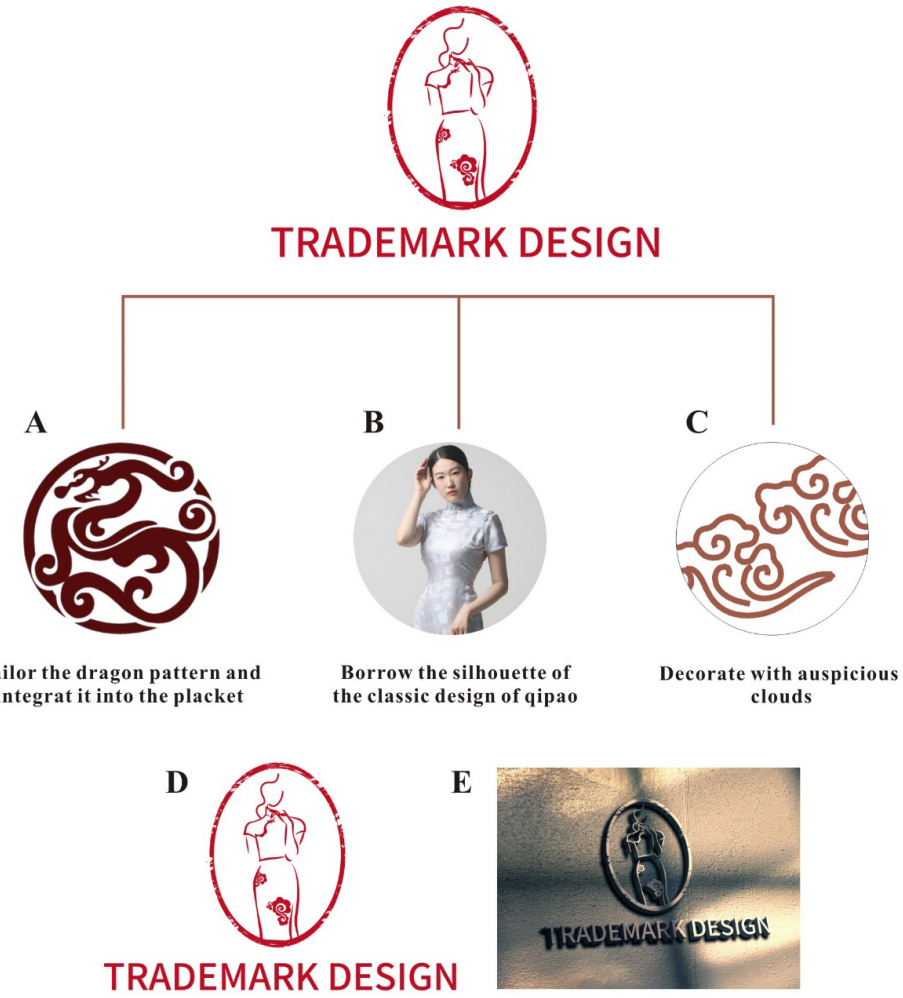


*Fig. 7. (drawn by the author) (A) tailor the dragon pattern and integrate it into the placket; (B) borrow the silhouette of the classic design of qipao; (C) decorate with auspicious clouds; (D, E) design sketch of the trademark for "Qipao".*

with clouds around it in vermilion colour (as shown in Figure 7C), which are both stately and elegant.

For the second trademark, we designed it for modern garments by combining Chinese and Western elements.

The overall design is a needle with a thread, which reflects features of the clothing industry (shown in Figure 8A). But in the details we added Chinese auspicious clouds around the thread (shown in Figure 8B) and used European flower pattern designs (at the bottom) (shown in Figure 8C). A European style crown is added to the head of the needle to highlight the Western style (shown in Figure 8D). Every part of the design embodies the blending of the two cultures in the product. Basically, the design of this trademark seeks to represent the developing rhythm of the time, while revealing the connotation hidden in the development of the time, featuring a mutual appreciation and integration between Chinese and Western culture (shown in Figure 8E and 8F).

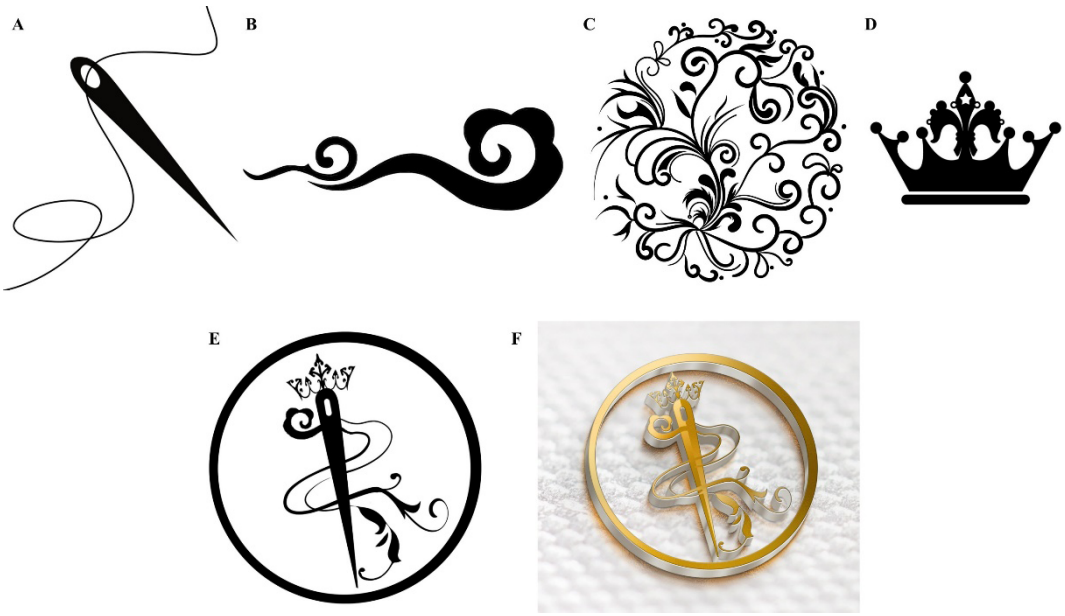


*Fig. 8. (drawn by the author) (A) needle with a thread; (B) Chinese auspicious clouds; (C) European pattern designs; (D) European style crown; (E, F) design sketch of the trademark for modern garments of both Chinese and Western styles.*

## 6. Conclusion

During the period of the Republic of China, as a visual symbol, the textile trademark was an important carrier to develop national industry and commerce, guide mass culture and advocate a new life. This paper lists the textile trademarks and collection objects in different pictorials during the period of the Republic of China, aiming to interpret the connotation of practical humanism, traditional humanities, national emotion and mutual learning of civilization through the integration of the trademark design theme and literal expression. In the specific social history and national environment, it carries a function, a unique aesthetic value, a surge of patriotic thoughts and a spirit of mutual learning between Chinese and Western cultures. Also, we provide some innovative trademark experience and practices based on textile trademark connotations of the Republic of China to meet the modern visual aesthetic and needs of fashion and cultural identity for the better inheritance and innovation of design in the future.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Prof. Rongrong Cui for providing the textile trademarks and Qipao from the Folk Clothing Museum.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Key Project of Philosophy and Social Science Research of Ministry of Education "The Collation of Historical Materials of Han Textile Clothing and the Empirical Study of Chinese Style" [grant no. JZD048].

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