MAPPING AND INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLISM IN MOTIFS IN PENANG

DAVID YEO
5 BLESSINGS

BASIC SUBCONSCIOUS NEEDS OF MOST HUMAN BEING

- GOOD HEALTH
- LOVE OF VIRTUES
- PROSPERITY
- LONGEVITY
- NATURAL DEATH
SYMBOLS

- PRODUCT OF VIVID IMAGINATION OF CONSTRUCTIVE VALUES
- SIMPLIFY ABSTRACT THOUGHTS AND CONCEPTS
- REINFORCE PERSONAL THOUGHTS AND IDEAS
- POSITIVE AFFIRMATION & MOTIVATIONAL TOOL
- SUBLIMAL TARGET SETTING

Prior to arrival of religion, symbols of primitive animistic beliefs prevail.
SYMBOLIC MOTIFS FALL INTO 5 GROUPS

1. NATURAL WORLD – FLORA AND FAUNA ATTRACTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

2. MYTHOLOGY - DIETIES, FABULOUS BEAST AND ELEMENTS OF THE COSMOS MOSTLY OF SYMBOLIC MEANING

3. INANIMATE ITEMS - IMBUED WITH SIGNIFICANCE BY SOCIETY AND CONVEY MEANING DIRECTLY

4. SUGGESTION & ASSOCIATION - BORE LOGICAL REALTIONSHIP TO SOCIAL ATTITUDE SUCH AS AGE, SUCCESS, FILIAL AND MARITAL CONDUCT.

5. MOTIFS USED AS REBUSSES FOR ABSTRACT WORDS, SMALL SELECTION OF WORDS OR CHARACTERS USED DECORATIVELY
MIGRATION PATTERN

- INDIANS
- SHIPPERS
- TRADERS
- BUILDERS
- GOLDSMITHS
- MONEYLENDERS

- EUROPEAN
  - TRADERS
  - ADMINISTRATORS
  - SHIPPERS
  - PLANTERS

- PENANG

- MUSLIM
  - TRADERS
  - SHIPPERS

- CHINESE
  - ARTISANS
  - PLANTERS
  - TRADERS
  - BUILDERS
  - MINERS
Colorful, rich and visually powerful strong images.
Geometric symbols expressing infinite nature of Allah

Human, animals and realistic plant images are prohibited for fear of being deemed idolatry.
Empowerment, transmission and reality based.
A fusion of Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist symbols and motifs

Images required for beginners to understand abstract religious thoughts and concepts e.g. hell.
Their forebears were already in Malacca prior to the arrival of the European to South East Asia.

They were the descendants of early Chinese traders who had stayed back and intermarried with local women. They maintain many traditional Chinese traditions while assimilating most of the colonial and local customs and cultural practices e.g. spicy food, local dialect intermixed with Malay and Anglophile in outlook.

They evolve a Straits culture which distinctly separate them from later Chinese immigrants.
Circa 1910s
The men are in western 3-piece suit and the ladies in heavily gold-thread embroidered Malay-style sarung & kebayas.
Famile-rose porcelain specially made for the Straits Chinese.

The prominent feature is the phoenix, peony flower with Buddhist symbols at the rim of the porcelain ware.
Typical Straits Eclectic residential town house

Interconnected with rich ornamented façade, covered verandah walkway. Richly carved wooden door and majolica wall tiles.
Pilasters embellished with Chinese motifs
An expression of affluence and social standing.
Traditional Chinese with “ji ho” above the door and calligraphic boards on both side of door and clan lanterns lighted on auspicious days.
WALL TILES

Imported from European countries and to show off their affluence.
Colorful cement based locally produced floor tiles utilizing special moulds.
Decorative transom with inspiring motifs

- Bat - happiness
- Grapes - fertility
MAIN DOOR LATTICE SCREEN
decorative and functional

Acts as a security screen to vet visitors, privacy screen for the ladies to peek out for suitors and finally for ventilation purposes.
MAIN DOOR MIDDLE PANEL

types of woodcarving

- bas relief
- detailed high relief
- pierced through
- 3D layered pierced through
Symbol of Tree of Life is found in most culture. Life is to be treasured in the early turbulent part of the century.
EUROPEAN MOTIFS

Imitating European culture and at the same time cultivating goodwill.
Symbol of growth, peace and harmony
Plentiful, fruitful, longevity, success and productive motifs
Interpretation of European motifs by local Chinese furniture craftsmen

- Water babes
- Lion
- Satyr
- Wreath
- Eagle
- Cherubim
This type of furniture could be found in residential houses, clan houses and associations. The images found on the chair serve different purposes. The images in private home stresses on prosperity, personal peace and safety, fertility, happiness and blessings.

Those in clan houses and association stresses on filial piety, loyalty, bravery, academic success and glory and finally continuation and expansion of the clan.
Imperial Official Ranks

Civil Military
1. White crane Qilin
2. Golden Pheasant Lion
3. Peacock Panther
4. Wild Goose Tiger
5. Silver Pheasant Bear
Chinese Symbolism

Bamboo – longevity
Bat - good fortune
Butterfly - long life and beauty
Carp - advantage or benefits in business
Chrysanthemum - joviality, autumn
Crane - longevity
Deer - immortality, longevity
Dragon - power, strength, masculinity
Eagle - strength
Fish - wealth
Lotus - purity, perfection
Peony - queen of flowers, beauty, spring
Phoenix - queen, beauty, peace
Tiger - strength, military prowess
Tortoise - longevity, immortality
Preview of when, where, what to look out for.
FIELD TRIP EXPLORATION
ONSITE INSITU RUBBINGS
SHAPING AND LAYERING TECHNIQUES
SUBTRACTION
THANK YOU