



CHARACTERISTICS OF PHOENIX CULTURE & ART IN GANPO: GROUNDED THEORY, PERSPECTIVE, CONNOTATION AND DECONSTRUCTION

Yijun Dai

Faculty of Art and Design, Jiangxi Institute of Fashion Technology, Nanchang 330201 – China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3949-8377> |  yijun.dai@outlook.com

DAI, Yijun. Characteristics of phoenix culture & art in Ganpo: grounded theory, perspective, connotation and deconstruction. *Trans/Form/Ação: Unesp journal of philosophy*, Marília, v. 47, n. 6, e02400319, 2024.

Abstract: The phoenix, as one of the Chinese nation's cultural symbols, holds multiple special symbolic meanings across different cultures and historical contexts. Delving into the artistic features of the GanPo phoenix pattern aims to deepen the philosophical examination of its artistic essence and the social customs and historical cultural heritage it carries. Supported by the Root Theory, this paper constructs a philosophical framework for understanding the artistic features of the GanPo phoenix pattern through encoding and in-depth analysis of diverse sources, such as texts, images and archaeological materials related to the phoenix pattern in the GanPo region. Through the analysis of the context and word frequency of the phoenix art features in the GanPo region, we uncover its manifold artistic traits and cultural significance.


Keywords: Yuzhang area. Grounded Theory. Phoenix Culture. Artistic characteristics.

DAI, Yijun. Características da cultura e arte da fênix em Ganpo: teoria fundamentada, perspectiva, conotação e desconstrução. *Trans/form/ação: revista de filosofia da Unesp*, Marília, v. 47, n. 6, e02400319, 2024.

Resumo: A fênix, como um dos símbolos culturais da nação chinesa, contém múltiplos significados simbólicos especiais, em diferentes culturas e contextos históricos. Investigar as características artísticas do padrão fênix GanPo visa a aprofundar o exame filosófico de sua essência artística e dos costumes sociais e herança cultural histórica que ele carrega. Apoiado pela Teoria da Raiz, este artigo constrói uma estrutura filosófica para entender as características artísticas do padrão fênix Gan-Po, por meio da codificação e análise aprofundada de diversas fontes, como textos, imagens e materiais arqueológicos, relacionados ao padrão fênix, na região de GanPo. Através da análise do contexto e da frequência de palavras das características da arte da fênix, na região de GanPo, descobrem-se seus múltiplos traços artísticos e significado cultural.

Palavras-chave: Área de Yuzhang. Teoria Fundamentada. Cultura Fênix. Características artísticas.

Submission: 02/08/2024 | Decision: 20/08/2024 | Revision: 15/09/2024 | Publication: 28/10/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n6.e02400319>



This is an article published in open access under a Creative Commons license.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PHOENIX CULTURE & ART IN GANPO: GROUNDED THEORY, PERSPECTIVE, CONNOTATION AND DECONSTRUCTION

*Yijun Dai*¹

Abstract: The phoenix, as one of the Chinese nation's cultural symbols, holds multiple special symbolic meanings across different cultures and historical contexts. Delving into the artistic features of the GanPo phoenix pattern aims to deepen the philosophical examination of its artistic essence and the social customs and historical cultural heritage it carries. Supported by the Root Theory, this paper constructs a philosophical framework for understanding the artistic features of the GanPo phoenix pattern through encoding and in-depth analysis of diverse sources, such as texts, images and archaeological materials related to the phoenix pattern in the GanPo region. Through the analysis of the context and word frequency of the phoenix art features in the GanPo region, we uncover its manifold artistic traits and cultural significance.

Keywords: Yuzhang area. Grounded Theory. Phoenix Culture. Artistic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

The Phoenix is one of the important cultural symbols of Chinese civilization and possesses significant research value in cultural and artistic aspects. The Gan-Po region, in the Yangtze River basin, is a cultural circle where Chu culture intersects with the Central Plains Qin culture. Due to the influence of the natural environment and cultural background, Phoenix holds a unique position in Chu culture. Its spiritual connotations and pattern forms present various appearances in different times and regions, embodying the spirit of the era (Yang, 2022, p. 8; Zhou, 2006). Exploring the artistic features of Phoenix culture patterns, in the Gan-Po region, serves three purposes: first, it interprets Chinese cultural symbols. It investigates the most iconic decorative symbols of Chu culture in China's southern region. Second, it analyzes the folk traditional culture and art of the Yangtze River region in China. The third is to promote the modern interpretation of the Chinese nation's excellent traditional cultural symbols through the exploration of phoenix art.

In recent years, the study of phoenix culture has been deepening in the field of Chinese beliefs and art. In the field of art, scholars have carried out research from two perspectives:

¹ Faculty of Art and Design, Jiangxi Institute of Fashion Technology, Nanchang 330201 – China. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3949-8377>. E-mail: yijun.dai@outlook.com.

the plastic art of the phoenix image and the reapplication of schemas. In terms of the plastic art of phoenix images, scholars have analyzed the evolution of the types and styles of ancient phoenix images through the two-dimensional sealing method of archaeological objects. They believe that the phoenix pattern on the unearthed cultural relics reflects the performance and application of ancient regional humanistic culture and social spiritual consciousness in folk life. At the same time, the phoenix totemic form and the craftsmanship skills on the utensils also reflect the ancients' semantic art, cultural accomplishment and aesthetic needs, and have certain value for the study of ancient Chinese decorative modeling skills and aesthetic thoughts (Zhang, 2022, p. 50; Rothko, 2023, p. 8).

In terms of the reapplication design of the phoenix pattern, scholars have carried out practical research on the recreation of the phoenix pattern and modern design. They start with pattern form, color and meaning, and use modern materials and techniques to combine with traditional decoration to bring new inspiration to contemporary design. At the same time, in the context of international cultural integration, we attach importance to the influence of traditional elements on cultural mechanisms and art, enrich international design forms and styles, expand the status of traditional Chinese culture in the world and enhance cultural self-confidence (Rêgo *et al.*, 2023, p. 7).

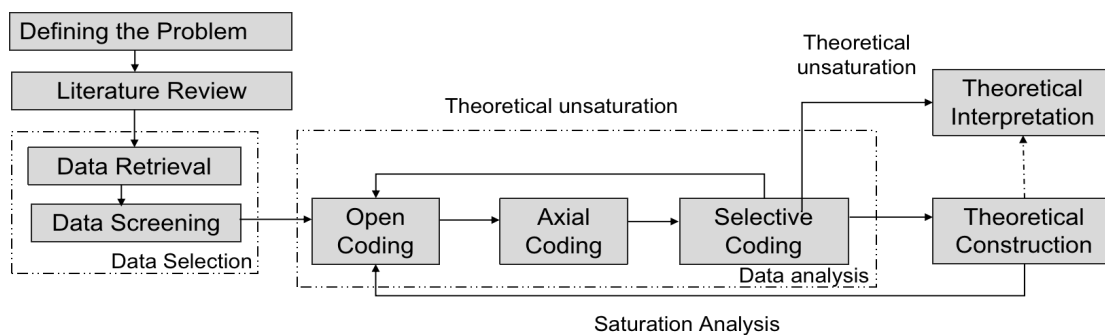
However, the current research has not deeply explored the spiritual internal factors, inheritance and transmission strategies of the phoenix culture and art in the GanPo region, presented by the intersection of northern and southern cultures in the historical context, such as regional folklore, history, culture and social ethics, Confucian ritual culture, and universal phoenix social culture. Therefore, it is necessary to study the artistic and cultural characteristics of the phoenix pattern in the GanPo region from the Han to the Ming and Qing dynasties, from multiple dimensions, and construct the corresponding characteristic model. It can deeply explore the characteristics and internal causes of the artistic characteristics of phoenix patterns, sort out the relics of regional, historical, folk customs and social Confucian culture, and provide feasible and multiple ways for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary society.

1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Grounded theory is a method of research, or a qualitative research “style”. The main purpose of which is to build theories on the basis of empirical data. This approach provides a useful technique for theory generation. It can help scholars break through theoretical dilemmas, using workflow management, and provides greater transparency than is common in many qualitative jobs (Tucker; Todd, 2014). Researchers generally do not have theoretical assumptions before the start of research, directly generalize concepts and propositions from primary sources, and then develop theories. It is a bottom-up approach to theory; that is,

a theory is formed by systematically collecting data and establishing connections among these concepts. Not in its empiricism, but in the fact that it abstracts new concepts and ideas from empirical facts. This study collected relevant documents, archaeological data and self-taken pictures to summarize, compare and analyze the artistic characteristics of the phoenix pattern in the Yuzhang region, and, then, explored the specific artistic characteristics and inheritance and transmission of the phoenix pattern in the Yuzhang region. Grounded theory has become a dominant approach that has the potential to construct novel theories. Apart from traditional philosophical thinking, inductive methods do not logically lead to innovative theoretical insights. Drawing on the theory of inference, meaning and action from the pragmatist philosopher Charles S. Peirce, we propose that retroactive non-inductive should be the guiding principle for empirically based theory construction. Retrospective reasoning is a creative reasoning process that aims to generate new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence. We believe that traceability analysis stems from the actors' social and intellectual stances, but can be further supported by careful methodological data analysis.

In addressing the artistic characteristics of Phoenix patterns in the Gan-Po region, this study employs a qualitative research method, specifically grounded theory, which establishes theoretical connections among collected data. New concepts and ideas are derived through a continuous process of abstraction from empirical facts (Chen, 2002, p. 5; Mohajan, 2023, p. 4). As shown in Figure 1, the study initially defines the artistic characteristics of Phoenix patterns in the Gan-Po region as the research problem. Literature, archaeological reports and image materials, related to the artistic characteristics of Phoenix patterns in the Gan-Po region, are selected and analyzed. Textual data is systematically coded, following the principles of typicality and variation throughout the coding process. By comparing and summarizing the data multiple times and continuously examining the saturation of the theory, the concept of artistic characteristics, possessed by Phoenix in the Gan-Po region, is empirically substantiated. Moreover, the core artistic characteristics that unify Phoenix in the Gan-Po region, are identified, and a preliminary theoretical framework for the artistic characteristics of Phoenix in the Gan-Po region, is constructed. This bottom-up approach culminates in developing the model for the artistic characteristics of Phoenix culture in the Gan-Po region.

Figure 1 – Research Flowchart

Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun (2023)

The graphic data in this paper are mainly derived from the official website of China's national cultural relics, the graphic resources of unearthed cultural relics in the cultural relics and ornament resource database, the image of phoenix in the Gaopin global digital image database, the database of bird remains unearthed from Chinese archaeological sites on the website of the Institute of Archaeology of China, the general database of archaeological journals and various academic journals, etc. totaling 215 sources. Among them, there are 152 image materials, 13 archaeological reports, 15 geographic records, and 35 monographs and papers. Sample selection was based on region and item type. In terms of data collection, the authors first carefully selected samples of phoenix image patterns from three to five regions in the Yuzhang area. These samples were derived from architecture, costumes and utensils, and they were analyzed in depth to better understand the characteristics and differences of the phoenix's shape. At the same time, for a more comprehensive study, we also collected 25 relevant textual materials, which cover a variety of fields, such as archaeological reports, geographical chronicles and journal articles. After completing the initial data collection, we conducted the first round of coding. This round of coding is mainly to systematically sort out and analyze the collected graphic data to reveal the main categories and corresponding categories. On the basis of the first round of coding, a second round of data collection was carried out, and new data were sampled and coded. In order to ensure the rigor and depth of the research, special attention was paid to the theoretical saturation of the artistic characteristics of the pattern and the living inheritance model of the Phoenix culture in the Yuzhang region. To this end, we re-applied open-coding, axial coding and selective coding from the previously collected uncoded literature. We repeat these steps until no new generic categories emerge, which marks the saturation of the theory. Through this series of data collection and coding, we not only have a deeper understanding of the phoenix culture in the Yuzhang area, but also establish a complete set of research frameworks and methods that lay the foundation for subsequent research.

2 ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS MODEL OF PHOENIX CULTURE PATTERNS IN THE GAN-PO REGION

2.1 EXTRACTION OF CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES THROUGH OPEN CODING

Open coding is to encode, tag and register the original data word by word, and develop the initial concept and refine the scope from the original data. Firstly, the “fragments” of the collected images and texts were read and sorted, classified and coded, and the schematic and artistic characteristics of the Feng culture in Yuzhang region were extracted, and a total of 217 original sentences were obtained. Secondly, 57 original sentences and 49 initial concepts were obtained through conceptual collation, and only some of the concepts are shown here due to the limited space of the article. For example, the concept of “the pursuit and yearning for a better life” is abstracted from the original sentence “In the cultural traditions of the Hejia Han and She ethnic groups, the elements of religious belief occupy a certain position, the worship of the phoenix, and the yearning for beautiful things and the expectation of wealth and nobility embodied in the phoenix in their respective beliefs”. And many records show that the ancient Yue people once worshipped birds as totems. In addition, many cultural relics, unearthed in Jiangxi, also reflect the primitive bird totem worship in the Ganpo region. Finally, through further classification and integration of the initial concepts, the categories were refined and, finally, 21 initial categories were obtained. Due to space limitations, I will only expand on part of it here, such as: spiritual beliefs, totem worship, fertility worship, etc. (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Categories Formed through Open Coding in the Artistic Characteristics Model of Phoenix Culture Patterns in the Gan-Po Region

Category	Concept	Category	Concept
F1 Spiritual Beliefs	Pursuit and yearning for a better life Symbolizing auspiciousness and nobility A metaphor for pure and blissful love	F12 Interweaving Curves	Interweaving curves in Phoenix form

F2 Totem Worship	Matrilineal clan characteristics Earliest totem worship in the Gan-Po region	F13 Diverse Forms	Resembling Phoenix, luan, vermilion bird, and other images Golden rooster is the earliest form of the Phoenix Incorporating various bird images like cranes and peacocks Winged bird forms
F3 Reproductive Worship	Cultural phenomenon of reproductive worship Symbolizing early childbirth and noble offspring	F14 Ancient Object Decoration	Presence of Phoenix in ancient cultural relics and utensils
F4 Cosmological Observations	Phoenix represents the South in songs and poetry Vermilion bird represents the south	F15 Symbol of Aristocratic	Identity Phoenix signifies the status of scholars and officials Phoenix patterns represent the decoration of nobles and kings
F5 Views on Life and Death	Reflecting ancient people's natural view of the world Expressing the longing for enlightenment, ascension, and immortality	F16 Multiethnic Cultural Symbols	Phoenix's attire best represents Her traditional ethnic culture Phoenix totem culture permeates daily ethnic life Phoenix imagery is preserved in Yao ethnic costumes
F6 Confucian Moral Philosophy	Phoenix embodies universal virtues and rituals Cultural traits of Phoenix customs	F17 Folk Semantic Meanings	Folk idiomatic expressions

F7 Aesthetic Values	Aesthetics of ethnic minorities' Ancient Art Patterns of auspicious animals as representatives of traditional culture	F18 Stylistic Artistic Inheritance	Three-dimensional inheritance and innovation of Phoenix flat patterns Inheritance of form and patterns
F8 Traditional Decorative Techniques	Hakka Phoenix embroidery techniques Carving craftsmanship Gilding techniques	F19 Traditional Craftsmanship Inheritance	Inheritance of Phoenix tie-dyeing techniques
F9 Simplification of Form	Progression from complex to simple in Phoenix form, with emphasis on abstraction	F20 Inheritance of Traditional Decorative Art and Culture	Inheritance of traditional decorative art and culture
F10 Elaborate Crown, Round Eyes, Exaggerated Tail	Exaggerated tail feathers in Phoenix form Phoenix pattern with long crown, round eyes, and graceful wings Curved abdomen and concentrated tail design	F21 Application and Dissemination in Contemporary Design	Inheritance of decorative history Multiple cultural values inheritance
F11 Elaborate and Elegant Body Shape	Elaborate body shape of Phoenix with elegant form Exquisite sculpture of Phoenix		

Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun (2023)

2.1.1 SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

The phoenix occupies an important position among ethnic minorities, among which the Hakka Han and She cultures are particularly important. They see the phoenix as a symbol of good things. The phoenix is often used as a decorative pattern. This belief is fully reflected in their clothing patterns and colors. For example, the patterns on the costumes, such as the mandarin duck playing lotus, the lotus giving birth to a noble son, the goddess of

mercy sending a child, the white-headed wealth, the dragon and the phoenix are auspicious, and the rich and longevity are related to people's good wishes for marriage and childbirth. For example, embroidered with phoenix, peony, tiger head, gossip, butterfly, rooster, pomegranate, spring flower, ruyi and other patterns, it entrusts people's blessings and hopes for children. Symbolic expressions, such as "dragon flying and phoenix dancing", "luan phoenix singing" and "colorful phoenix double flying" are not only wishes for a happy and harmonious life for the family. In some places, the village's ancestral hall was built as the town's fire god's tower, named "Longtian," which means "dragon and phoenix are auspicious", echoing the village's name of "Fengshan".

2.1.2 TOTEM WORSHIP

The ethnic minority She in Ganpo area is the majority, at the same time, they are also a nation that worships the phoenix totem, mainly reflected in the characteristics of the matrilineal clan era in ancient times and gradually replaced by the pangon totem of the patrilineal clan era, and the phoenix has become a national culture that only stays in the women's bodies. According to scholars' research, the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty distributed in the ancient Yugan region, in northeast Jiangxi, belonged to the Ganyue tribe, that is, an ancient Baiyue tribe's branch and many records show that the ancient Yue people once worshipped birds as totems. In addition, many cultural relics, unearthed in Jiangxi, also reflect the primitive bird-totem worship in the Ganpo region. Based on the information provided, it can be inferred that both the She and the ancient Yue worship bird totems, especially the phoenix totems. In She culture, this worship is mainly embodied in women, which may be related to the She people's history and cultural heritage. At the same time, the ancient Yue people once worshipped birds as totems, which can be confirmed by the cultural relics unearthed in Jiangxi. The images of these cultural relics all reflect the primitive bird-totem worship in the Ganpo region.

2.1.3 REPRODUCTIVE WORSHIP

The Ganpo region's architectural decoration is also often decorated with phoenix, such as at the Chejiang Academy, and the phoenix decoration on the eaves corner is used to represent the life's reproduction and the family's prosperity. These patterns seem to have magical powers. When the couple hugs each other and sleeps on the bed, they seem to be able to feel the sweetness and romance brought by the "mandarin duck playing in the water," as if they can hear the harmony and happiness in the "double phoenix sunrise." Every detail seems to tell one beautiful story after another. And those patterns and decorations are not only decorations, but also a kind of spiritual sustenance and comfort.

2.2 MAJOR CATEGORIES FORMED THROUGH CORE CODING

The task of core coding is to develop the nature and levels of categories and discover the underlying logical connections among them, thereby establishing the major categories and their subcategories (Birks; Mills, 2022, p. 6; Mohajan; Mohajan, 2022, p. 7). This study explores the artistic characteristics of Phoenix culture patterns in the Gan-Po region. It classifies them based on the logicity and inherent connections of corresponding categories at the conceptual level. Five major categories have been identified (see Table 2). Due to space limitations, only two areas will be expanded here.

Table 2 – Major Categories Formed through Core Coding

Major Category	Corresponding Categories	Category Connotations
Symbolic and Allegorical Features	Spiritual Beliefs	Spiritual beliefs have become the pursuit and yearning for a better life, carrying auspicious meanings and aspirations.
	Totem Worship	Phoenix totem worship is an early characteristic of matrilineal clans and minority groups in the Gan-Po region, representing the most primitive form of totem worship.
	Reproductive Worship	Phoenix decorative patterns represent the cultural phenomenon of reproductive worship in the Yuzhang region, commonly found in folk interior decorations, symbolizing the desire for early and noble offspring.
Ancient Traditional Value Concepts	Celestial Observations	Numerous ancient texts record that the Phoenix represents the southern direction among the four cardinal directions of “east, west, south, and north.”
	Views on Life and Death	Views on life and death reflect the ancient people’s understanding of the world and their longing for enlightenment, ascension, and immortality.
	Confucian Ethical Views	Confucian ethical views embody the universal values of benevolence and ritual propriety in the Yuzhang region, characterized by certain cultural customs and practices.
	Aesthetic Values	Aesthetic values represent the aesthetic preferences of ethnic minorities and serve as representatives of traditional culture.

Solidification of Traditional Aesthetic Symbols	Traditional Decorative Techniques	Traditional crafts of Phoenix patterns in the Yuzhang region encompass embroidery techniques, carving crafts, gilding techniques, and more.
	Simplification of Form	The main characteristic of Phoenix forms in the Yuzhang region is the transition from complexity to simplicity, emphasizing abstract representations.
	Elaborate Features	The Phoenix form features exaggerated long crests, round eyes, flowing double wings, and a concentrated tail, reflecting its prominent characteristics.
	Elaborate and Elegant Form	The Phoenix possesses a complex and elegant body shape, and its exquisite representation can be found in various unearthed artifacts.
	Interweaving Curves	Interweaving curves are the main composition of Phoenix patterns, ranging from representational forms to semi-abstract and abstract forms.
	Diverse Forms	Phoenix exhibits diverse forms, resembling Phoenix, luan, vermilion bird, golden chicken, white crane, and other avian or winged creatures.
Universal Characteristics	Decoration on Ancient Artifacts	Phoenix patterns have been present in the decoration of ancient artifacts.
	Symbol of Aristocratic Status	Phoenix patterns symbolize the noble status of nobles, scholars, and their ceremonial attire and daily necessities.
	Multicultural Symbols	Phoenix patterns have permeated the daily lives of various ethnic groups in the Yuzhang region, such as the She, Yao, and Zhuang ethnic groups, becoming cultural symbols of minority communities.
	Folklore Semantics	Folklore semantics encompass various folk activities, youth romance, and mythical legends.

Diverse Inheritance and Dissemination Characteristics	Artistic Form Inheritance	Artistic form inheritance involves the three-dimensional transformation and innovation of Phoenix patterns in flat designs, ensuring the continuity of morphological patterns.
	Traditional Craftsmanship Inheritance	Traditional craftsmanship has been preserved in contemporary works, including gilding techniques, carving crafts, embroidery techniques, and more.
	Traditional Ornamental Art and Cultural Heritage	Traditional ornamental art and cultural heritage possess sacredness, uniqueness, and artistic significance, positively influencing Chinese culture and art.
	Application and Dissemination in Contemporary Design	The application and dissemination of contemporary design are based on the historical continuity of decorative patterns and the inheritance of multiple cultural values. It plays a significant role in popularizing traditional Chinese culture and developing designs with Chinese characteristics.

Source: Illustrated by Dai Yijun (2023)

2.2.1 SYMBOLIC AND ALLEGORICAL FEATURES

According to the analysis of grounded theory, from the category and concept of open coding, we can conclude that, in spindle coding, the symbolic and schematic characteristics of the phoenix highlight its far-reaching values and emotional connotations. It not only represents the pursuit and yearning for a better life, but also places people's expectations for purity and happy love. At the same time, the phoenix, as a symbol of auspiciousness and nobility, brings blessings and hope to people. Therefore, the beautiful life and hope, contained in the phoenix's animal image, make it a symbol with profound and multidimensional meanings. This symbol not only embodies human emotions, but also symbolizes human emotions and values.

2.2.2 ANCIENT TRADITIONAL VALUES

According to the analysis of grounded theory, spindle coding embodies the characteristics of ancient traditional values. The phoenix, as the core element in the code, is regarded as a symbol of the south and is an indispensable and important element in the ethnic minorities' artistic aesthetics. It has a similar meaning to the vermilion bird. The image, represented by the phoenix, reflects the ancient people's concept of nature in the

world. The pattern of the phoenix bead expresses the people's deep yearning of the Han Dynasty for attaining the Tao and ascending to heaven and immortality. In addition, animals, such as turtles, phoenixes and lions, all have profound historical and cultural connotations in ancient societies, and they represent the core ideas of Confucianism, such as benevolence and propriety, and show the characteristics of ritual culture.

2.3 ARTISTIC FEATURES MODEL OF PHOENIX CULTURAL PATTERNS IN THE GAN-PO REGION

By organizing relevant literature, images, archaeological data, local records, and other textual and visual materials, related to the artistic features of Phoenix patterns in the Gan-Po region, a comprehensive “storyline” centered around the artistic features of Phoenix cultural patterns, in the Gan-Po region, was formed. This led to the construction of the Gan-Po Region Phoenix Cultural Pattern Artistic Features Path Model. The model consists of three major modules: symbolic and allegorical features, ancient traditional value concepts and solidifying traditional aesthetic symbols. These modules form the foundational characteristics of Phoenix art features in the Gan-Po region. It was discovered that these characteristics have a categorical relationship with universal features, which gave rise to the diverse inheritance and dissemination characteristics of regional Phoenix pattern motifs in contemporary society. The following sections will provide specific theoretical explanations for each dimension of the model.

3 COMPOSITION AND CONNOTATIONS OF PHOENIX CULTURAL PATTERN ARTISTIC FEATURES IN THE GAN-PO REGION

3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR FEATURES

From the Han Dynasty to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the symbolic and allegorical semantics of Phoenix patterns, in the Gan-Po region, originated from the cultural and artistic characteristics of spiritual beliefs, totem worship and reproductive one. The lifestyles, cultural customs and the diverse ethnic groups' ethnic characteristics, in the Gan-Po region, influenced these beliefs. They shaped the ancient Gan-Po society's historical and cultural evolution. They influenced the spiritual orientation of Phoenix culture and local customs in various regions of the Gan-Po water system, gradually forming distinctive cultural characteristics in the Gan-Po region (King, 2019, p. 200).

In ancient Gan-Po architecture, Phoenix decorations were used to ward off evil and symbolize the auspicious meaning of “dragons and Phoenix bring good fortune.” Especially in the embroidery patterns of Phoenix on traditional Gan-Po folk costumes, the continuation of Chu culture customs and specific allegorical meanings were explained, embodying the

intrinsic spiritual significance of Phoenix art and possessing cultural value across different periods. It reflects the collective and inherited characteristics of folk culture and art in ancient human societies. The symbolic and allegorical context of Phoenix imagery makes it an important cultural symbol in human society. The Phoenix culture, in the Gan-Po region, combines the consensus spiritual concepts of the Yellow River culture in the northern Central Plains and the Chu culture in the southern Yangtze River region. It gathers historical and cultural influences from different regions and affects the Gan-Po region's social and spiritual consciousness, and cultural forms under the Gan-Po water system. The visual culture, influenced by local ethnic wisdom and ethnic differences, has given rise to folk customs and traditions, characterized by "different customs over a thousand miles, and different styles over a hundred miles," endowing the visual culture and art with allegorical cultural features across different periods. This feature, influenced by changes in local history, economy, nature, ecology and population migration, has resulted in diverse regional cultural narratives with different allegorical meanings. In conclusion, the artistic forms of Phoenix pattern motifs, in the Gan-Po region, are rich in symbolism, using imagery to convey meaning, and have become diverse symbolic cultural symbols (King, 2019, p. 200).

In ancient times, the abundance of large lakes, in the Gan-Po region, attracted migratory birds to winter there, making it an intuitive way for early humans to understand their beliefs and way of life. The wars and population migrations, in the Gan-Po region of the Yangtze River Basin in ancient times, facilitated the integration of the Wu-Chu civilization with the local culture, enriching the infiltration, inheritance and dissemination of the Phoenix culture in the region's water system. Ancient records have documented the existence of totemic bird symbols, such as Phoenix, crows and roosters within the Shao Hao clan's tribes. In the "Yue Shi Jia", in *Historical Records*², "Yue King Goujian presented a bird pecking its neck." According to research, the prehistoric ancestors, who lived in the ancient Yugan area in northeastern Jiangxi during the Shang Dynasty, belonged to the Qianyue tribe. Many historical documents, such as *Yue Jue Shu*³, *Wu Yue Bei Shi* and *Shui Jing Zhu*⁴ recorded the ancient Yue tribe's phenomenon, revering bird totems. In addition, numerous artifacts unearthed in present-day Jiangxi, such as the bronze artifacts unearthed in Tongling, Ruichang City, during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the bird-shaped enamel pottery spinning wheels unearthed at the Wucheng site, in Zhangshu, and the bronze covers with Phoenix ornaments

² *Historical Records*, China's earliest chronicle of history, but also China's best history book, was compiled by Sima Qian of the Western Han Dynasty. He wrote from the legendary Yellow Emperor to the end of Emperor Wu's early years, of the Han Dynasty, in which the author lived up and down for 3,000 years. A total of 130 articles.

³ *Yue Jue Shu*, It is a miscellaneous history that records the local history of Wuyue in ancient times, also known as *Yue Jue Ji*, and the whole book has a total of 15 volumes. Some of these accounts are not found in other extant texts, but are unique to this book, while others can be invented and corroborated with other texts.

⁴ *Shui Jing Zhu*, It is a masterpiece of ancient Chinese geography, with a total of 40 volumes. The author is Li Daoyuan from the late Northern Wei Dynasty. It is the most comprehensive and systematic geographical work in ancient China.

found in the Han Dynasty Haihun Tomb, in Nanchang, all reflect the traces of early Phoenix totem worship in the Gan-Po region. These bird symbols were objects of totemic worship and represented fertility worship in ancient times. Legends, such as “Heavenly Destiny Mysterious Bird” and “Men from the Phoenix’s Lair”, and image paradigms, like “Mandarin Ducks Playing in the Water”, “Pair of Phoenixes Facing the Sun” and “Golden Phoenix Singing” were all narrative ways in which ancient traditions used images to convey cultural symbolism and showcase folk customs. They embodied human existential and spiritual thoughts and were manifestations of cultural narratives, related to Phoenix totem worship and symbolism.

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT TRADITIONAL VALUES

Phoenix imagery gave rise to ancient traditional values and became a narrative feature of Phoenix pattern designs in the Gan-Po region. Ancient people created the “Tian Xiang Guan (Heavenly Phenomenon Observation),” using divine birds to represent directions, reflecting their observation of celestial phenomena. In the paradigm of folk culture, the five directions of east, south, west, north and central are paired with five colors and five Phoenix, corresponding to the hierarchical ethical orientations in Confucian ideology. This establishes normative social patterns and structures. The ancient people’s appeal to Phoenix’s ethical culture gave rise to human views on life and death, which was one of the important historical and cultural reasons behind the formation of Phoenix images in the Gan-Po region.

The ancient Gan-Po region is the birthplace and prevalent area of Taoism, and Taoist teachings serve as the philosophical foundation for views on life and death. The Phoenix is one of the divine beings in the Taoist pantheon. Laozi’s statement of “Human follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows Dao, Dao follows Nature” establishes an ethical framework for the relationship between humans and nature, which influenced the Gan-Po region’s funeral customs during the Han Dynasty, where death was treated as a part of life. The unearthed artifacts, such as lacquerware, gold and jade objects featuring Phoenix motifs, found in the Han Dynasty tombs in Haihun marquis, bear witness to the ancient people’s yearning for eternal life and transcending the mortal realm. On the other hand, Confucian moral philosophy provides a better interpretation of the eternal and universal concepts, represented by auspicious Phoenix patterns in ancient society. Pre-Qin Confucianism and Daoism, as the standards of their time, have a certain inheritance and enduring cultural value significance for later dynasties. The moral principles of Confucianism and ethics became the rules for maintaining harmonious social relationships. The Southern Classics of the Classic of Mountains and Seas state, “The first text is called virtue, the winged text is called obedience, the back text is called righteousness, the breast text is called benevolence, and the abdominal text is called trust” (Xiao, 2019, p. 29). These cultural remnants associate the Phoenix’s image with ethical and cultural values, such as benevolence, righteousness, trust and virtue. The

diverse sociocultural expressions, derived from the Phoenix, encompass various fields of anthropology, including regional historical culture and social customs.

In the Gan-Po region, the discovery of the bronze Phoenix represents nobility through the Phoenix, a significant symbol associated with the royal family. It embodies the core values of Confucianism and the intellectual culture that promote wealth, wisdom and ethical ideals. Within social customs, the practice of wearing Phoenix garments by ethnic minorities, in Nankang County, and using feathered masks with headdresses, in Nanfeng County, symbolize the cultural values of female virtue, emphasizing ethical concepts, such as chastity, loyalty and benevolence. These cultural concepts, including narrative elements, constitute a system of human values and subjective experiences formed over time in human existence, thus establishing influences and constraints on moral sentiments and ethical values in ancient times, continually evolving towards deeper levels of rationality. The ethical and cultural concept of the Phoenix, representing benevolence and moral virtue, has also shaped the later Confucian scholars' and literati's expressions. Examples include the educational doctrines found in works like the *Three Character Classic*, the *Thousand Character Classic* and the *Disciple Rules*, as well as the reflection of Phoenix ethical culture, as a cultural heritage, in the family and national spirits, as exemplified by Zeng Guofan's "Ten Principles of Housekeeping and Child Rearing" during the modern era. The Phoenix's cultural imagery has evolved over different historical periods and societal contexts, leaving a diverse range of traditional cultural values, imprinted in traditional residential architecture, and the ethnic minorities' attire. Ultimately, it constructs a regional context and semantic meaning that showcases the distinctive cultural characteristics of Gan-Po and traditional culture.

3.3 SOLIDIFICATION OF SYMBOLIC CHARACTERISTICS IN TRADITIONAL AESTHETICS

Through organizing and analysis, it has been found that the traditional aesthetic orientations, regarding the Gan-Po Phoenix, tend to lean towards design applications. They primarily involve the constraints imposed by factors, such as the Phoenix's social culture and ideological perspectives, in the Gan-Po region and the North-South regions, on aesthetic value orientations, thus giving rise to different Phoenix symbols. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of paradigmatic types of symbolic feature aesthetics culture to thoroughly explore the traditional aesthetic values of Gan-Po Phoenix patterns, forms and other visual representations. Since the establishment of Yuzhang Commandery, during the Western Han Dynasty and continuing into the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Han Dynasty Phoenix imagery has become a symbol of solidified folk culture. At the same time, the Gan-Po region serves as a convergence point of the North-South water systems, and its aesthetic culture has absorbed the distinctive features of both the northern Central Plains culture and the southern Chu one. It is precisely the result of the fusion of these different cultures that has

shaped the characteristics and aesthetic orientations of the solidified symbolic representation of the Gan-Po Phoenix imagery.

Through comparative analysis of the Gan-Po Phoenix's cultural paradigms and the Phoenix from the North and South regions since the Western Han Dynasty, it has been found that, on the one hand, the Phoenix figurine patterns have evolved into spiral and scroll patterns, forming artistic expressions and semantic intentions. The influences of craftsmanship from the North and South have transcended geographical and historical boundaries, permeating and constructing China's traditional art forms. From tangible forms, they have transitioned into a context of auspicious symbolism, becoming a unique aesthetic paradigm within Chinese social folk image studies. On the other hand, the solidified symbolic representation of the Gan-Po Phoenix imagery incorporates aesthetic value orientations from the Chu culture of the Yangtze River basin in the South and the Qin culture of the Central Plains in the North. It embodies the folk aesthetic paradigm with distinctive regional characteristics of the Gan-Po plain. This can also be observed in ancient architecture, carved art images, clothing image, and object ones during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Further research reveals that the aesthetic values, associated with Phoenix imagery, have transformed into a guiding force for social and cultural spirituality, carrying significant meaning in inheritance and dissemination. In terms of form, they align closely with descriptions found in ancient texts, such as the depiction in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas-Southern Mountains* as "resembling a rooster, with five colors and patterns, known as the Phoenix" and the description in the *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* as "The anterior part resembles a wild goose, while the posterior part resembles a moose; the neck resembles a snake and the tail resembles a fish; there are dragon patterns on the body, resembling a turtle in overall form; the mouth resembles a swallow, and the beak resembles a chicken". By examining the hanging golden rooster images, used in the Gan-She ethnic group's ceremonies, the Phoenix and bird on walls and windows in Chenji fang Township, Jinxi County, Fuzhou, and the Phoenix feather crowns in clothing, it is evident that the images closely related to the Phoenix, with different names, such as Huang, Luan, Zhu Que, Zhu Niao and Jin Ji, indicate that any bird-like creature with wings could potentially be the Phoenix's prototype or derivative (Yu, 2022, p. 5).

By comparing and analyzing the similarities and differences between the Gan-Po Phoenix's cultural paradigms and the southern and northern Phoenix from the Western Han Dynasty, it is found that, on the one hand, the Phoenix sculpture patterns have evolved into water wave patterns and curling vine patterns, forming intentions and semantics of artistic expression. The craftsmen's influence from the north and south has transcended geographical and historical boundaries and mutually permeated, thus constructing China's traditional art form, moving from concrete forms towards contexts, seeking auspicious meanings and becoming a unique aesthetic paradigm culture in Chinese social imagery studies. On the other hand, the aesthetic value orientation of the Gan-Po Phoenix imagine integrates the

aesthetic values of the Chu culture in the Yangtze River basin, in the south, and the Qin culture in the Central Plains, in the north. It possesses the local folk aesthetic paradigm with the characteristic of the Gan-Po plain in the south. It can also be extended to ancient architecture, three-dimensional carving art, clothing, and artifact images of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Further research reveals that transforming the aesthetic values of Phoenix images into the guiding principles of social and cultural spirits has significant meaning in inheritance and dissemination value. The depiction of the Phoenix, in terms of its form, matches the descriptions found in ancient texts, such as the depiction in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas-Southern Mountain Classic* which states, “It resembles a rooster, with five colors and patterns, known as the Phoenix” and the description in the *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* that describes, “The anterior part resembles a wild goose, while the posterior part resembles a moose; the neck resembles a snake, and the tail resembles a fish; there are dragon patterns on the body, resembling a turtle in overall form; the mouth resembles a swallow, and the beak resembles a chicken”. By examining the gold rooster drawings, used in the Gran-She people’s worship, the Phoenix on the Chen Jifang Village’s walls and windows, in Jinxi County, Fuzhou, and the Phoenix feather crowns, worn as part of the attire, it can be concluded that images with avian attributes are likely to be the Phoenix’s prototypes or derivatives, even if they have different names.

3.4 UNIVERSAL SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FOLK CULTURAL

41 bird images, representing the Phoenix’s 11 types, five regions and three eras in different historical conditions, in the Gan-Po region, were organized to present the universal social characteristics. These characteristics are manifested in the decorative patterns or motifs featuring the Phoenix found in the local ethnic minorities’ artifacts, ancient architecture and traditional costumes, in the Gan-Po region. The Phoenix’s early portrayal represented the social status of the aristocracy and intellectuals’, as it was associated with imperial authority. This can be observed in the nobles’ and officials’ (as the Liang Phoenix) daily utensils and travel-related decorations, the government officials’ and intellectuals’ attire, and the decorative use of the Phoenix on women’s headpieces. However, as the social and historical processes unfolded, the Phoenix’s cultural attributes gradually permeated into everyday life among the general population. It became a common symbol of auspiciousness used in special occasions and rituals within the folk society. Examples include the ethnic minorities’ festive ceremonies, such as the She, Yao, Manchu and Hui, in the Gan-Po region, the Phoenix depicted on the gate towers of the Ji’an guildhall, the folk stories and customs related to marriage, the naming of ancient architectural structures and the ethnic minorities’ traditional costumes in Yifeng County. These various contexts retained numerous visual representations of the Phoenix symbol, demonstrating the fusion of Feng culture with the agrarian culture of Gan-Po, and

becoming a localized social and cultural phenomenon. It interprets various ethnic minorities' cultural symbols and the history of Chinese traditional culture, embodying anthropological cultural connotations and the universal value characteristics of folk spirit culture in human society's different periods (Zhang, 2022, p. 114).

3.5 PLURALISTIC INHERITANCE AND DISSEMINATION

The Phoenix patterns, in the Gan-Po region, inherit traditional cultural artistic forms and techniques. Combining diverse craftsmanship techniques, such as porcelain patterns, tile designs, traditional clothing and tie-dye works, perfectly demonstrates the translation from ancient forms to modern art. Simultaneously, the Phoenix patterns borrow, absorb, blend and recombine with the local ethnic minority cultures while improving and enhancing the charm of traditional ethnic cultures. The Phoenix patterns have been widely applied in various fields, including ancient architectural decoration projects, ethnic minority costume designs, cultural tourism product development, furniture and daily life decorations, and image digitization. With its frequent application of symbolic meanings, traditional values and artistic aesthetics, the Phoenix pattern has become one of the symbols of Chinese traditional culture, allowing for wider inheritance and exploration. This has significant implications for promoting China's excellent traditional cultural arts.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically analyzed the Phoenix's artistic characteristics in the Gan-Po region, based on grounded theory, and constructed an artistic feature model of Phoenix patterns in the Gan-Po region. This model represents the local cultural heritage, under the framework of Chinese traditional culture, and holds universal social and cultural value, as well as academic significance in the field of anthropological and cultural studies. By effectively promoting the recreation of theory in practice, it is possible to deepen the guiding role of core values of Chinese culture in contemporary humanistic values, thereby enhancing the promotion of regional folk art at a national level. This study also represents an important academic exploration of the core values of art anthropology.

The data used in this research was derived from a wide range of sources, including literature, images, archaeology, local chronicles, and other textual and visual materials, related to the Phoenix's artistic patterns in the Gan-Po region. Efforts were made to ensure comprehensiveness and integrity. However, due to subjective factors, some degree of subjectivity is unavoidable. Although this paper has conducted relevant theoretical validations of the artistic characteristics of Phoenix patterns, there is still room for improvement in related research. Phoenix patterns are one of the typical symbols in traditional Chinese cultural art

and hold extensive practical value. There are still opportunities for further exploration in preserving and inheriting traditional cultural art, promoting education and dissemination, fostering innovative development, and facilitating communication and exchange.

PROJECT FUNDING

This article is supported by the 2023 Humanities and Social Sciences Research of the Ministry of Education (Research on Cultural Transmission of Artifacts and Images of the Haihun Marquis state) Project (23YJC760018).

REFERENCES

- BIRKS, M.; MILLS, J. **Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide**. Limited Publications: Sage, 2022.
- CHEN, X. M. **The Quality of Social Science**. Beijing: Educational Science Press, 2002.
- GUAN, N. The Triple Meaning of the Subjective Construction of Contemporary Chinese Culture. **Journal of Shandong University** (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), v. 1, p. 82-95, 2022.
- KING, P. E. Religion and Identity: The Role of Ideological, Social, and Spiritual Contexts. *In*: FURROW, J. L.; WAGENER, L. M. (ed.). **Beyond the Self: Perspectives on Identity and Transcendence Among Youth – a Special Issue of applied Developmental Science**. New York: Routledge, 2019. p. 197-204.
- LIU, J. H. **Collective Remembering and the Making of Political Culture**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- MA, T.; LV, L.; TAN, W.; CHEN, R.; PAN, H. Regeneration Research on the Rural Landscape Based on Cultural Gene. **IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science**, v. 310, n. 2, 022076, 2019.
- MOHAJAN, D.; MOHAJAN, H. **Memo Writing Procedures in Grounded Theory Research Methodology**. Paradigm Academic Press, 2022.
- MOHAJAN, D.; MOHAJAN, H. **Glaserian Grounded Theory and Straussian Grounded Theory: Two Standard Qualitative Research Approaches in Social Science**. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, v12, 2023.
- RÊGO, A. D. S.; RADOVANOVIC, C. A. T.; HADDAD, M. D. C. F. L.; SANTOS, J. L. G. D. *et al.* Use of Grounded Theory in the Extraction, Coding, and Analysis of Data in Literature Meta-Analyses. **Texto & Contexto - Enfermagem**, v. 32, 2023.
- ROTHKO, M. **The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art**. London: Yale University Press, 2023.
- TIMMERMANS, S.; TAVORY, I. Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. **Sociological Theory**, v. 30, n. 3, p.167-186, 2012.
- TUCKER, T.N. Grounded Theory Generation: A Tool for Transparent Concept Development. **Journal of International Studies Perspectives**, v. 17, n. 4, p. 426-438, 2016.

XIAO, J. Y. **Shanghai Sutra**. Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education Press, v. 01, n. 29, 2019.

YANG, R. **The Chinese Idea of a University: Phoenix Reborn**. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022.

YU, L.; ZHANG, X.X. Research on the Phoenix Pattern of Silk of Chu State During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods from the Perspective of Semiotics. **Silk**, v. 59, n. 11, p. 133-142, 2022.

YU, W. T. Take “Body in Space” As the Symbol. **Journal of Shanghai University** (Social Sciences Edition), v. 39, n. 2, 2022.

ZHANG, L.Y. The Practice and Function of Ancestor Worship in Chinese Society. **Praxis, Folks’ Beliefs, And Rituals: Explorations in the Anthropology of Religion**, p. 48-56, 2022.

ZHANG, Z. P. Research on the Innovation Mechanism of the Business Model of Cultural Enterprises Based on Grounded Theory. **Journal of Theory**, v. 4, p. 109-116, 2022.

ZHOU, L.Y. The Aesthetic Value of Chu Art from the Image of “Chu Feng”. **Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities** (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), v. 6, p. 141-143, 2006.