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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores an innovative approach to communicating and revitalizing traditional Chinese stories through the art of character design applied to artifacts in the British Museum. The author is a commercial illustrator inspired by traditional Chinese culture and dedicated to communicating the beauty and richness of it to a global audience.

This study aims to breathe new life into cultural artifacts by combining visual art and character design to transform Chinese artifacts into vivid characters. The thesis discusses the unlimited potential of character design for cultural communication and heritage preservation and how this approach can increase the visibility and impact of artifacts in the international community. After an in-depth analysis of four critical artifacts' historical and cultural context, the author created characters that embodied these artifacts and imagined them telling their historical stories.

The research results reflect the author's exploration of her artistic practice and contribution to preserving and promoting China's cultural heritage. Through art, the author hopes to give voice to the silent parts of history, revitalize ancient cultural heritage in contemporary times, and foster understanding and respect between different civilizations.

CULTURAL REBIRTH:

The Application of Character Design in the Promotion of Chinese Cultural Heritage

by

Fan Tang

B.F.A, China Academy of Art, 2019

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Illustration.

Syracuse University

August 2024

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INTRODUCTION

As a Chinese national, I am imbued with a deep cultural pride. From a young age, I studied the four traditional Chinese arts, fostering my love for the culture and giving me an intimate familiarity with the art's historical and cultural significance. This profound connection to tradition and my experience as a commercial illustrator grants me a unique perspective on art and cultural heritage. As a professional, I have always had a deep interest in character design. In my artistic practice, character design means more than making images attractive; it's a powerful tool for injecting new meanings into cultural content. Through research on the promotion of Chinese artifacts in the British Museum, I realized that the transformation of these inert pieces of Chinese artifacts into living, breathing characters with new storylines and backgrounds can help increase the impression of these objects on a multicultural audience. I hope to use my talents to bring global awareness to the beauty and richness of Chinese culture.

For this paper, using character design as cultural promotion will be discussed in detail, based on a multi-perspective view of how artful methods can advance the internationalization of cultural heritage. Within the entire framework of globalization and cultural diversity, the problem of dissemination and protection of cultural heritage is significant. Cultural heritage is not one facet of history but an important bridge linking different civilizations, promoting the mutual understanding and exchange between different cultures. The core of this research is to explore how to combine character design with the background of cultural heritage as a new promotional strategy.

This paper will examine the historical and cultural background of several specific Chinese artifacts chosen to represent a historical range and variety of forms. For the visual

thesis, I created characters and drew comics to tell their stories. Hopefully, this will make global audiences enjoy something different and bring new ideas regarding methods of dissemination and protection of Chinese culture and heritage.

THE IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Definition and Scope of Chinese Cultural Heritage

A rich tapestry of historical, aesthetic, and social values—that is all part of the Chinese cultural heritage. This heritage is spread across the country, making for a long history and great diversity, encompassing all walks of life. The classical gardens of China, silk and tea trade routes, and masterpieces in literature are all witnesses and testimonials of outstanding achievements in civilization, artistic accomplishment, and philosophical development through millennia in China. These elements show China's historical trajectory and strengthen its collective identity and cultural continuity.

Impacts of War, Colonialism and Conflict on Cultural Heritage

Chinese cultural heritage has constantly experienced huge setbacks throughout history. In times of war and colonialism, wars have often brought about devastating impacts, causing the destruction and loss of some cultural heritage. During internal and external turmoil in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, numerous Chinese artifacts were looted and carted out. Many cultural treasures were widely plundered during the Opium Wars (1840-1842), the Boxer Rebellion (1900), and other conflicts. During that time, colonial powers, including Britain, France, and Japan, looted significant artifacts from palaces, temples, and tombs. The looting was especially notorious in 1860 during the sacking of the Old Summer Palace by the British and French armies, and a large number of works of art and manuscripts were stolen. These cultural relics now reside everywhere but in China.

Internal conflicts also resulted in severe losses to Chinese cultural heritage. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is the most notable example. Many historical artifacts, ancient buildings, and cultural artworks became the target of politically motivated destruction and were called the “Four Olds” (Old Ideas, Old Culture, Old Customs, Old Habits). In this decade, numerous temples, ancestral halls, and traditional buildings were pulled down by the Red Guards, whereby the transmission of China's intangible cultural heritage suffered irremediable damage (Gao, 2008). The impact of such lootings is much more than physical loss; it signifies deep cultural trauma and is a significant disruption of historical continuity. The removal of artifacts kindled a debate on the ethics of repatriation and the responsibilities of the contemporary museum.

Modern Expressions of Cultural Confidence and National Spirit in China

Responding to this history of challenges to cultural heritage, China embarked on a journey of revival characterized by the re-establishment of artistic confidence and national spirit, manifesting in post-reform measures and policies. For example, established by the Government of China and the Law of the People's Republic of China is the Protection of Cultural Relics (Law, 2005), which stipulates regulations for the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage for the restoration and maintenance of historical sites, the recovery of looted fine arts, and the promotion of traditional arts and crafts. The overseas Chinese communities also supported efforts by various governments to monitor the return of Chinese artifacts. The British and French forces sacked the Yuanmingyuan, also known as the Old Summer Palace, in Beijing in 1860, and many precious relics, including the bronze animal heads of the Chinese zodiac, were lost. The Yuanmingyuan was a sprawling palace with gardens

that served as an imperial residence. In 2000, China's Poly Group purchased the bull's, tiger's, and monkey's heads at auction, while Stanley Ho gifted the pig's head in 2003 and the horse's head in 2007. Finally, the French Pinot family donated the rat's head and the rabbit's head to China in 2013. Although the whereabouts of the remaining heads remain unknown, the return of other bronze animal heads signifies that efforts to preserve China's cultural heritage have been fruitful. This success has sparked growing public interest in the arts, fueled not only by government initiatives but also by increased engagement through education, media, and tourism. Various provinces' cultural and tourism bureaus have actively propagated China's rich cultural heritage through festivals, museum exhibitions, and digital platforms, both inside China and beyond.

Moreover, in contemporary Chinese art, traditional elements are increasingly incorporated into modern expressions, becoming a new cultural phenomenon that functions as the so-called “Guo-Chao,” a blending of Chinese-specific elements and modern popular elements to make a traditional local culture trendy fashion. This fusion highlights China’s historical achievements and positions its cultural heritage as a dynamic part of the global cultural landscape.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHARACTER DESIGN

Definition, Basic Elements, and Goals of Character Design

Character design is the artistic process of creating characters with unique identities and characteristics, commonly used in films, television, games, animation, books, comics, and other forms of entertainment or artistic works. As defined by Adrienne Shaw (2014), the goal of character design is “to create characters that people find attractive and believable.”

Another crucial element to character design is the character’s personality traits. The essence of character design lies in shaping the character’s temperament, interests, values, and emotional responses. A well-designed character should be psychologically complex and charismatic, allowing the audience to believe in their authenticity and resonate with them.

A well-thought-out backstory is meaningful to the character, helping the audience understand the character’s complexity. The backstory encompasses the character's identity, experiences, and interpersonal relationships. Who the character is and what happened in their family's past greatly influences where they are now and why; the character's motivations and goals drive the storyline. The characters' experiences are an integral part of the story, and it is in the evolution of the characters through the different stages of their experiences that the backstory becomes interesting.

Finally, there are the interpersonal relationships. These relationships and interactions help to further reflect the multifaceted nature of the characters and how they fit into their world, making them more nuanced and the story more exciting. In more layered projects, this is not enough—for example, it is necessary to pay attention to the cultural and social environments in

which the characters live. Whether it's an imaginary story or a real adventure, if the characters can be placed in a believable setting, it will appeal more to the reader or viewer.

Principles, Techniques of Character Design and Their Application in Storytelling

Character design is often an iterative process that is used to create visually appealing and narratively rich characters. Feedback is an important aspect of the design process, and regular review and critique can help further refine a character design to remain consistent with the original narrative intent.

Characters and stories go hand-in-hand. Good character design generally begins with detailed background research, which is the first step in establishing a comprehensive design foundation. Illustrators need to analyze existing data from different sources, such as previous backgrounds, cultural resources, and current trends, to gather creative ideas. We need to create a worldview with the era in which the character is set: past, present, or future; as well as the style of the world: modern, fantasy, steampunk, cyberpunk, and so on. This extensive research triggers concept sketches. Exploratory sketching refines and explores the visual image and characteristics of the character. According to Jeanne Gustafson's (1990) course report on character design, successful character design starts with visual representation. Visual representation includes the character's body shape, clothing, and color scheme.

As the initial visual image of the character begins to take shape, the design work needs to focus on the characters' details. The character's identity, experiences, and relationships are related to the character's appearance, ensuring that thought processes are logical and making actions and decisions more believable. For example, in the Harry Potter stories, the lightning bolt-shaped scar on Harry Potter's forehead was left by Voldemort when he tried to kill him

after killing his parents as a child. The scar is not only a physical mark but also a symbol of his past painful experiences. This experience had a profound effect on his subsequent growth.

Author J. K. Rowling's portrayal of a protagonist who can give more love to others despite being in a love-starved environment is deeply impressive.

The next important stage is the expressive part of the visual narrative. The characters in these stories should be expressed in cartoons or animations through their expressions, movements, and interactions. Comprehensive artistic expression will bring the characters to life and make the story more attractive and relatable.

The Role of Character Design in Cultural Dissemination and Heritage Preservation

Character design is significant in various cultural dissemination and heritage preservation projects. As a strong visual and emotional communication tool, character design can quickly capture the public's attention and enhance the accessibility of social and cultural content. Cultural stories and values can be expressed in a way that can be understood quickly by reinforcing striking and relatable characters. This visual storytelling approach also ensures that cultural heritage can be preserved and interpreted in contemporary discourses that affect young generations or individuals not native to a culture. For example, in the history of American animation, the cultural background of different regions has been seen to encourage divergent character styles and ideologies. West Coast styles are focused on middle-class values and favor children and animal characters. In contrast, the New York style is designed to reach adults, examining social topics and often features characters from the working class (Langer, 1990).

Concerning heritage interpretation, character design can be used to reenact and render historical artifacts and traditional narratives in a new and exciting form: designing characters for

artifacts, not as history reenacted, but as a renaissance by which old cultures remain vibrantly sustained, and new public interest is aroused to explore the source.

Characters also have a place in providing education. Characters are loaded with narrative and emotional depths, making complex historical and cultural contexts comprehensible and engaging, thereby making the educational content effective. This approach is vital in the era of globalization, as there are cultural and linguistic differences that can be bridged by clever character design and storytelling.

CASE STUDY: CHARACTER DESIGN INFLUENCED BY THE SANXINGDUI RELIC

Introduction of Sanxingdui Excavations

In Sichuan Province, an internationally renowned site was discovered in the late 1920s, and massive excavation was carried out in the 1980s. The unearthed artifacts of Sanxingdui date to the Bronze Age—somewhere around 1200-1000 BCE—an era that includes giant bronze statues, masks, jade, and gold. In style and artistry, they are unique and represent a highly developed civilization that was unknown to history at that time. The archaeological discovery was a significant breakthrough and revolution in the understanding of ancient Chinese civilization. In contrast, the mystery of the sudden disappearance of this civilization adds to the enigma of Sanxingdui. Visual media professionals studied this research to bring the archaeological findings to a general audience, not just international researchers and academics.



Figure 1. Sanxingdui Sculpture, Xinghua News, 2021

How Character Design Revises Sanxingdui Artifacts

Character design has been a significant way to bring Sanxingdui artifacts back to life, transforming them from static museum pieces into dynamic representations that resonate with contemporary audiences. In 2023, the famous Chinese game *Genshin Impact* collaborated with the Sanxingdui Museum to integrate several features from the Sanxingdui artifacts into the game. This collaboration turned the game's extremely popular character Zhong Li into an ambassador for ancient culture, introducing limited edition character Sanxingdui-style dress-ups, props, theme songs, lines, and episodes, attracting nearly 10,000 players to visit the Sanxingdui Museum in just two days. Overseas players of *Genshin Impact* also produced many live gameplay videos to introduce the linkage event, greatly promoting the international reputation of Sanxingdui.



Figure 2. *Sanxingdui Museum and Genshin Impact Game Poster, Genshin Impact, 2023*

Before the Sanxingdui Museum and Genshin Impact collaboration, games based on Sanxingdui artifacts had been launched on various museum websites. The animation film *Sanxingdui-Glory Awakening*, themed “Traveling through the Era of Sanxingdui,” has also appeared frequently on mainstream Chinese platforms. Translating the archaeological achievements of Sanxingdui into exciting stories and imaginative interactions is not only educational but also entertaining, fostering a deeper connection with the cultural heritage of Sanxingdui and significantly stimulating the audience's interest in history and archaeology.



Figure 3. *Sanxingdui: Glory Awakening* Animation Poster, Hongxing News, 2019

To utilize these ideas in the creative process for these other media forms, designers began by extracting key elements from archaeological findings, focusing on the iconic bronze masks of Sanxingdui, known for their exaggerated facial features, intricate patterns, and symbolic motifs. These elements were then re-imagined and integrated into character designs to

capture the essence and mystery of Sanxingdui culture. For instance, in *Sanxingdui: Glory Awakening*, a character named Gaiqi, a robot hero, features a striking mask-like face inspired by the Sanxingdui bronze masks. This design choice reflects the powerful and enigmatic aura of the original artifacts. Gaiqi's costume and accessories incorporate patterns and colors from historical artifacts, enhancing the connection between the character and its cultural heritage.



Figure 4. *Sanxingdui: Glory Awakening*, Character Design of Gaiqi, Souhu News, 2019

The Public Appeal of Character Design

The successful interpretation of Sanxingdui artifacts underscores the pivotal role of innovative expression in cultural preservation and education. By transforming these ancient relics into dynamic, lifelike representations, modern audiences find them more engaging and relatable. Designers have revitalized Sanxingdui characters by embedding them in various

media such as animations, video games, comic books, and virtual environments. This shift not only makes the artifacts more appealing but also situates them within a decentralized museum framework, leveraging cloud storage for broader accessibility beyond traditional museum confines. This approach fosters a more interactive and immersive cultural experience, enhancing appreciation and understanding of historical artifacts.

CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

With digital media becoming a primary platform for telling new stories, it has opened up new opportunities for modern creators, bringing their work to a worldwide audience that generations of past storytellers could never have. Animations, video games, social media campaigns, and interactive experiences have gained prominence as modes through which to disseminate research. They make much of the complex cultural and academic knowledge more accessible through visual and narrative appeal. Digital media allows characters to flow freely in many forms: they are pixelated participants in virtual exhibitions, interactive timelines on web pages, and VR/AR tours in museums; they make history dynamic and alive for audiences.

Original Characters and Webtoons

One of the most exciting applications of character design in digital media is Webtoons, a trendy online comic format that is used worldwide. Originally from South Korea, Webtoons are known for their unique vertical scrolling format; the reading of long-strip comics became much more accessible, corresponding to people's habits of using smartphones and tablets, unlike traditional flip-over comics. Webtoons have brought about a new serialization style that modernizes production and consumption in the comic world, leaving behind the traditional print.

Successful Webtoon original characters require excellent design and storytelling. Webtoon creators can create characters that embody rich narratives by drawing inspiration from heritage and history. It is not surprising to find that many Webtoons use the backdrop of ancient mythology and the personification of mythological characters as modern individuals who reenact ancient stories in the present world. Examples include the successful short comic series

Feirenzai. The team of author Xu Manxin (pen name Yifang Air) anthropomorphized various monsters in the ancient Chinese *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and used their daily life stories to echo the book's records. Because of this comic series, many young people have been drawn to read the ancient Chinese book *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, along with other related ancient books that protect the Chinese myth stories.



Figure 5. *Feirenzai* Poster, FenZ Culture, 2017

Webtoons' blend of visual creativity and compelling storylines makes them widely appealing. For a Webtoon artist to be successful in this very competitive market, sketching the character plays an essential role in gaining favor with audiences. The characters should be able to click visually and must have distinct features, habits, and expressions that captivate readers. Characters in Webtoons are developed serially so that readers can get to know them thoroughly, and this is how authors can engage readers.

Original Characters and Mobile Games

An interesting example of using character design for cultural promotion is the Chinese mobile game *The Tale Of Food*. This game aims to promote famous dishes from all over China. The creative team researched the eight major Chinese cuisines, listed dozens of dishes from different regions, and then created characters based on the appearance of the dishes, the traditional culture of the place the dish comes from, the way the dish is made, and the history that the dish represents. For example, the character “Dumpling” is a doctor because a famous doctor historically made dumplings to help the poor in winter. As such, the character's clothes refer to the visual elements of ancient doctors and New Year's Eve customs. Due to his identity, the character is also designed to be calm and gentle. The character design contains a considerable amount of information, from the appearance to the mannerisms to the props' details.



Figure 6. Character Design of Dumpling, The Tale Of Food, 2019

Game developers can integrate traditional cultural elements into the game's worldview, plot, character design, and visual effects, reproducing traditional culture in a novel and unique

way and giving it a new lease of life in a modern context. Mobile games have a large user base and are especially popular among young people. The games also provide a highly interactive experience where players can understand and feel traditional culture more deeply by controlling their characters and participating in the plot. The social functions in the game also help accelerate the spread of information and create a word-of-mouth effect, further expanding the influence of original characters and traditional culture.

VISUAL THESIS: FROM ARTIFACTS TO CHARACTER DESIGN

Research and Selection of Cultural Relics

Cultural relics are essential as objects of creation because they are not only material evidence of history but also cultural and historical representatives of an era. Through the study and interpretation of cultural relics, we can learn about the level of science, as well as the process technology of the time. For example, the production of ceramics reveals the kiln firing techniques of that period, while bronze artifacts demonstrate smelting techniques.

Cultural relics also reflect people's lives. By examining these artifacts, we can gain insights into past clothing, food, housing, and customs. Statues and portraits in paintings, for instance, display the clothing and fashion of their respective times. Additionally, cultural relics can indicate a country's economic situation; trade with foreign countries often leaves traces of foreign cultures, evident in the artifacts. For example, during the Yuan Dynasty, the thriving trade and cultural exchange between the East and West led to the introduction of cobalt material from West Asia—known as Sumaliqing—into China, which gave the blue and white porcelain its vivid and bright blue color.

Selecting suitable cultural relics for personification in this project has proven to be a complex task. To address this, the author has formulated three criteria for preliminary screening:

1. **Historical Value:** This criterion considers whether the cultural relic is related to a specific historical event or influential person, such as a war, revolution, a particular emperor, or a famous historical figure.

2. Artistic Value: This involves evaluating whether the cultural relic showcases the highest caliber of artistry and level of production technology for its time, such as advanced painting or firing techniques. It also considers the use of rare materials like gold or ore and whether the design of the relic reflects the aesthetic trends of its era.
3. Cultural Value: This criterion assesses what the artifact means to China and whether the relic itself is topical, attracting public attention and helping people understand history and culture.

Based on these criteria, combined with current real-time news and topics of widespread interest, I initially narrowed the scope to Chinese cultural relics in the British Museum and listed nine candidates. I then delved into each artifact's history to understand its story and value, comparing, analyzing, scoring, and ranking them according to my criteria. Their loss serves as a reminder for the Chinese to cherish and protect our cultural heritage more fervently, highlighting the importance of cultural exchange and mutual respect.

Character Design

Ultimately, I chose four cultural relics for character design: the Bronze Kanghou Gui, the copy of *the Admonitions Scroll*, the David Vase, and the Dragon Pattern Glass. At first, I started by setting their ages based on the year they were made. The Kanghou Gui, being the earliest and from the BC era, inspired me to depict it as a monster reminiscent of prehistoric beasts. The Dragon Glaze, which is the closest in date to the present, is portrayed as a child. The David Vase is depicted with youthful characteristics to embody its elegant and vibrant design. The Copy of *the Admonitions Scroll* is intended to be depicted as an older woman, but due to

the painting's excellent preservation, she is portrayed as a mature woman. In creating their images, I incorporated some shapes, colors, or decorative elements from the artifacts into the character designs to further strengthen the fictional connection between the characters and the artifacts.

Bronze Kanghou Gui: A Strong Bronze Monster

The Bronze Kanghou Gui from the Early Western Zhou Dynasty (1050-770 B.C) is a significant cultural artifact housed in the British Museum (Museum Number: 1977,0404.1). The vessel features an open mouth, a rounded neck, a bulging belly, and double-ring handles. Both symmetrical half-ring handles are adorned with cocked-nosed animal heads. Each head is depicted as a fierce beast with long teeth, sharp horns, and large square ears, devouring a small bird with its beak visible in the monster's mouth. The mouth and foot of the Gui are interspersed with fire and eye motifs, while the belly is incised with smooth, dense vertical stripes (BBC, 2014).



Figure 7. Bronze Kanghou Gui, The British Museum, 1977,0404.1

An inscription on the underside of the bronze vessel records how Kang Shufeng (Kang Hou), the brother of King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty, acquired the territory of the state of Wei and detailed a failed rebellion against the Zhou, known as the “Rebellion of the Three Prisoners.” This 24-character inscription is crucial for dating the artifact and is a typical representative of the development of inscriptions on Western Zhou bronzes. It records three major historical events in the early Western Zhou period and provides key evidence for determining its age.

In the twentieth year of the Republic of China (1931), in Xincun, a village in China's Henan Province, villagers discovered the Kanghou Gui while digging. The discovery of the ancient tomb behind it attracted the attention of many grave robbers and artifact smugglers. According to Sun Haibo's “Joon County Yi Ware,” the Henan provincial government later learned of the raid, punished the county governor, and searched for the bandits' leader, which helped curb the wave of illegal excavations (Sun, 1937). Despite the government's and relevant departments' efforts to maintain and excavate the ancient tombs, China was experiencing turbulent times, leading to the sale of countless cultural relics to Europe and the United States.

The excavation and loss of the Kanghou Gui became a sore point in Chinese history. After more than 70 years of wandering, this artifact was finally collected by the British Museum, becoming a valuable cultural relic that bears witness to the history and culture of ancient China.



Figure 8, Bronze Kanghou Gui Character Design, Fan Tang, 2024

The character design retains the bronze texture of the Gui and dark green color tone, conveying a sense of age and the historical weight of the artifact. The two double-ring handles of the Gui are painted as strong arms, symbolizing strength and resilience, enhancing the character's sense of majesty while echoing the importance of the Gui as a sacrificial artifact. The original inscription on the inside of the Gui was moved to the outside and designed in the shape of a band to record the story of the deceased, making the inscription more eye-catching. The head of the character is designed to resemble a warrior's helmet, symbolizing protection and courage. The ornamentation and detailing on the character's body refer to the patterns and carvings of the Gui, bringing it closer to the appearance of the original artifact.

Copy of *the Admonitions Scroll*: A Demure and Elegant Woman

The copy of *the Admonitions Scroll* is a Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) replica of the original painting, one of the treasures of the British Museum (Museum Number: 1903,0408,0.1). It is the earliest surviving Chinese silk canvas and the first to combine painting with calligraphy and writing, laying the foundation for Chinese literati painting, which persisted for over a thousand years. The original painting, “the Drawing of the Admonitions of the Instructress to Court Ladies” by Gu Kaizhi, a revered artist of the Jin Dynasty, has been lost. This painting is based on the Jin Dynasty poet Zhang Hua’s “Admonitions of the Instructress to Court Ladies” (292 A.D.). The content of the poem is a didactic narrative that uses stories of virtuous concubines to instruct the emperor's harem on proper morality.



Figure 9, Copy of the *Admonitions Scroll* (part), The British Museum, 2024

Due to its age, the Tang Dynasty copy of *the Admonitions Scroll*, originally consisting of 12 paragraphs, now has only nine sections left, preserved on silk and housed in the British Museum (Sheng, 2014). Although the work implies the moral principles that women should abide by, the depictions of the daily life of upper-class women, including grooming, makeup, and dress, honestly and vividly reproduce the gentleness and reserve of the aristocratic women and their postures, gestures, and dress. All of these are in line with their status and personality (Lu, 2014). *The Admonitions Scroll* successfully portrays court women of different identities, reflecting women's lives in the author's time (Zhao, 2013).

The Admonitions Scroll is a prime example of combining indoctrination with aesthetics, marking a significant transformation in Chinese painting. It heralds a shift from purely didactic art to a more aesthetic approach, making *the Female Historian* an epoch-making work in the history of Chinese painting (Zhang, 2009). Despite being a facsimile, the skill of the painter remains of top quality, and it has been collected by nobles and royal palaces for generations. The inscriptions and seals on the existing scrolls occupy half of the page, each bearing a prestigious name.

Historical records indicate that from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Western explorers and collectors showed a deep interest in Oriental cultural relics. Captain C. Johnson acquired the scroll in Beijing in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion and the occupation of the city by the League of Eight. Johnson brought the painting to the British Museum for appraisal, leading to its acquisition by the museum. Due to the British Museum's lack of knowledge about ancient Chinese paintings, improper framing caused significant wear, resulting

in the scroll being divided into two long sections and a small section for preservation. To better protect the artifact, its exhibition is limited to about six weeks per year.

The loss of artifacts from this period is a sore point in Chinese cultural history. Each lost artifact carries the historical memory of the Chinese nation. *The Admonitions Scroll* is more than just a painting; it represents the aesthetic orientation, values, and perception of women's status in Chinese civilization during a specific period.



Figure 10, *Copy of the Admonitions Scroll Character Design*, Fan Tang, 2024

The design of this figure skillfully incorporates elements from the copy of *the Admonitions Scroll*, retaining the colors of the silk cloth and drapery so that it visually echoes the original work. The figure's clothing and hairstyle are in the style of the Tang Dynasty to correspond to the historical era of this scroll. The seals on the skirts of the figures in the design are also from the scroll, which is one of the important features of this artifact and has been

collected. Through these design details, this anthropomorphic character not only preserves the historical features and artistic value of the original artifact but also gives it a new vitality so that viewers can feel the unique charm of the Tang Dynasty.

David Vase: A Pair Of Tall, Handsome Young Twins

The David Vases (1351 A.D.) come in a set of two. Originally known as the Yuan Zhizheng 11th-year mark, they are blue and white vases with cloud and dragon motifs and elephant handles. These vases are among the treasures of the British Museum and have been selected by the British BBC as one of the 100 collections that represent the history of the world (Museum Number: PDF, B.614.). Yuan dynasty porcelain holds epoch-making significance in the history of ceramic decoration; its emergence marked a significant change in traditional porcelain following the restrained style of the Song dynasty.



Figure 11, David Vase, The British Museum, 2012

This pair of vases was originally dedicated to temples, and their style draws on influences from the Shang and Zhou bronzes. Each vase has a pair of handles in the neck area, with deep wear marks at the bottom where it joins the vase's body, indicating that it was once hung with a bronze ring for an extended period. Their significance lies in the chronological inscription written on the side of the neck above the band of dragons, making it possible to know precisely when they were made. This long dedication inscription is the earliest known for a blue-and-white porcelain bottle.

The body of each vase is divided into nine parallel bands, with a total of eight different subjects painted in the underglaze-blue technique from top to bottom. These subjects include entwined compressed chrysanthemums, banana leaves, flying phoenixes, lingzhi, entwined lotus, four-clawed clouded dragons, ocean waves (in two layers), entwined peonies, overlaying lotus, and miscellaneous jewels. This array of motifs provides a complete compendium of the blue-and-white ceramic motifs of the Yuan dynasty (Feng, n.d.)

The vases ended up overseas because when discovered in the Republic of China period (1912-1949 A.D.), the inscription on their neck indicated that they were from the Yuan Dynasty (1351 A.D.). However, at that time, knowledge about blue and white porcelain was limited to the Ming Dynasty (1368 A.D.). People believed the vases were fake, so they were not taken seriously. It wasn't until they were rediscovered by the public, by which time they were no longer in China, that extensive verification confirmed they were indeed genuine blue and white porcelain from the Yuan Dynasty. Their authentic identity was established after numerous verifications, leading to a global craze to study and collect Yuan blue and white porcelain.

The vases' names were changed in honor of Percival David, one of England's most famous porcelain collectors. The David Vases are artworks and symbols of Yuan culture, representing that era's aesthetic and technical achievements.

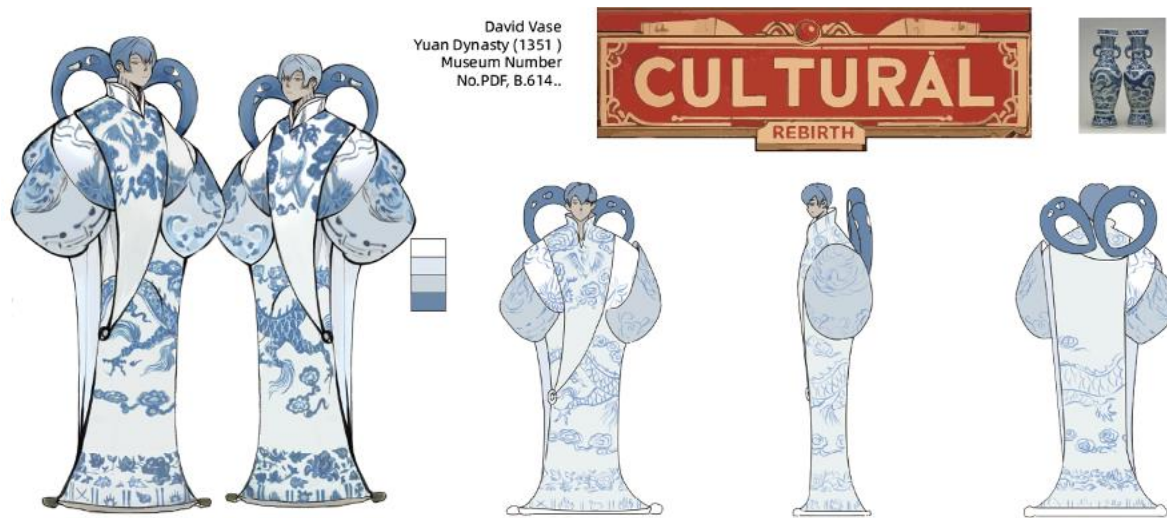


Figure 12, David Vase Character Design, Fan Tang, 2024

This character design retains the shape and color of David's vase and the vase's blue and white patterns. These patterns are reflected in the characters' costumes, giving them a unique artistic aesthetic. Because they are two almost identical vases, they are designed to be twins, but the two figures are slightly different sizes, as one of the vases is a bit thicker in shape, reflected in the heights of the characters' designs. The handle of David's vase was cleverly incorporated into the character's accessories. Both characters' accessories feature curved shapes that mimic the vases' distinctive double-ear handles. The curves of the clothes also echo the shape of the

vases. This design not only preserves the iconic features of the vase but also enhances the visual appeal of the characters, allowing the character designs to retain the unique elements of the original artifacts while giving the characters an elegant classical aesthetic.

Dragon Pattern Glass: Lively and Lovely Girl

The Dragon Pattern Glass from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) is a set of twenty glazed tiles, originally from the ridge of two buildings in a temple in Shanxi, China (Museum Number 2006 0503.1.1-20). These tiles are made of stoneware and are decorated with Fahua patterns, depicting a three-clawed dragon—one of the dragons chasing fire beads—among lotus, peony, and other floral motifs. The glazing technique is a low-temperature lead glaze commonly employed in architecture, a technology that first appeared in the Han and Yuan dynasties.



Figure 13, The Dragon Pattern Glass, The British Museum, 2006 0503.1.1-20

The Shanxi colored glaze industry began to flourish during this period, showcasing outstanding technical achievements in categories such as modeling, technology, and color. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, with the expansion of religion, glazed tiles were often used in the architecture of Buddhist, Taoist, and custom temples for decoration. The dragon, a symbol of China, represents authority, dignity, and strength.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), was overthrown. Due to the socio-political turmoil in China and the West's keen interest in Eastern culture, many works of art were taken overseas. It is hypothesized that the original collector of the dragon bricks chose to display them in a flat format and that if all 22 dragon bricks were placed on a flat surface in their original layout of six left and five right, the layout would have been asymmetrical. The collector might have temporarily discarded two of the less visually appealing pieces and eventually forgotten about them. Finally, it appeared at auction as a row of four rows and five columns (Zhao, 2007).

This glazed tile with a dragon pattern is more than just an ornament; it represents China's ancient civilization and exceptional technology, carrying a glorious history and tradition. The damage and loss of these tiles are sincerely regrettable, as they deserve preservation and respect.



Figure 14, The Dragon Pattern Glass Character Design, Fan Tang, 2024

The character design retains the colors and patterns of the dragon glaze, making it visually tied to the original artifact. The artifact's dark blue and gold colors are mirrored in the character's costume, highlighting its ornate appearance and elegance. The swirling dragon motifs have been carefully incorporated into the design to enhance the majesty and mystery of the character. The decision to remove the character's eyes and feet reflects the missing parts of the original artifact and adds an element of mystery and ethereality. This deliberate choice brings the character closer to the original state of the artifacts, symbolizing the passage of time and the mutilation of historical artifacts while also encouraging the audience to contemplate the stories and cultural significance behind these ancient treasures.

Webtoon

To make my artifact character designs more relatable. I created a strip comic to tell the histories and stories behind these artifacts. The reason for choosing the form of Webtoon is that it has robust dissemination on the Internet, meets the reading habits of modern people, and is especially suitable for reading on mobile devices. Readers can read continuously by simply swiping the screen, which improves the reading experience and helps attract a younger group of viewers.

This format provided me with a unique narrative space that showcases the character's physical characteristics and, through the development of the storyline, the connection between the characters and their historical contexts, making the connection between the characters and the artifacts stronger and more vivid. For example, the artifacts in the Webtoon start intact, and the scars slowly appear. Through the Webtoon, I want to make more people understand and appreciate these artifacts so that these cultural heritages that transcend time and space can take on a new life in contemporary society.



Figure 16, *The Story Comic (part 1)*, Fan Tang, 2024

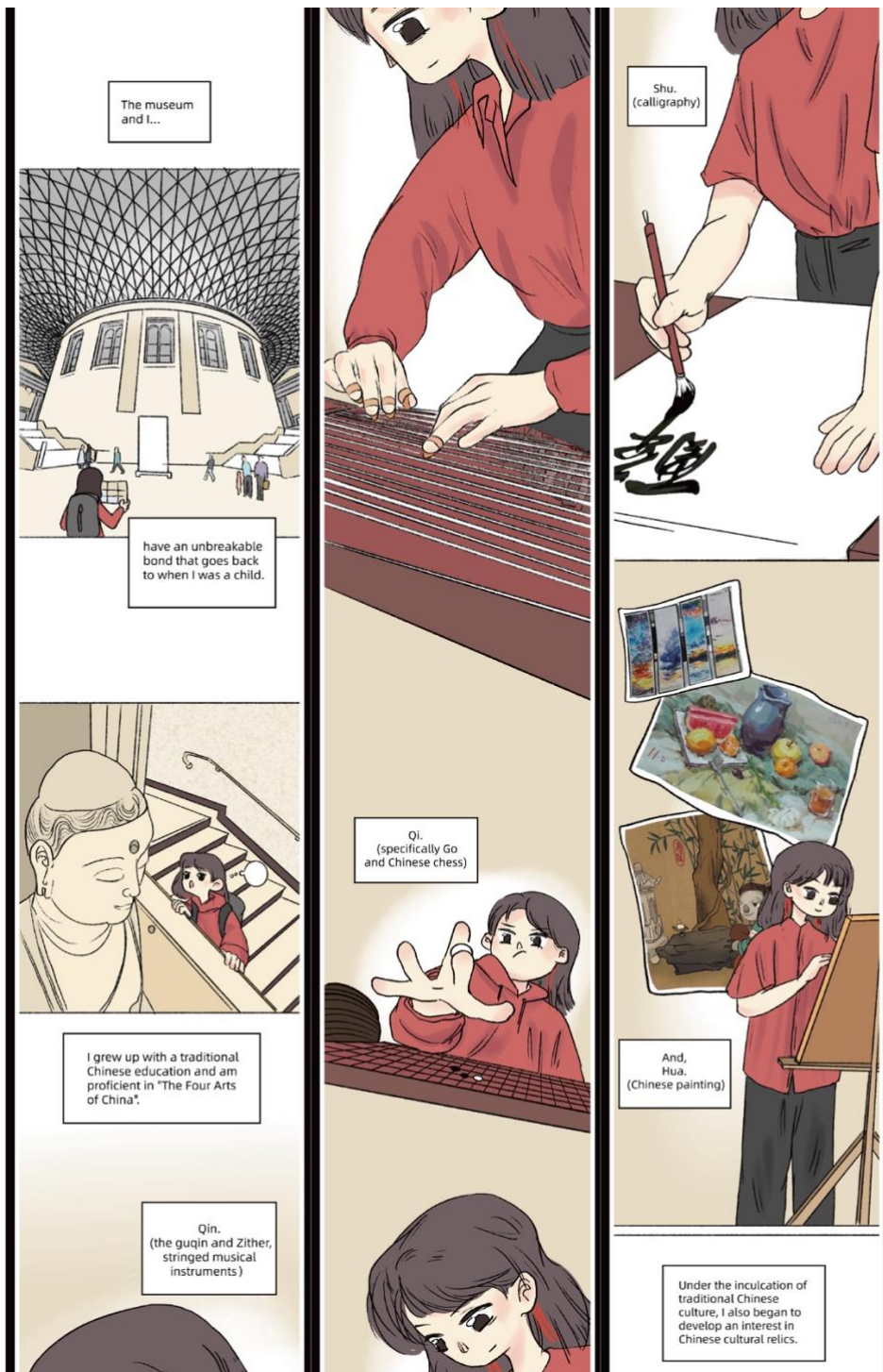


Figure 17, The Story Comic (part 2), Fan Tang, 2024



Figure 18, *The Story Comic (part 3)*, Fan Tang, 2024

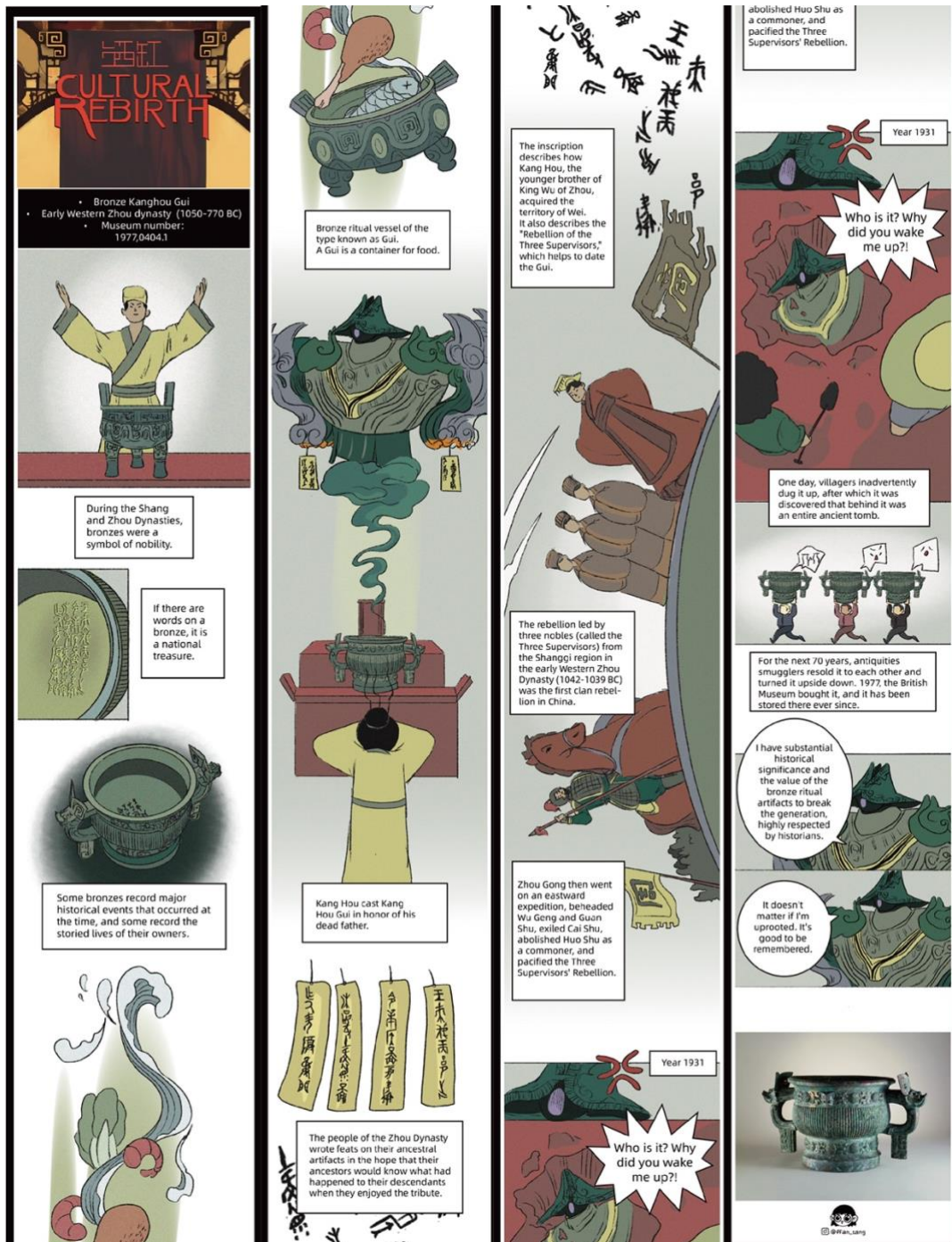


Figure 19, *The Story Comic* (part 4), Fan Tang, 2024



Figure 20, *The Story Comic* (part 5), Fan Tang, 2024

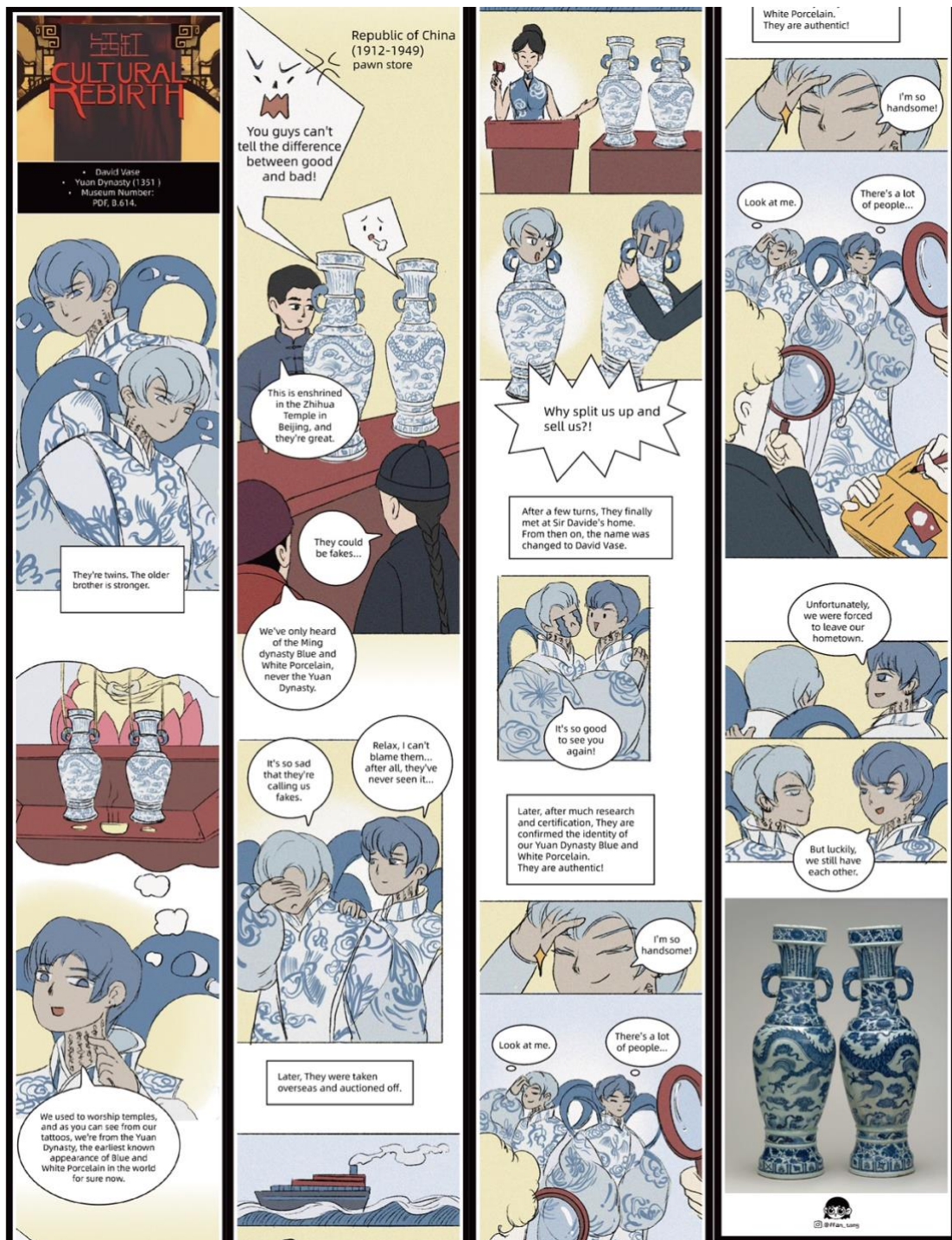


Figure 21, The Story Comic (part 6), Fan Tang, 2024



Figure 22, *The Story Comic* (part 7), Fan Tang, 2024

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, I have experienced a profound sense of pride and responsibility as a Chinese individual, which has driven me to tell the stories of artifacts through character design. By transforming Chinese artifacts in the British Museum into vivid characters, I aim to breathe new life into these silent witnesses of history and present their stories to a global audience in a more compelling way. My professional background and love for Chinese culture have uniquely positioned me to tell the stories of these artifacts, bringing them to new prominence on the international stage. This innovative approach not only enhances the educational value and global appeal of the artifacts but also provides a unique perspective on their historical and cultural context.

The significance of this study extends far beyond individual artistic creations. It explores how modern creative means can promote the dissemination and preservation of cultural heritage in the context of globalization and cultural pluralism. By providing new strategies for the international dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage, this research opens new avenues for cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

This research holds great personal significance for me, serving as both an artistic and academic exploration and a tribute to my cultural roots. Through the power of art and creativity, we can reveal the depth and beauty of Chinese culture to the world. As I look to the future, I am committed to continuing my work in this field, seeking more opportunities to share the stories of Chinese culture with a global audience and contributing to the preservation and transmission of

our valuable cultural heritage. My research aims to break the silence of history through the power of art, allowing cultural heritage to shine anew in the contemporary era.

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