

REVITALIZING HERITAGE: ARTISTIC ANALYSIS AND DESIGN TRANSLATION OF JIANGXI LACQUERWARE IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the traditional lacquerware of Jiangxi Province, China, specifically examining the regional artistic styles of Yichun, Poyang, and Ji'an. Against the backdrop of cultural tourism integration and the rise of the "China-Chic" trend, Jiangxi lacquerware faces structural challenges, including a disconnect between traditional craftsmanship and modern aesthetics, as well as insufficient excavation of cultural value. Adopting a mixed-methods research framework, this study systematically examines the historical evolution, visual grammar, and crafting techniques of Jiangxi lacquerware through literature review, field investigations in core museums, and expert interviews. The primary objective is to analyze the artistic characteristics (shape, color, pattern) and regional distinctiveness of Jiangxi lacquerware, and to further explore methods for translating these traditional elements into modern cultural and creative product designs. The study constructs an analytical framework centered on symbol extraction and design reconstruction. The findings reveal that Jiangxi lacquerware possesses a unique aesthetic system characterized by "Evolve" and "Hidden Flower" techniques, along with rich symbolic patterns like cloud and animal motifs. Through design translation strategies such as deconstruction and functional adaptation, these heritage elements can be revitalized into modern products that balance cultural authenticity with market demand, providing a theoretical foundation for the sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Jiangxi Lacquerware, Regional Artistic Style, Cultural and Creative Products, Intangible Cultural Heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Jiangxi Province serves as a significant cradle of Chinese lacquer art, constructing a unique regional cultural circle centered around Yichun, Poyang, and Ji'an. Historically, from the booming production in the Han Dynasty (evidenced by the Haihunhou tomb excavations) to the refinement of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Jiangxi lacquerware has embodied a high degree of unity between craftsmanship and artistry. Techniques such as the "Bodiless" (Tuotai) method of Yichun and the "Hidden Flower" (Yinhua) craft of Poyang represent the pinnacle of regional aesthetics (Kou, 2019).

However, in the contemporary context of cultural tourism integration, the development of Jiangxi lacquerware faces a structural contradiction between "rich cultural resources" and "lagging industrial transformation" (Shen & Li, 2022). Traditional lacquerware, often characterized by complex decoration and ritual functions, struggles to integrate into the minimalist aesthetics of modern life. Issues such as high manual costs, functional limitations, and homogenization of design further hinder its market acceptance. Therefore, applying design translation theories to bridge the gap between traditional heritage and modern aesthetics has become a critical research topic.

Research Objectives

The research objectives include the following two points:

- 1) To analyze the artistic style and regional characteristics of Jiangxi lacquerware from the aspects of shape, color, and pattern, revealing its unique aesthetic value.
- 2) To explore the application methods and design strategies for integrating traditional Jiangxi lacquerware elements into modern cultural and creative product design.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Historical and Regional Characteristics of Jiangxi Lacquerware

The development of Jiangxi lacquerware is a symbiotic evolution of technology and regional culture. Archaeological findings confirm that the Yuzhang Commandery (modern Jiangxi) was a center for lacquer production in the Han Dynasty (Li et al., 2023). By the Song and Yuan periods, Ji'an (Luling) became a core production area for mother-of-pearl inlay lacquerware, as recorded in *Gegu Yaolun* (Cao, 2014). During the Ming and Qing dynasties, a dual-core industrial structure emerged: Yichun was renowned for its "detached-layer lacquerware" and tin-inlay craftsmanship, while Poyang, leveraging its advantages in waterway transportation, blended Huizhou and Fujian techniques to create the unique "flowing color" and "hidden flower" styles. This evolution reflected the distinctive "Jiangnan" aesthetic, characterized by elegant and diverse decorative techniques.

Design Translation of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Current research emphasizes shifting from superficial imitation to deep cultural translation. Zhang and Zhu (2020) argue that design should transform cultural heritage into experiential consumer products. Recent studies on lacquerware design also emphasize preserving traditional craftsmanship while adapting materials, functions, and visual language to contemporary lifestyles. Based on these perspectives, this study applies design translation strategies to the Jiangxi lacquerware context.

Jiangxi Lacquerware: Historical Context and Typology

Concepts and Historical Evolution: Jiangxi lacquer art is the product of a profound interplay between the region's natural ecology and its historical development. Originating in the Neolithic Age, the craft reached its first peak during the Han Dynasty, as evidenced by the exquisite gold and silver-inlaid artifacts unearthed from the Marquis of Haihun's tomb. By the Song and Yuan dynasties, the production center shifted to Ji'an (Luling), which became renowned for its sophisticated mother-of-pearl inlay craftsmanship.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, distinct regional styles solidified, forming a "Jiangnan" aesthetic characterized by elegance and refinement: Famous for "Bodiless" (Tuo-tai) lacquerware, which uses a fabric core to create incredibly lightweight yet durable vessels, often decorated with tin inlays. Renowned for the "Hidden Flower" (Yin Hua) technique. This style integrates northern ruggedness with southern delicacy, using under-lacquer painting to create subtle, hazy patterns akin to objects submerged in water (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Green Jade-Incised and Colored Bodiless Vase

Types of Unearthed Lacquerware: Archaeological findings, particularly those from the Han Dynasty, reveal that lacquerware permeated every aspect of social life. These artifacts served not only as practical utensils but also as carriers of ritual and cultural identity. They can be broadly categorized into three functional types: Daily Life Utensils This category constitutes the largest volume of unearthed artifacts, reflecting the “food” and “utility” aspects of ancient life. It includes dining sets (plates, bowls, and the iconic "Ear Cups" (Figure 2) or Yushang for wine) and storage vessels (boxes and jars). Craftsmen often used the Jiazhu (ramie fabric core) technique to make these items lightweight and sturdy. The decorations, ranging from mystical cloud motifs to realistic floral designs, reflected the aesthetic pursuits of the nobility.



Figure 2 Lacquered Cup with Ears, Han Dynasty

Musical Instruments In ancient China’s “ritual and musical civilization,” lacquer was essential. The hard lacquer coating protected the wooden bodies of instruments like the Guqin (Figure 3) (zither), Se, and Drums from moisture while optimizing their acoustic resonance. These instruments were meticulously crafted to produce the solemn, “virtuous sound” required for rituals and banquets.



Figure 3 Tang Dynasty “Colorful Phoenix Singing at Qi” Seven-Stringed Zither

Weapons and Military Gear Lacquer craftsmanship was extensively applied to weaponry for its superior preservation qualities. Lacquer sealed composite materials (wood, bamboo, horn) used in bows, crossbows, and shields, protecting them from rot and maintaining structural elasticity in humid environments. Beyond utility, high-ranking military gear such as sword scabbards (Figure 4), was often decorated with mystical dragon or phoenix motifs. These decorations served as symbols of authority and spiritual talismans for protection in battle.



Figure 4 Sword-crossbow, Tomb of Liu He, Marquis of Haihunt

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

This study included two groups of participants: tourists and cultural heritage experts. The tourist sample primarily consisted of visitors to museums and related cultural tourism sites in Nanchang City. Based on Cochran's (1977) proportional sample size formula and considering the overall scale (approximately 9.5377 million visitors to Nanchang City Museums in 2023), the sample size was determined to be approximately 385 individuals. The cultural heritage expert sample employed purposive sampling, selecting 10 individuals, including experts in cultural and creative product design, lacquerware craftspeople specializing in intangible cultural heritage, and related practitioners. These individuals participated in the study through in-depth interviews and focus groups, and all possess extensive industry experience and professional backgrounds.

Research Instruments

This study employed two primary research tools: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The structured questionnaire was designed based on the research objectives and relevant literature and consisted of two sections: the first section collected demographic information from respondents, while the second section measured four variables - awareness of Jiangxi lacquerware culture, cultural identity, product preferences, and purchase intention. All measurement items used a five-point Likert scale. The semi-structured interview guide was primarily used to gather expert opinions on traditional lacquer craftsmanship, the characteristics of representative patterns, and the application of Jiangxi lacquerware cultural elements in the design of modern cultural and creative products.

Data Collection

This study employed multiple methods to collect data. First, through a literature review and case studies, historical documents, museum collections, and representative examples of lacquerware were organized and analyzed to provide a theoretical foundation for the research. Second, field research was conducted at relevant museums in Jiangxi Province to observe and document the forms, patterns, craftsmanship, and cultural characteristics of lacquerware artifacts on-site. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with lacquer art experts to discuss traditional lacquer craftsmanship, the characteristics of representative patterns, and the application of Jiangxi lacquerware cultural elements in the design of modern cultural and creative products. Finally, a pilot survey was conducted to test the wording and applicability of the questionnaire; revisions were made based on the pilot results, followed by the implementation of a formal questionnaire survey to collect quantitative data.

Data Analysis

This study employs a combined qualitative and quantitative data analysis approach. Qualitative data, including literature reviews, field research records, and expert interview transcripts, were

categorized and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to Jiangxi lacquerware culture and the design of cultural and creative products. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. First, descriptive statistical methods (including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to analyze the basic characteristics of respondents and the questionnaire results; during the pilot testing phase, Cronbach's α was used to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire, and the item-level content validity index (I-CVI) was employed to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire; for the formal survey data, descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze respondents' perceptions of Jiangxi lacquerware cultural resources, cultural identity, product preferences, and purchase intentions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Questionnaire Instrument Validation

Prior to the formal survey, this study conducted a pilot test and reliability and validity analyses of the questionnaire. Five experts evaluated the content validity of the 18 items across the four measurement dimensions; the item-level content validity index (I-CVI) for all scale items was 1.00, and the average scale-level content validity index (S-CVI/Ave) was 1.00. The optimized questionnaire consists of 25 items, including 7 demographic items and 18 measurement items across the four dimensions. The overall Cronbach's α calculated based on the 18 measurement items was 0.934, with α values for each dimension ranging from 0.798 to 0.872. The results indicate that the scale possesses good content validity and internal consistency and meets the measurement requirements for the subsequent formal survey.

Table 1 Reliability and validity results of the questionnaire

Measurement Construct	Number of Items	Content Validity	Cronbach's α	Reliability Assessment
Overall Scale	18	S-CVI/Ave = 1.00	0.934	Excellent
Cultural Awareness	4	I-CVI = 1.00	0.872	Good
Travel Experience	4	I-CVI = 1.00	0.846	Good
Dimensions of Purchase Preferences and Consumer Behavior	5	I-CVI = 1.00	0.821	Good
Acceptance of Cultural and Creative Design	5	I-CVI = 1.00	0.798	Acceptable

Preliminary Identification of User Needs

Based on feedback from preliminary tests and expert interviews, this study has tentatively identified functional utility, cultural symbolism, visual simplicity, and product portability as key dimensions to consider in the design of cultural and creative products. These dimensions are primarily used to refine the questionnaire structure and establish a design analysis framework; however, related user preferences and purchase intentions still need to be further validated through formal survey data.

Analysis of Artistic Style and Regional Characteristics

Through systematic identification and classification, this study reveals that the artistic value of Jiangxi lacquerware is embodied in three core dimensions: Regional Craft, Pattern System, and Color Philosophy.

Regional Craft Characteristics

Yichun "Bodiless" (Tuotai): Characterized by its "lightness as cloud, solidity as rock." It often employs "Tin Inlay" (Baixi), embedding metal foil to create a sharp contrast with the dark lacquer, reflecting a pragmatic and sturdy folk aesthetic.

Poyang "Hidden Flower" (Yinhua): A lacquer underpainting technique where patterns are painted and then covered with transparent lacquer. The visual effect is subtle and hazy, like patterns submerged in water, reflecting the introverted and reserved cultural character of the Ganpo region.

Ji'an (Luling): Famous for Mother-of-Pearl Inlay, emphasizing intricate geometric precision and literati elegance.

The visual grammar of patterns not only reflects decorative functions but also serves as an important carrier of cultural significance. Based on regionally representative museum collections (Figure 5), relevant patterns were systematically sorted out and summarized into four main types (Table 2).



Figure 5 Regional museums (Yichun, Poyang, Ji'an)

Table 2 Classification of Jiangxi Lacquerware Patterns

Category	Motifs	Visual Characteristics	Cultural Meaning
Cloud/Gas (Yunqi)	S-curve, Spiral	Flowing, Dynamic, Rhythmic	Cosmic Energy (Qi), Vitality, Immortality. Dominated Han Dynasty artifacts.
Animal/Totem	Dragon, Phoenix, Fish	Stylized, Intertwined	Dragon/Phoenix: Auspiciousness & Authority. Fish: Abundance ("Nian Nian You Yu").
Geometric	Diamond, Circle, Thunder Pattern	Regular, Repetitive	Cosmic Order (Round Sky, Square Earth), Stability, Rationality.
Plant/Floral	Lotus, Scroll Grass, Persimmon	Organic, Continuous	Purity, Continuity of Life, Good Fortune.

Analysis of Jiangxi Lacquer Art Patterns and Cultural Symbols

The analysis of patterns, colors and craftsmanship reveals that the patterns on Jiangxi lacquerware are not merely surface decorations but a symbolic system carrying profound regional culture and spiritual aspirations, adhering to the traditional Chinese logic of "every picture has a meaning, and every meaning is auspicious".

The "endless vitality" life symbols are typified by the cloud and dragon-phoenix patterns of the Han Dynasty. The flowing cloud patterns are not only depictions of natural phenomena but also symbols of the vigorous "primordial energy" of the universe and the birth of all things, symbolizing endless vitality. The phoenix patterns, as divine beasts connecting heaven and humanity, with their heads held high and wings spread, imply the arrival of auspiciousness and the ascent of life. These symbols construct a virtual space beyond the mundane, expressing the ancients' reverence for eternal life and cosmic order.

The "happiness, longevity and health" auspicious symbols evolved as lacquerware patterns gradually became more secular, forming a rich system of auspicious meanings. The fish pattern symbolizes abundance through homophonic association; the continuous lotus pattern symbolizes the proliferation of descendants and longevity; the persimmon calyx pattern implies everything going well and stability; inscriptions like "May the Lord Enjoy Wine" directly

convey wishes for present happiness. These symbols transform the simple yearning for a good life in the agricultural civilization of the Ganpo region into tangible and usable language.

The "reclusive and reserved" regional aesthetic symbols are embodied in Jiangxi's unique "hidden flower" and "decoction" techniques, which constitute metaphorical symbols of regional culture. The "lightness" and "sturdiness" of decoction lacquerware symbolize the craftsmanship spirit of handling heavy tasks with ease; the faintly visible textures in hidden flower lacquerware, like the waters of Poyang Lake, are reserved and profound, reflecting the reserved and practical, as well as the balanced and flexible, humanistic character of Gan culture. This "unassuming yet full of depth" visual feature is an important cultural identifier that distinguishes Jiangxi lacquerware from those of other regions.

Animal patterns: Animal motifs played a pivotal role in Han Dynasty lacquerware decoration. Among the 130+ Han tombs excavated to date, over 90 contain lacquerware adorned with animal patterns. This widespread use of animal motifs in Han lacquerware reflects the prevalent animal worship during the Han period. In Han culture, animals were often believed to possess supernatural powers, and the animal designs on these artifacts embodied peoples aspirations for a better life and their desire to achieve immortality after death. The lacquerware unearthed from the Haihunhou Tomb displays a remarkably diverse array of animal motifs, which can be categorized into two types: real-world animals and mythical creatures (Table 3).

Table 3 Animal pattern lacquerware

Name	Graphic	Period
Lacquer spoon shaped like a birds head		Early Western Han
Pigs Mouth Lacquer Box		Early Western Han
Painted Animal Pattern Disc		Early Western Han
Painted Phoenix Pattern Lacquer Box		Early Western Han
Painted mug box		Early Western Han
Painted Fish		Early Western Han
Painted Vermilion Bird Pattern Lacquer Spoon		Early Western Han
Double Phoenix Lacquer Ding-Phoenix Pattern		Early Western Han

Cloud Pattern: The cloud-pattern motif originated from pre-Qin era nature worship and Taoist philosophy, reaching its zenith during the Han Dynasty. Jiangxi Province, situated in the Jiangnan region with its misty waters and picturesque landscapes, provided abundant inspiration for this artistic style. In Han Dynasty lacquerware, cloud motifs were often intertwined with immortal concepts, depicting celestial ascension. For instance, the lacquerware excavated from the tomb of Marquis of Haihun in Nanchang features sinuous cloud patterns that evoke ethereal imagery of a mystical paradise. By the Tang and Song

periods, these motifs gradually shed their mystical connotations, blending with the poetic landscapes to reflect literatis contemplation of nature (Table 4).

Table 4 Lacquerware with cloud and cloud patterns

Name	Graphic	Period
Cloud pattern lacquer ear cup		Early Western Han
Fish Yang Lacquer Ears Cup with Peacock Feather Motif and Cloud Painting		Early Western Han
Painted Cloud Pattern Lacquer Zhi		Early Western Han
Painted Cloud Pattern Paint Box		Early Western Han
Painted cloud pattern lacquer lid		Early Western Han
Painted Phoenix and Cloud Pattern Lacquer Box Lid		Early Western Han
Painted Lacquer Bowl		Early Western Han

Geometric pattern: Geometric patterns exhibit a highly stylized, regularized, and symbolic aesthetic. They strip away the details of specific objects, employing fundamental elements like points, lines, and planes. Through compositional principles such as repetition, symmetry, continuity, and rotation, they weave a rhythmic visual tapestry. Common motifs include: diamond patterns (with their intricate variant "square-linked patterns" formed by overlapping diamonds creating a continuous brocade effect), circular patterns (or dots often used as

auxiliary accents or main lines), string patterns (simple parallel lines applied to vessel rims and bases to define and stabilize visual space), triangular patterns, undulating patterns (like rippling water), and later-developed spiral patterns (a highly abstracted form of cloud patterns) and coiled knot patterns (a complex linear interweaving structure symbolizing eternal cycles). These patterns may serve as standalone decorative elements, as seen in the "Color-Painted Geometric Pattern Yuyang Lacquer Ears Cup" and "Porcelain Lacquer Box with Geometric Patterns," or function as borders and separators for other motifs (like phoenixes and cloud patterns), providing a rational framework for bold primary designs. This approach achieves balance between freedom and discipline, maintaining clarity amidst complexity (Table 5).

Table 5 Geometric pattern lacquerware

Name	Graphic	Period
Painted lacquer cup		Early Western Han
Geometric Painted Fish Yang Lacquer Ears Cup		Early Western Han
Dice		Early Western Han
Painted lacquer also		Early Western Han
Clay Pot with Painted Lacquer		Early Western Han

Plant pattern: Early plant patterns were commonly seen in Han Dynasty lacquerware, mainly consisting of simple scroll grass and cornus patterns, which were often combined with cloud patterns, carrying the magical color of warding off evil and seeking good luck. For example, the persimmon stem pattern on the lacquerware unearthed from the tomb of Marquis of Haihun in Nanchang expressed that everything was as desired and had the meaning of good luck (Table 6).

Table 6 Decorative lacquerware with plant motifs

Name	Graphic	Period
"Ju Dao" Lacquer Ear Cup		Early Western Han
Painted Copper Tube with Bamboo Joint Lacquer		Early Western Han
Yichun lacquerware jar with painted landscapes and figures from the Republic of China era		the Republic of China era
Black Lacquered and Red-Painted Tray		Early Western Han
Cloud-Patterned Lacquer Box		Early Western Han

Character pattern: The human figure motifs in Jiangxi lacquerware embody profound religious and mythological significance, with the Eastern King Gong and Western Queen Mother standing as quintessential figures in early Taoist cosmology. This decorative tradition traces its roots to the Han Dynastys flourishing asceticism, as evidenced by artifacts like the lacquerware excavated from the Haihunhou Tomb in Nanchang. Typically arranged symmetrically on vessel lids or main bodies, these motifs symbolize the cosmic balance between yin and yang. Eastern King Gong is depicted as a bearded sage wearing a crown and holding a jade gui scepter, seated atop a dragon-tiger throne or cloud formation. The Western Queen Mother, adorned with a ceremonial headdress and feathered robes, is often accompanied by celestial beings such as the Azure Bird, Jade Rabbit, or Nine-Tailed Fox, surrounded by longevity symbols including lingzhi mushrooms and immortal herbs. These motifs not only reflect Jiangxis Taoist beliefs and cultural dissemination since the Han Dynasty, but also embody humanitys spiritual quest for immortality and transcendence of earthly existence (Table 7).

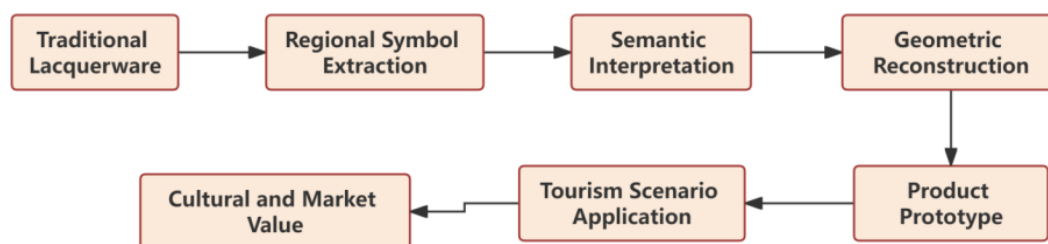
Table 7 Figure Pattern Decorative Lacquerware

Name	Graphic	Period
Painted		Early Western Han
Painted coffin		Early Western Han
Tsubo-ha Hunting Motif Lacquerware		The reign of Emperor Wen of the Western Han Dynasty
Human Figure-Dongwang Gong, Xi Wang Mu		The reign of Emperor Wen of the Western Han Dynasty

Color Aesthetics: The palette is dominated by Black (Heaven/Water, solemnity) and Red (Earth/Fire, vitality), often accented with Gold or Silver. This classic combination embodies the Daoist philosophy of "Yin-Yang Harmony," creating a visual language that is both dignified and passionate.

Application in Modern Cultural and Creative Product Design

To address the disconnect between tradition and modern life, this study proposes a "Deconstruction - Reconstruction - Application" framework (Figure 6).

**Figure 6** Deconstruction - Reconstruction - Application Framework

Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Symbols: First, identify the visual elements and cultural meanings of representative lacquerware patterns. Taking the Han Dynasty cloud-and-phoenix motif as an example, remove damaged and overly intricate details, retaining the dynamic S-shaped outline, auspicious symbolism, and the interplay of red, black, and gold; then, through geometric simplification, mirroring, rotation, and repetitive arrangement, reconstruct it into scalable visual units suitable for modern product applications.

Functional transformation: Transforming traditional ritual objects into everyday items. For example, the shape of a zun (wine vessel) can be modified into a desktop storage device, giving it the function of storing stationery while retaining its original structural features. At the same time, the tin inlay technique can be applied to electronic products such as mobile phone cases, giving them both decorative effects and heat dissipation, thus realizing the practical application of traditional elements in modern products.

Design Translation Case Study: Poyang “Hidden Flower”: To validate the feasibility of the design framework, this paper selects Poyang’s “Hidden Flowers” as a typical case study and completes the design transformation following the “deconstruction - reconstruction - application - evaluation” process (Table 8).The results indicate that this method can achieve modern design expression while preserving the essence of traditional culture, thereby providing a reference for the development of cultural and creative products featuring Jiangxi lacquerware and for the promotion of cultural tourism.

Table 8 Transformation of Poyang “Hidden Flower” from traditional technique to cultural-tourism products

Stage	Operation	Design output	Tourism application
Deconstruction	Extract visual genes	Ripple texture, color palette	Museum interpretation
Reconstruction	Simplify and redesign	Patterns, icons, packaging	Museum merchandise
Application	Multi-material adaptation	Souvenirs, lifestyle products	Gift shops, tourism routes
Value evaluation	User & expert evaluation	Design optimization	Market validation

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Based on a comprehensive analysis of regional culture, case studies, and expert interviews, it is evident that the modern design transformation of Jiangxi lacquerware relies not only on the preservation of traditional craftsmanship but also on the integration of regional cultural symbols, modern design language, and cultural tourism consumption scenarios. By distilling regional characteristics such as Yichun’s “tuotai” technique, Ji’an’s mother-of-pearl inlay, and Poyang’s “yin Hua” technique, traditional culture can be reinterpreted for the modern era, providing design insights for the development of Jiangxi lacquerware cultural and creative products and the integration of culture and tourism.

This study identified representative visual resources of Jiangxi lacquerware and established a design pathway comprising “symbol extraction - design reconstruction - product application,” providing theoretical guidance and practical insights for the development of cultural and creative products based on Jiangxi lacquerware and the building of regional cultural brands. Future research will further validate and optimize the effectiveness of this design framework by integrating formal survey data, user evaluations, and product testing.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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