

CULTURAL IDENTITY OF WUXI, CHINA: EXPLORING AESTHETIC EXPRESSIONS THROUGH LIFESTYLE AND ARCHITURAL HERITAGE FOR TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of global tourism has heightened the focus on integrating cultural heritage into the design of local tourism souvenirs, particularly in Wuxi, a city emblematic of Jiangnan's historical and aesthetic legacy. This research aims to explore the cultural identity of Huishan, Jiangsu Province, China, and analyze the main cultural features of Wuxi, including its ancestral hall traditions, traditional crafts, folk festivals, religious practices, and architectural adornments, and to explore the symbolic meaning embedded within these cultural elements as expressed in local religious and secular art. Through qualitative research methods, including field studies, literature analysis, and expert interviews, the study examines key visual symbols in Wuxi's lifestyle and architectural heritage. The research results found that Wuxi's cultural identity is deeply rooted in family reverence, aesthetic sophistication, and symbolic representation of well-being, which are effectively reflected in architectural details, festive customs, and artisan craftsmanship. The findings demonstrate that Wuxi's nuanced cultural expressions can serve as a rich resource for tourism product design, promoting both cultural continuity and market competitiveness. This research provides insights into translating regional aesthetics into tangible products, enhancing the cultural appeal of Wuxi's tourism offerings while fostering a broader understanding of Jiangnan's unique heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Identity of Wuxi, Jiangnan Aesthetics, Lifestyle, Architectural Heritage, Tourism Product Design, Folk and Religious Symbolism

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of global tourism has increasingly emphasized the integration of cultural heritage and local tourism souvenir design. Tourism souvenirs have become carriers of local cultural experiences for travelers, serving as essential means for cultural dissemination and representation of regional identities (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Wuxi, a quintessential representation of Jiangnan's water towns, is renowned for its rich historical heritage and distinct Jiangnan aesthetics, attributes that captivated emperors Kangxi and Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty and have since embodied significant regional cultural value (Liu, 2014). However, Wuxi's current tourism souvenir market faces issues of homogenization (Mo, 2016), where products are predominantly functional and fail to effectively convey Wuxi's profound cultural essence. This lack of representation limits the ability of tourism souvenirs to showcase local uniqueness, leaving Wuxi's distinct cultural identity underrepresented (Yang & Wang, 2012). Therefore, exploring how to incorporate Wuxi's cultural essence into tourism souvenir design is not only practically significant but also contributes to the transmission and innovation of regional culture.

This study aims to reveal Wuxi's cultural identity - particularly the aesthetic expressions inherent in its lifestyle and architectural heritage - and to apply these insights to tourism souvenir design. Specifically, the study examines Wuxi's core cultural values, including clan ethics, harmony with nature, the legacy of traditional craftsmanship, and cultural rituals, as the primary research objects. It explores how these values manifest through specific lifestyles and architectural styles. By analyzing Wuxi's unique cultural characteristics, this research seeks to provide aesthetically distinct elements for souvenir design, enhancing both the cultural value and market competitiveness of these products.

Previous studies have extensively researched Wuxi's intangible cultural heritage and architectural features, focusing primarily on cultural heritage preservation paths and aesthetic analysis of architecture, as well as the challenges faced by traditional arts and crafts in the modern economy (Wu, Li, & Tao, 2017). While these studies offer valuable historical and cultural contexts, there remains a gap in research regarding how to convey Wuxi's cultural identity through souvenir design. Existing studies often concentrate on individual cultural elements, such as Huishan clay figurines and bamboo carving, lacking a systematic analysis from cultural content to aesthetic features to design applications. Moreover, most prior research emphasizes local preservation and dissemination of traditional culture, without delving into how these cultural characteristics can be innovatively expressed in modern tourism products.

In summary, this paper builds on previous research by analyzing Wuxi's lifestyle and architectural heritage as primary carriers of cultural features, systematically examining the potential application of these aesthetic expressions in souvenir design. Specifically, through literature review, field research, and semiotic analysis, this study distills core aesthetic symbols and visual language unique to Wuxi, offering practical design strategies for tourism souvenirs. This research not only promotes Wuxi's cultural outreach but also serves as a reference for the expression of cultural identities in other regions, further advancing the development of the cultural and creative industries.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the cultural identity of Huishan, Jiangsu Province, China, in terms of implied meanings, lifestyle, architecture, and aesthetics, for application in product design.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Cultural Value and Regional Identity of Wuxi Tourism Souvenirs

Tourism souvenirs serve as concentrated representations of local culture, fulfilling travelers' needs to commemorate their experiences while playing a significant role in cross-regional cultural transmission. Cao Xing (2009) highlights that Wuxi's tourism souvenirs should be

based on its unique regional culture, particularly traditional crafts such as Huishan clay figurines and Yixing Zisha teapots. These crafts are deeply rooted in Wuxi's folk and religious culture, embodying unique artistic features and cultural symbols of the region. Additionally, Ju Shengli and Tao Zhuomin (2015) emphasize the role of tourism souvenirs in expressing local cultural connotations, stating that integrating regional elements in souvenir design can enhance the cultural recognition of products and foster an emotional resonance between tourists and the destination.

Aesthetic Expression of Lifestyle and Architectural Heritage

The lifestyle and architectural heritage of Wuxi reflect the traditions and aesthetics of Jiangnan's water towns. Huishan clay figurines, as an epitome of Wuxi's folk culture, showcase the everyday life and beliefs of Wuxi residents through their vibrant colors, simple forms, and lively expressions. These crafts are not only decorative but also embody the values and spiritual aspirations of the local people, serving as an essential medium for expressing lifestyle aesthetics (Cao, 2009). In terms of architectural heritage, traditional gardens such as Jichang Garden, a representative of Wuxi's architectural heritage, incorporate reverence for nature. These architectural elements are not only expressions of spatial aesthetics but also symbols of traditional cultural values (Cao, 2009). Jiang Peng et al. (2021) argue that converting architectural elements into visual symbols in souvenir design allows tourists to experience Wuxi's architectural aesthetics through souvenirs, thus achieving deeper cultural communication (Jiang, Fu, & Li, 2021).

Design Innovation and Modern Needs

In tourism souvenir design, innovation is key to enhancing cultural appeal and meeting the needs of modern tourists. Qiao Jin (2015) asserts that tourism souvenirs must balance functionality with aesthetic value, rather than being mere decorative items (Qiao, 2015). Li Shu (2007) proposes a method of combining Wuxi's unique cultural elements with modern design concepts, such as incorporating traditional Huishan clay figurine images into contemporary lifestyle products to cater to tourists with diverse preferences (Li, 2007). Furthermore, Wen Hong et al. (2016) emphasize that modern tourism souvenirs should focus on interactivity and emotional experience. This can be achieved by increasing the functionality and diversity of souvenirs, such as transforming elements from architectural heritage and local lifestyle into multifunctional products, thus enhancing the tourist experience (Wen, Li, & Li, n.d.).

Cultural Identity and Future Trends in Souvenir Design

Wuxi's lifestyle and architectural heritage, as carriers of cultural characteristics, offer broad potential for application in tourism souvenir design. Souvenirs should enhance their cultural value through in-depth cultural exploration, especially through Wuxi's traditional cultural symbols like Huishan clay figurines and Zisha teapots, which serve as symbols of Wuxi culture that can introduce more tourists to Wuxi (Cao, 2009). Further, Zeng Qingliang (2019) points out that with the growing popularity of cultural tourism, tourists' expectations for souvenirs have evolved beyond mere decoration; they now hope that souvenirs can express the destination's unique cultural identity and aesthetic characteristics. Designers can create high-value-added souvenirs by deeply exploring cultural resources (Zeng, 2019).

In conclusion, Wuxi's lifestyle and architectural heritage provide rich cultural resources for tourism souvenir design. By deeply exploring these cultural elements and translating them into concrete visual symbols, tourism souvenirs can better embody Wuxi's cultural identity, meet the needs of modern tourists, and enhance cultural dissemination. This design strategy not only brings innovative perspectives to Wuxi's tourism souvenir design but also offers a reference for other regions with unique cultural backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore how the unique lifestyle and traditional architecture of the Wuxi region, as primary carriers of cultural characteristics, can express cultural identity in tourism souvenir design. The following outlines the specific research methods:

Qualitative Research Methods

This study primarily adopts qualitative research methods to delve into how Wuxi's cultural characteristics are embodied in lifestyle and architectural heritage. Qualitative research is suited to analyzing Wuxi's unique cultural symbols, aesthetic features, and their underlying cultural meanings, which aids in transforming these cultural traits into concrete elements in souvenir design. Through field research, literature analysis, and expert interviews, the study explores the implications and scope of Wuxi's cultural identity.

Data Collection

- 1) Field Research: Field research will involve on-site visits to collect data on representative architectural heritage and lifestyle practices in Wuxi. Sites include Huishan Ancient Town, Jichang Garden, the Huishan Ancestral Hall Group, and other significant architectural landmarks. By observing architectural styles, structures, decorative elements, and local lifestyle activities such as temple fairs, festivals, and handicraft practices, we aim to gain a deep understanding of Wuxi's cultural characteristics. Photographs and recordings of architectural details and decorative patterns will provide first-hand visual symbol data.
- 2) Literature Analysis: Based on existing literature, this study systematically reviews research on Wuxi's cultural identity, tourism souvenir design, lifestyle aesthetics, and architectural heritage. Literature analysis will focus on the cultural heritage, craftsmanship aesthetics, architectural aesthetics, and cultural symbols (such as Huishan clay figurines, Zisha teapots, and garden decorations) in Wuxi. Sources include journal articles, books, and research reports, which will help establish a solid theoretical foundation for this study.
- 3) Expert Interviews: This study will invite three tourism souvenir designers and five to eight experts in cultural heritage preservation and Jiangnan cultural studies for in-depth interviews. The interviews will gather expert opinions on Wuxi's cultural characteristics, aesthetic expressions, and their application in souvenir design. Questions will focus on how to effectively extract and transform Wuxi's cultural symbols to create souvenirs that reflect Wuxi's cultural identity. Expert interviews will aid in combining theory with practical application, clarifying the design direction for Wuxi's cultural characteristics.

Data Analysis

- 1) Semiotic Analysis: Semiotic analysis will be applied to data from field research and literature analysis to interpret symbolic visual elements and motifs representing Wuxi's cultural traits. This method will help extract aesthetic symbols from architecture and lifestyle, exploring their cultural meanings. By analyzing Wuxi's traditional architectural styles and craft symbols, these visual symbols can be incorporated into souvenir design, enhancing the cultural distinctiveness of the products.
- 2) Content Analysis: Content analysis will be used to code and categorize interview data, identifying key themes in expert opinions. Suggestions from experts on Wuxi's cultural identity, aesthetic characteristics, and souvenir design will be organized to determine the core elements and forms of expression of Wuxi's cultural traits in souvenir design. Content analysis aids in summarizing design directions, providing guidance for Wuxi souvenir design.

Design Application and Feasibility Validation

Based on the data collection and analysis results, this study will design a series of tourism souvenir concepts themed around Wuxi's lifestyle and architectural heritage. Using model-making and visual presentations, the application of cultural symbols in souvenir design will be demonstrated. Small-scale user feedback and expert reviews will assess the feasibility and

appeal of designs. This validation phase will gather direct feedback from users on the souvenir designs, optimizing the design schemes to enhance cultural expressiveness and market appeal.

Research Summary and Recommendations

Building on data analysis and design applications, this study will summarize strategies and pathways for applying Wuxi's cultural characteristics in tourism souvenir design, offering recommendations for converting Wuxi's cultural symbols into design language. The research findings will provide theoretical support for Wuxi's tourism souvenir design and offer methodological references for other regions with distinct cultural characteristics in souvenir development.

RESEARCH RESULTS


The cultural characteristics of Wuxi's Huishan Ancient Town refer to the unique regional cultural expressions formed under the influence of Wu culture, primarily reflected in the cultural essence, beliefs, lifestyle, architectural decorations, and aesthetic concepts of Huishan Ancient Town. The town preserves a rich ancestral culture, folk beliefs, and traditional crafts, such as the Huishan Ancestral Hall complex, Huishan Temple Fair, and Huishan clay figurines, reflecting the Wu region's emphasis on ancestor worship and folk art. The lifestyle in Jiangnan's water towns, where people live by the water, creates the iconic Jiangnan imagery of small bridges, flowing streams, and fertile lands.




Influenced by Wu culture, people value etiquette, humility, and respect, embodying Confucian ideals. The architecture and garden landscapes incorporate Jiangnan elements like white walls, dark tiles, small bridges, and flowing water, built close to the water. Exquisite wood, brick, and stone carvings in the architectural details demonstrate a pursuit of art and beauty. Aesthetically, the soft, fresh, and elegant qualities of Jiangnan stand in stark contrast to the northern style's robust, vibrant, and bold features. These aesthetic traits are also evident in crafts like Huishan clay figurines and intricate embroidery, highlighting the aesthetic qualities of Wu culture.

The research findings are organized into a table as follows:

Table 1 illustrates that Wuxi's traditional handicraft culture embodies the rich regional characteristics of Jiangnan and a deep sense of humanistic sentiment. The Da-A-Fu clay figurines, representing happiness and auspiciousness, feature vibrant colors that convey warmth and blessings from the local people. The Liuqing bamboo carving, with its simple and elegant style, reflects the noble sentiments of scholars, blending nature and culture seamlessly. Wuxi's fine embroidery, with its delicate and graceful needlework, captures the refinement of Wu culture and its literary traditions. These handicrafts not only showcase exceptional craftsmanship and unique aesthetics but also embody the aspirations of Wuxi's people for harmony and a beautiful life, fully reflecting the artistic essence of Wuxi culture.

Table 1 Characteristics of Wuxi's Traditional Handicraft Culture

No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
1	Da-A-Fu Clay Figurine (Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty)		This clay figurine is an artwork from the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, measuring 22 cm in height, 16.5 cm in width, and 7.2 cm in thickness. It is a high-relief molded figurine, characterized by a simple yet refined form. The figure is depicted seated cross-legged, with a full face, slight smile, and plump physique. Its expressive features include arched brows, delicate eyes, a straight nose, and a square mouth. The hair is styled in a rhomboid topknot, and it holds a green lion in its embrace. The vibrant attire, featuring a yellow base with red




No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
			floral patterns, evokes a strong Southern Jiangnan folk aesthetic. As the lion symbolizes the king of beasts, Da-A-Fu's embrace of the lion reflects a conquering spirit.
2	Fu and Xi Clay Figurines (Modern Period)		This pair of clay figurines, crafted by a contemporary master artisan, builds upon traditional design with a rounded and simplified form. The colors remain consistent with the tradition, featuring red, blue, and green as primary tones. The set consists of Fu (male) and Xi (female), symbols of peace on the journey and happiness in the home, embodying people's wishes for a harmonious and joyful life.
3	Liuqing Bamboo Carving		Wuxi's Liuqing bamboo carving represents the essence of Jiangnan's bamboo culture. Bamboo, alongside plum, orchid, and chrysanthemum, is revered as one of the "Four Gentlemen" and has long been cherished by Chinese literati. The unique style of Liuqing bamboo carving, influenced by the natural and cultural environment of Wuxi, has been preserved to this day. Its artistic style is light, elegant, and showcases the natural texture of bamboo, essentially painting upon bamboo itself.
4	Wuxi Fine Embroidery		Wuxi Fine Embroidery is deeply influenced by the regional culture of Wuxi, known for its gentle landscapes and emphasis on literacy and education. It is characterized by subtle elegance, light and even textures, and a blend of painting and embroidery. The exquisite craftsmanship, varied embroidery techniques, and intricate stitching are a reflection of the rich cultural essence of Wu culture that has shaped local artisans' creativity over generations.


Based on Table 2, it is evident that the religious culture of Huishan Temple showcases rich cultural characteristics and profound spiritual connotations. The temple's architectural features, such as the double-layered green-tile eaves, upturned corners, and dragon ridge decorations, embody elegance and dignity, symbolizing auspiciousness, imperial authority, and strength, reflecting the sanctity and majesty of Buddhism. The temple's *jingchuang* (sutra pillar), a prized Buddhist stone carving, conveys the Buddhist concept of eliminating sins and cultivating both merit and wisdom through its intricate carvings, magnificent design, and the historical significance of the Tang and Song dynasties, evoking a sense of religious mystery and power. Decorative patterns, including lotus motifs, scroll patterns, and auspicious clouds, symbolize purity, enlightenment, auspiciousness, and blessings, expressing a pursuit of spiritual liberation and a prosperous life. For tourism souvenir design, the following elements can be utilized:

- 1) Lotus Pattern: Representing Buddhist purity and enlightenment, this can be applied to decorative accessories and pendants, conveying a sense of tranquility and purification.
- 2) Sutra Pillar Shape: Miniaturized or abstracted models of the sutra pillar can serve as small ornaments or pendants, symbolizing Buddhist faith and the dual virtues of merit and wisdom.

3) Architectural Elements: Elements like double-layered eaves and dragon ridge decorations can be incorporated into souvenir designs, embodying the dignified and auspicious aesthetics of traditional Chinese culture. 4) Auspicious Patterns: Scroll and auspicious cloud motifs can embellish everyday items, extending blessings for a prosperous life. These elements are not only visually appealing but also embody the profound religious culture and aesthetic of daily life in Wuxi, providing abundant material for souvenir design.

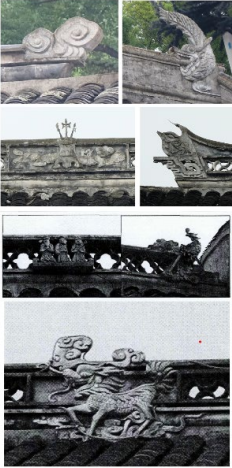



Table 2 The religious culture of Wuxi's Huishan Ancient Town


No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
1	Architectural Features of Huishan Temple		The entrance pavilion of Huishan Temple epitomizes Jiangnan architecture with its double-layered green-tiled roof, merging elegance and solemnity. The temple's yellow walls symbolize imperial authority, while upturned eaves and dragon ridge decorations convey auspiciousness and strength. Plaques and inscriptions on the facade add aesthetic value and communicate Buddhist teachings. Surrounding vegetation and climbing vines create a tranquil atmosphere, embodying the philosophical ideal of harmony between humanity and nature, or "unity between heaven and humanity".
2	The Sutra Pillar of Huishan Temple (Tang Dynasty)		The North and South Sutra Pillars of Huishan Temple are Wuxi's oldest Buddhist stone relics. The southern pillar, 6.26 meters, dates to 876 CE, and the northern pillar, 6.22 meters, to 1070 CE. Both, crafted from blue stone and standing 10 meters apart, exhibit exquisite carvings reflecting Tang artistry. In Buddhism, these pillars serve as stupas; their inscriptions are believed to cleanse sins and bestow merit and wisdom.
3	Golden Lotus Bridge of Huishan Temple		The Golden Lotus Bridge, with a history spanning over 800 years, extends 10.7 meters in length and 3.4 meters in width, positioned east to west across the river. As the oldest three-arched stone beam bridge in Wuxi, it is named for the abundant golden lotus flowers planted in the pond beneath. The bridge's side railings are intricately carved with low-relief motifs of "entwined peony vines," symbolizing prosperity and beauty. On the southern side, the central arch features an inscription with the characters "Residence of Li of the Maode Hall," adding historical depth to this remarkable structure.

No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
4	Architectural Decorations of Huishan Temple		<p>The decorative patterns within Huishan Temple embody cultural elements of religious symbolism, Buddhist spirituality, and auspicious traditional motifs. Lotus designs, symbolizing purity and enlightenment, reflect spiritual aspirations within Buddhism. Brick and stone carvings depict scenes from religious narratives, symbolizing struggles with inner desires and illustrating the journey of Buddhist practice. Patterns such as scrolling grass and auspicious clouds convey blessings and prosperity, linking folk beliefs with everyday life. These motifs enhance the sacred ambiance of space, blending religious faith with social values through artistic expression.</p>

According to Table 3, the architectural decorations of the Huishan Ancestral Hall Complex in Wuxi embody rich cultural characteristics and profound symbolic meanings, blending religious, ethical, and aesthetic elements. The roof decorations, including phoenix ridge tiles, copper coins, and wheat motifs, symbolize prosperity, dignity, and local cultural identity. Roof ornaments like eaves tiles and drip stones feature cloud patterns, animal faces, and bats, representing blessings, longevity, and peace. Screen walls and gables integrate functional fire protection and symmetrical aesthetics, incorporating elements of landscape paintings and poetry, which reflect the owner's status and cultural refinement. Additional wooden components, such as sparrow braces, purlin supports, and beam-ends, are intricately carved with dragon and phoenix motifs, auspicious animals, and historical tales, symbolizing family prosperity and blessings for protection. The stone and wood carvings on columns and windows showcase Jiangnan's delicate aesthetic sensibilities and embody the family's spiritual aspirations. The couplets and plaques serve not only as decorative elements but also reflect Confucian values such as filial piety and loyalty, illustrating the clan culture and ethical ideals in the Jiangnan region. In designing tourism souvenirs, these decorative elements provide ample material: 1) Ridge and eave tile motifs (e.g., dragons, phoenixes, copper coins, bats) could be used as patterns on medals, pendants, and other ornaments. 2) Wood carvings on sparrow braces and purlin supports can be abstracted into dragon and auspicious animal shapes suitable for small carved ornaments or amulets. 3) Auspicious motifs such as lotus and cloud patterns can be applied to jewelry, clothing, and home decor items, symbolizing good fortune. 4) Calligraphy from couplets and plaques can be featured on items like fridge magnets, bookmarks, and postcards to showcase the beauty of Jiangnan culture. These elements not only provide visual appeal but also embody Wuxi's unique cultural identity, offering an extensive array of design materials for developing culturally significant souvenirs.

Table 3 Architectural Decorative Characteristics of the Huishan Ancestral Hall Complex in Wuxi

No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
1	Roof Ridge Decorations		The roof decoration, a prominent and complex feature in building architecture, reflects social values and cultural beliefs. In Huishan's ancestral halls, roof ridges include six main types: rooster-beaked, hen-feathered, sugarcane, dragon-beaked, patterned, and clustered ridges. Emperor Qianlong's designated room featured a phoenix-adorned ridge, symbolizing imperial status, while officials' rooms had figurines symbolizing their role. In contrast, commoners' halls displayed simpler tile designs, often resembling coins or wheat spikes, capturing Jiangnan's local aesthetic.
2	Eave tile decorations		The eave tiles on Huishan ancestral hall buildings primarily include cloud-patterned tiles, beast-face tiles, and floral-patterned tiles. The matching drip tiles are mainly of two types: downward-facing and scroll-patterned. The decorative motifs on these drip tiles typically feature bat patterns associated with "fortune and longevity." Commonly, two or five bats are arranged together to symbolize "double fortune and longevity" or "five fortunes supporting longevity," respectively.
3	The eave wall decorations		The eave wall, located between the eaves and wall pillars of a building, typically includes both front and rear sections. In northern regions, eave walls are thicker to provide insulation, while in southern areas, they are generally thinner. The eave walls in Huishan ancestral hall complex are predominantly decorated at corbel ends, often featuring intricate brick carvings. These brick carvings encompass a wide range of subjects, including flowers, figures, birds, and animals. They frequently depict scenes, such as opera stories, traditional performances, or depictions of the "Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars," all adding rich narrative and cultural depth to the architectural design.
4	Carved angle brace		The carved angle brace is a unique component in Chinese architecture, positioned where beams intersect with pillars to provide structural support and often used decoratively beneath hanging panels. In Huishan's ancestral halls, it bears cultural significance, adorned with traditional motifs like dragons, phoenixes, clouds, and flowers, symbolizing prosperity and family continuity. These

No.	Name	Typical Patterns	Cultural Characteristics
			intricate carvings showcase Jiangnan’s refined aesthetics, combining function and artistry, enriching the architectural depth and expressing the values of Wuxi's cultural heritage and familial reverence.
5	Decoration of doors and windows		The doors and windows of Huishan ancestral halls serve functional roles like ventilation and lighting while embodying cultural significance and decorative beauty. Their diverse designs include floral, animal, human, auspicious, geometric, calligraphic, and landscape motifs, each with symbolic meanings - peonies for prosperity, dragons and phoenixes for fortune, and plum blossoms for resilience. The refined carvings use shallow relief and openwork, creating layered, intricate compositions. Through artistic craftsmanship, these motifs integrate Jiangnan’s poetic aesthetics, reflecting the life philosophy and spiritual aspirations of Wu culture, merging architecture with nature and culture.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Through an in-depth analysis of the ancestral hall culture, traditional crafts, folk festivals, religious culture, and architectural decorations of the Huishan area in Wuxi, this study reveals Wuxi's distinctive cultural characteristics and aesthetic expressions. These cultural traits reflect the people’s emphasis on clan relations, reverence for nature, and aspirations for the well-being of family and individuals. The cultural identity of Wuxi is manifested in the nuanced, warm, and symbolic Jiangnan style seen in local lifestyles and architectural details.

First, the ancestral hall culture embodies the core of Wuxi's clan values. Through the layout of ancestral buildings and the decoration of couplets and plaques, the people of Wuxi express reverence for their ancestors, thereby reinforcing Confucian ideals and family cohesion unique to Jiangnan region. Second, traditional crafts such as Huishan clay figurines, engraved bamboo, and meticulous embroidery reflect Jiangnan’s aesthetic preferences and craftsmanship. The simplified shapes and intricate carving techniques embody the local people’s wishes for a prosperous life. Third, folk festivals - rich in symbolic rituals like dragon boat races during the Dragon Boat Festival and women’s skill displays during Qixi - integrate specific totems, symbols, and foods that represent significant elements of the local festival culture, reflecting a focus on life, love, and family. Religious culture is prominently expressed in Huishan Temple through architectural and decorative elements like dragon and phoenix patterns, lotus flowers, and auspicious cloud motifs, which convey Buddhist teachings and the philosophy of “unity between heaven and humanity,” imbuing the structures with a sacred, auspicious atmosphere. Lastly, the architectural decorations of the ancestral hall complex, including carved angle braces, roof tiles, and gables, form the distinctive character of Wuxi's buildings. These decorations feature elements like flowers, auspicious animals, and traditional narratives, embodying the refined aesthetics of Jiangnan while granting the buildings protective and blessing functions.

The cultural identity of Wuxi is showcased through an aesthetic that emphasizes elegance, solemnity, and auspiciousness in local lifestyles and architectural decor. These aesthetic features can be incorporated into the design of tourism souvenirs, drawing inspiration from

ancestral hall carvings, religious symbols, and traditional craft styles to create culturally rich mementos of Wuxi. Examples include miniature dragon and phoenix roof tile pendants, lotus-patterned home decor, and accessories adorned with classic folk motifs. These items, both visually appealing and practical, encapsulate Wuxi's cultural essence, transforming its distinct features into portable, collectible artworks. This design approach not only enhances tourists' understanding and appreciation of Wuxi's culture but also achieves the dual objectives of cultural transmission and commercial value.

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