

A Semiotic Analysis of the Cultural Meanings in Shu Brocade

Patterns: A Case Study of the Fu Lu Shou Xi Pattern

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically analyze the representative "Fu Lu Shou Xi" (福祿壽喜, Fortune, Prosperity, Longevity, Joy) pattern in Shu brocade using Charles Morris's triadic semiotic theory. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study utilizes archival research and visual analysis methodologies. Data was collected from historical documents, museum collections including Qing dynasty artifacts from Sichuan Museum and 1980s weavings from Chengdu Shu Brocade Weaving and Embroidery Museum, and academic literature. Through Morris's framework of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics, the research examines the pattern's formal composition, cultural symbolism, and social functions across different historical contexts. The syntactic analysis reveals a diamond grid arrangement creating infinite extension effects through four-way continuous patterns, embodying traditional aesthetics of boundaryless repetition. The semantic analysis demonstrates that the four core medallions constitute a comprehensive meaning system: "Fu" reinforces auspicious meanings through bat and heart motifs; "Lu" symbolizes scholarly cultivation via Four Arts motifs; "Shou" incorporates wan characters and treasure vase motifs representing longevity and wisdom; "Xi" echoes the "Fu" composition, forming harmonious joy and fortune symbolism. The pragmatic analysis shows the pattern's evolution from Ming-Qing dynasty status symbols to contemporary vehicles for international cultural exchange. This study expands semiotic theory application in traditional cultural research, providing new theoretical perspectives for Shu brocade preservation, transmission, and innovative development while offering analytical frameworks for traditional culture's modern interpretation and global dissemination.

1. INTRODUCTION

An introduction in a research paper serves as the foundation for the study, providing essential background. As the foremost among China's four famous brocades, Shu brocade carries profound historical and cultural heritage and rich symbolic meanings. Huang (2006) indicates that Shu brocade originated during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods and flourished during the Han and Tang dynasties. Named after its production in the Shu region, it represents the longest history and most profound influence in China's traditional silk weaving and brocade production. As an important component of China's excellent traditional culture, Shu brocade not only demonstrates exquisite weaving techniques at the material level but also carries profound cultural connotations and symbolic meanings at the spiritual level.

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Among the numerous Shu brocade patterns, the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern possesses special representativeness and research value. This pattern collectively embodies the Chinese nation's simple aspirations and persistent pursuit of a better life, containing extremely rich cultural and symbolic meanings. Qian (2014) explores the cultural connotations and historical significance demonstrated by Shu brocade patterns and designs in "Comprehensive Collection of Chinese Brocades - Three Famous Brocades Edition," providing important cultural background for this study. However, current academic research on Shu brocade patterns mainly concentrates on historical evolution, weaving techniques, and dissemination development, with relatively few studies using modern semiotic theory to deeply analyze their cultural symbolic meanings, particularly lacking a systematic theoretical framework-guided in-depth analysis.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth semiotic analysis of the Shu brocade "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern using American semiotician Charles Morris's triadic semiotic theory. proposed the triadic analytical framework of syntactic dimension, semantic dimension, and pragmatic dimension in "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," providing scientific theoretical tools for the systematic study of symbolic meanings. Through this theoretical framework, this study attempts to reveal the deep meanings of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern in formal composition, cultural connotations, and social functions, providing new research perspectives for the modern interpretation of traditional cultural symbols.

The significance of this study lies in: first, from a theoretical perspective, applying semiotic theory to analyze traditional craft patterns enriches the application of semiotics in cultural research; second, from the perspective of cultural inheritance, deeply exploring the symbolic meanings of Shu brocade patterns helps better understand and inherit China's excellent traditional culture; finally, from a practical perspective, the research results can provide theoretical support for the protection, inheritance, and innovative development of Shu brocade.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research Status of Shu Brocade and Its Patterns

As an important representative of traditional Chinese craft art, Shu brocade has long attracted scholarly attention. "A History of Chinese Silk Art" edited by Zhao (2005) provides a comprehensive overview and study of China's silk historical development, production technology, silk varieties, and artistic styles, with relevant content on Shu brocade historical research providing foundational and comprehensive theoretical frameworks for subsequent research. Huang (2011) in "Chinese Brocade: Shu Brocade" provides detailed discussions on Shu brocade's development history from ancient times to present, weaving techniques, pattern colors, and organizational structural characteristics, particularly analyzing the relationships between Shu brocade and the Silk Road from Qin-Han to Wei-Jin periods, manufacturing processes, and organizational structures, which possess important academic value. "The Complete Book of Chinese Brocade-The Three Famous Brocades " edited by Qian (2014) provides a comprehensive and systematic exposition of various Chinese brocades including Shu brocade, conducting an in-depth analysis and description from aspects of historical culture, artistic style, structural characteristics, and craft technology, representing a complete monograph on brocades.

Regarding Shu brocade pattern research, Wang and Wang (2002) systematically analyzes the historical evolution process of Shu brocade patterns in "Shu brocade pattern style and its development history," pointing out that Shu brocade patterns are rich and diverse in content, including natural landscapes, flora and fauna, geometric figures, historical stories, mythological legends, auspicious inscriptions, and other themes. These patterns not only possess extremely high artistic value but also contain profound cultural connotations. Yang (2008) in "Characteristics of textile patterns in different periods of Shu brocade" details the changing characteristics of Shu brocade patterns across different historical periods, from geometric patterns of the Warring States period and

auspicious inscriptions of the Han dynasty to complex patterns of the Tang dynasty and thematic changes of the Song-Yuan periods, systematically organizing the developmental trajectory of Shu brocade patterns and providing historical basis for understanding the cultural connotations of Shu brocade patterns. Yang and Zhao (2021) indicate in their review of Han-Jin Shu brocade research that existing Shu brocade research mainly focuses on historical evolution, weaving and patterns, development and dissemination, and trade, laying a solid foundation for this study.

2.2 Application of Morris Semiotic Theory in Cultural Pattern Research

Semiotics, as a discipline studying signs and their meanings, possesses important theoretical value in cultural research. Although semiotic theory encompasses multiple schools, including Saussure's structuralist semiotics, Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, and Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, this study primarily adopts American semiotician Charles Morris's triadic semiotic theory as the analytical framework. Morris (1938) established the theoretical framework of modern semiotics in "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," dividing semiotic research into three dimensions: the syntactic dimension studies relationships among signs, the semantic dimension studies relationships between signs and their referents, and the pragmatic dimension studies relationships between signs and interpreters (see Fig.1). This triadic theory provides a scientific methodology for the systematic analysis of symbolic meanings. Morris (1946) further developed semiotic theory in "Signs, Language and Behavior," emphasizing the important role of signs in human behavior and social interaction, considering signs not only as tools for information transmission but also as carriers of cultural meaning construction.

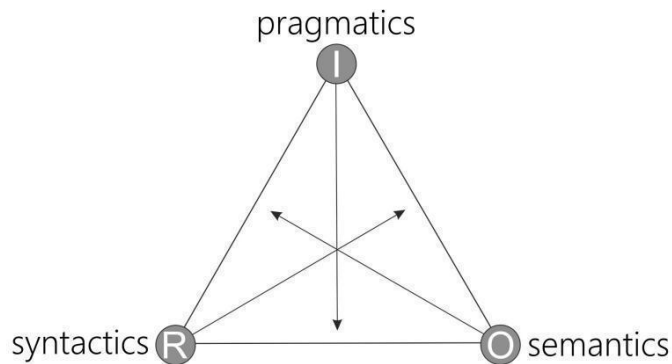


Fig.1. The mutual foundation of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics
Source: Krech, Volkhard. 2018

Recent years have witnessed expanding applications of semiotic theory in textile pattern research across diverse cultural contexts. Chang et al. (2024) provide particularly relevant precedent through their semiotic analysis of the Naxi ethnic group's Seven-Star Sheepskin Shawl, demonstrating how Morris's triadic framework can effectively decode the symbolic meanings embedded in Chinese traditional ethnic textiles. Their research reveals that traditional textile patterns function as complex symbolic systems encoding cultural beliefs, social hierarchies, and spiritual practices, offering direct methodological guidance for analyzing Chinese brocade patterns. Zou et al. (2024) expand this approach to cross-cultural contexts, examining totemic symbols in Chinese and Thai costume design through semiotic frameworks, illustrating how symbolic elements transcend cultural boundaries while maintaining distinct cultural meanings. Their work demonstrates the effectiveness of comparative semiotic analysis in revealing both universal and culture-specific symbolic functions in textile design. Lemi (2024) further advances semiotic textile research by investigating African commemorative textiles as cultural signifiers that preserve collective memory and express power relations, revealing that textile patterns serve as mirrors of local cultures expressing social status, political authority, and economic worth. This research establishes the pragmatic dimension of textile semiotics, showing how patterns function in social contexts to communicate identity and reinforce cultural values.

Xie (2018) applies semiotic theory from semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic perspectives to study southwestern ethnic minority pattern art in "A Semiotic Perspective on the Art of Patterns in Southwest China's Ethnic Minorities," conducting research on "meaning, form, and use" aspects, indicating that ethnic minority patterns are perceptible visual language symbols representing external expressions of ethnic peoples' consciousness and concepts, possessing functions of emotional expression, decoration, and recording, providing important reference for the application of semiotic theory in ethnic textile pattern analysis. Contemporary applications further demonstrate the versatility of semiotic approaches, with Nengsi and Azhar (2025) conducting comprehensive semiotic analysis of fashion as identity expression among millennials, revealing how clothing functions as a system of signs containing both denotative and connotative meanings that reflect personality, social status, and cultural background. Their research illustrates the continued relevance of semiotic frameworks in understanding textile symbolism across temporal and cultural boundaries, particularly in analyzing how traditional symbolic meanings adapt to contemporary contexts.

2.3 Research Gaps and Contributions of This Study

Through reviewing existing literature, although Shu brocade research has achieved rich results, some research gaps remain. First, existing research primarily focuses on Shu brocade's history, crafts, and dissemination, with relatively few studies deeply analyzing its cultural meanings from a semiotic perspective; second, in-depth interpretation of specific patterns is insufficient, particularly research using systematic theoretical frameworks for analysis is even rarer; finally, there is a lack of attention to the meaning transformation of traditional pattern symbols in contemporary contexts. While Chang et al. (2024) demonstrate the effectiveness of semiotic approaches in analyzing Chinese ethnic textiles, their focus on Naxi traditions leaves Shu brocade patterns largely unexplored through semiotic lenses. Systematic application of Morris's triadic theory to complete symbolic systems like "Fu Lu Shou Xi" that encompass multiple cultural domains and historical periods remains underexplored. This study attempts to fill these gaps by using Morris's triadic semiotic theory to conduct a systematic and in-depth analysis of the Shu brocade "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern, revealing its symbolic meanings at different levels and providing new theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches for the modern interpretation of traditional cultural symbols.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Theoretical Framework: Morris's Triadic Semiotic Theory

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing American semiotician Charles Morris's triadic semiotic theory as the analytical framework. This qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for examining cultural symbols and meanings embedded in traditional textile patterns, as it allows for in-depth interpretation of symbolic content, cultural contexts, and social functions that quantitative approaches cannot adequately capture. Morris (1938) proposes in "Foundations of the Theory of Signs" that semiotic research should unfold from three dimensions: syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. This theoretical framework provides a scientific methodology for the systematic analysis of symbolic meanings, offering a comprehensive approach to understanding how signs function at multiple levels of meaning construction.

The syntactic dimension focuses on formal relationships among signs without involving relationships between signs and external things. In Shu brocade pattern analysis, the syntactic dimension primarily examines pattern compositional elements, color combinations, spatial layouts, and organizational principles among various elements. Morris (1971) emphasizes in "Writings on the General Theory of Signs" that syntactic analysis is fundamental to understanding sign systems, revealing the internal structure and organizational principles of signs. The semantic dimension studies relationships between signs and their referents, namely the meaning content of signs. For the "Fu

Lu Shou Xi" pattern, semantic analysis primarily explores the cultural connotations and symbolic meanings of various sign elements as well as the cultural information conveyed by the overall pattern. This dimensional analysis helps reveal the deep cultural meanings of patterns. The pragmatic dimension focuses on relationships between signs and interpreters, namely the functions and effects of signs in specific usage contexts. Morris (1946) indicates in "Signs, Language and Behavior" that pragmatic analysis of signs needs to consider the social background and cultural contexts of sign usage as well as their impact on interpreters. The pragmatic analysis of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern will examine its social functions and cultural effects in different historical and contemporary contexts (see Table 1).

Table 1. Morris's Semiotic Analysis Framework for the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Pattern in Shu Brocade

Dimension	Definition	Application in This Study
Syntactics	Focuses on formal relations among signs.	Analyzes the arrangement of motifs, color schemes, spatial layout, and structural composition of the pattern.
Semantics	Examines the relationship between signs and what they signify.	Interprets the symbolic meanings of elements such as 福 (Fu), 禄 (Lu), 寿 (Shou), 喜 (Xi), and associated imagery like bats and vases.
Pragmatics	Concerns the use and reception of signs in specific contexts.	Explores how the pattern functions across different historical and cultural contexts, and how it is interpreted by various audiences.

3.2 Research Object Selection and Data Collection Methods

This study selects the Shu brocade "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern as the analytical object based on the following considerations: first, this pattern possesses typical representativeness, collectively embodying the core content of Chinese traditional auspicious culture; second, the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern contains rich symbolic elements with distinct symbolic layers, suitable for in-depth semiotic analysis; finally, this pattern possesses important cultural meanings both historically and contemporarily, facilitating cross-temporal pragmatic analysis.

Data collection for this qualitative study employs archival research and visual analysis methods through multiple sources to ensure comprehensive analysis. Primary visual data was obtained from museum collections, including a Qing dynasty imitation "Fu Lu Shou Xi" brocade housed in Sichuan Museum and a "Fu Lu Shou Xi" brocade woven in the 1980s from the Chengdu Shu Brocade Weaving and Embroidery Museum collection. These artifacts provide direct visual evidence for syntactic and semantic analysis, offering authentic examples of traditional craftsmanship and symbolic representation. Historical materials were gathered through systematic archival research across multiple institutional sources, with key documentation including records from the Shu Brocade Factory. Of particular relevance to this study's pragmatic analysis is the work of Shu et al. (1988) which chronicles Master Yang Zhixiu's 1978 international exhibitions where the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern gained appreciation from international audiences during demonstrations at the "Ancient Chinese Traditional Technology Exhibition" in Canada and the United States, illustrating the pattern's role in cross-cultural communication. Contemporary archival materials were sourced from China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Network, which documents the restoration efforts during China's reform and opening-up period when contemporary designers collaborated with veteran artisans to systematically excavate and organize traditional Shu brocade patterns, including the reproduction of Ming dynasty "Fu Lu Shou Xi" designs. Such documentation provides essential context for understanding the pattern's contemporary significance and its transition from historical artifact to living cultural heritage. Secondary sources include academic literature, historical texts, and cultural documentation that establish the broader scholarly framework for interpreting the pattern's symbolic meanings and cultural functions across different historical periods.

3.3 Analytical Methods and Procedures

This qualitative study primarily employs the following analytical methods within the overarching semiotic framework: first, archival research method, collecting basic materials about Shu brocade and "Fu Lu Shou Xi" culture through reviewing relevant historical documents, academic works, and research papers; second, semiotic analysis method, using Morris's triadic theoretical framework to systematically analyze patterns from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions; finally, comparative analysis method, revealing the changes and development of symbolic meanings by comparing the performance of "Fu Lu Shou Xi" patterns across different historical periods and cultural contexts.

The analytical procedure follows a systematic three-stage process. The first stage involves comprehensive documentation and cataloging of visual elements, including photographing and digitally recording pattern details from museum artifacts. The second stage applies the triadic framework systematically: examining compositional structures and spatial relationships, interpreting symbolic content through historical and cultural references, and analyzing social functions across temporal contexts. The final stage synthesizes findings through comparative analysis, identifying patterns of continuity and change in symbolic meanings and social uses from historical to contemporary periods.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Syntactic Dimensional Analysis

From the semiotic syntactic perspective, the Shu brocade "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern demonstrates a distinctive spatial organizational structure and precise visual hierarchy, embodying the profound heritage of Chinese traditional craft aesthetics. The pattern employs a diamond grid arrangement with interlocking placement, enabling each unit pattern to extend continuously in eight directions simultaneously, creating a multi-directional nested repetitive structure that forms a classic four-way continuous pattern. The defining characteristic of this composition lies in the absence of distinct hierarchical orientation—no definitive "top-bottom-left-right" primacy—generating a visual sensation of "infinite extension" that embodies the cultural concept of "unending auspiciousness and continuous fortune" fundamental to traditional brocade design.

The four core medallion patterns exhibit pronounced hierarchical characteristics and differential organization in their compositional structure (see Fig.2). The "Fu" character medallion pattern and "Xi" character medallion pattern demonstrate remarkable structural similarity, both employing central radial compositional modes with Chinese characters as focal points, surrounded by four bat motifs and four heart-shaped motifs, encircled by hui (回, meander) motifs forming complete circular medallions. This central radial composition embodies the fundamental principle of "centrality and balance" in Chinese traditional aesthetics, where core elements serve as centers radiating uniformly outward, creating visual effects that are simultaneously stable and dynamic. In comparison to the "Lu" and the "Shou" character medallions, the "Fu" and "Xi" medallions display larger dimensions and more complex compositions, establishing dominant positions within the overall visual hierarchy. The "Lu" character medallion pattern and the "Shou" character medallion pattern adopt relatively simplified compositional approaches, featuring Chinese characters as centers surrounded by eight abstract decorative motifs resembling bats and gold ingots. This design strategy maintains overall coordination with the "Fu" and "Xi" medallions while expressing individual distinctiveness through quantitative and morphological variations in decorative elements, creating balanced contrasts that render the overall pattern both unified and layered, exemplifying the aesthetic principle of "alternating density and sparsity, integrating solid and void" in Chinese traditional design.

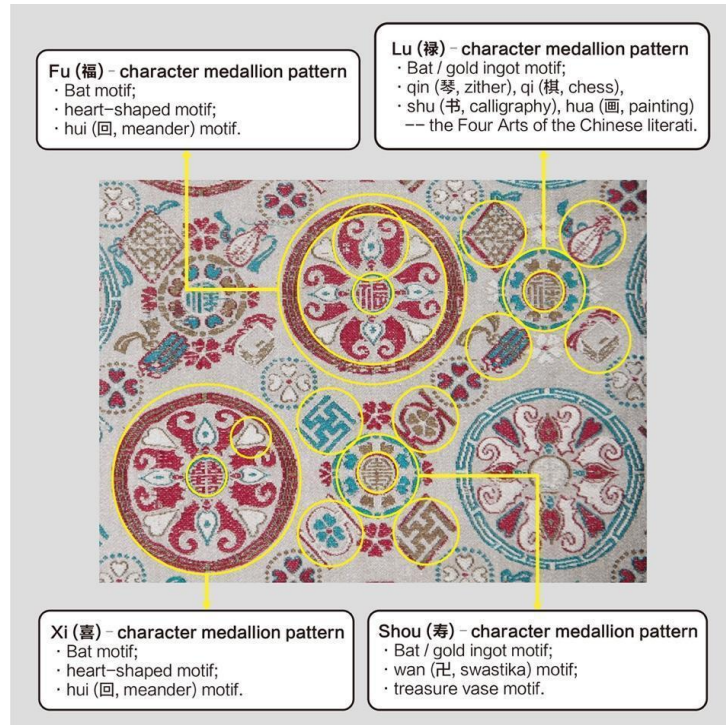


Fig.2. Semantic Analysis of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Pattern in Shu Brocade

Source: Digital reconstruction by Lei Xu, 2025, based on the original pattern from the Chengdu Shu Brocade Weaving and Embroidery Museum.

The color system adheres to ancient Chinese five-direction color theory. According to "Rites of Zhou: Records of Craftsmanship", the five colors correspond to cardinal directions: "East is designated azure, West is designated white, South is designated red, North is designated black, Heaven is designated dark, Earth is designated yellow." This pattern employs azure, red, yellow, and white, not only achieving harmonious visual effects but also conveying profound cultural connotations that embody the philosophical concept of harmony between heaven and humanity in traditional aesthetics.

The sophisticated arrangement of connecting patterns demonstrates the design principle of "unity in variation" and the compositional concept of "organic wholeness." The four core medallions are organically linked through decorative motifs including qin (琴, zither), qi (棋, Go), shu (书, calligraphy), hua (画, painting)—the Four Arts of the Chinese literati—along with wan (卐, swastika) motifs and treasure vase motifs. These connecting elements serve not merely decorative functions but, more importantly, establish internal relationships among various symbolic elements, transforming the entire pattern into an organic symbolic system. Particularly noteworthy are the Four Arts motifs positioned at the four corners of the "Lu" character medallion and the wan (swastika) motifs combined with treasure vase motifs at the four corners of the "Shou" character medallion. This differentiated corner decoration strategy enriches visual hierarchy while reinforcing the distinctive characteristics of different symbols, reflecting designers' profound understanding and skillful application of symbolic semantics (see Fig.3).



Fig.3. "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Pattern in Shu Brocade (Digital Reconstruction)
Source: Author, 2025

4.2 Semantic Dimensional Analysis

The semantic connotations of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern constitute a comprehensive expression system representing the Chinese nation's ideals for a perfect life. Qian (2014) indicates that brocade patterns carry profound cultural connotations and historical significance, which are collectively embodied in the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern.

The "Fu" symbol embodies the most fundamental and essential value pursuits in Chinese culture, possessing extremely rich and profound semantic connotations (see Table 2). The "Five Blessings" concept recorded in the "Book of Documents: Great Plan"—"first is longevity, second is wealth, third is health and tranquility, fourth is cultivation of virtue, fifth is natural death"—provides classical textual foundation and theoretical basis for the semantics of "Fu." This concept encompasses crucial life dimensions including lifespan, prosperity, health, moral character, and peaceful demise, reflecting ancient people's comprehensive understanding and profound insight into life values. Within the "Fu" character medallion, the employment of bat motifs embodies the wisdom of homophonic symbolism in Chinese traditional culture, utilizing the phonetic relationship between "bat" (fu 蝠) and "fortune" (fu 福) to reinforce auspicious meanings, creating dual reinforcement effects through visual and auditory symbolic systems. The incorporation of heart-shaped motifs further emphasizes the intimate connection between "Fu" and emotional harmony and familial happiness, while hui (meander) motifs symbolize the continuous perpetuation and eternal inheritance of fortune through their endless and ever-regenerating visual characteristics.

The "Lu" symbol embodies traditional society's profound contemplation of achievement, social status, and life values. Within Chinese traditional cultural contexts, the connotations of "Lu" extend far beyond material-level remuneration, representing social recognition and status symbols attained through moral integrity and exceptional ability. The eight abstract decorative motifs resembling bats and gold ingots surrounding the "Lu" character create rich visual effects quantitatively while symbolically reinforcing multiple meanings of wealth, good fortune, and blessings. The Four Arts motifs—qin (zither), qi (Go), shu (calligraphy), hua (painting)—positioned at the four

corners possess profound cultural significance and symbolic value. As essential components of Chinese traditional cultural life, the Four Arts represent indispensable cultivation for generations of literati and scholars, symbolizing extensive knowledge, refined taste, and profound cultural accomplishment. Qin represents musical harmony and temperamental refinement, qi embodies intellectual strategy and tactical application, shu symbolizes knowledge accumulation and cultural transmission, and hua represents aesthetic pursuit and artistic creation. This combination indicates that the authentic connotations of "Lu" reside in the organic unity of cultural character and social contribution, embodying the talent philosophy of "emphasizing both virtue and ability, integrating culture and substance" in Chinese civilization.

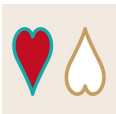
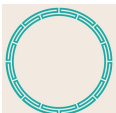
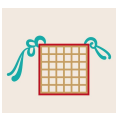
The "Shou" symbol reflects Chinese culture's profound understanding of life values and beautiful aspirations for health and longevity. The combination of the wan (swastika) character and the "Shou" character symbolizes infinite longevity, embodying expectations for life continuation. The treasure vase motif, as one of Buddhism's "Eight Auspicious Symbols", possesses significant religious and cultural connotations. The Eight Auspicious Symbols comprise the dharma wheel, conch shell, parasol, white canopy, lotus flower, treasure vase, golden fish, and endless knot, representing eight sacred implements symbolizing good fortune in Buddhism. The treasure vase, also designated the immortal vase, symbolizes auspiciousness, purity, and prosperity, conveying meanings of containing all treasures without leakage, perfection of wisdom and merit, and eternal life. Simultaneously, in folk culture, "vase" (ping 瓶) is homophonous with "peace" (ping 平), symbolizing safety, harmony, and tranquility, embodying the organic integration of religious and popular cultural traditions. This decorative selection indicates that the semantics of "Shou" encompass not only physiological longevity but also spiritual wisdom fulfillment.

The "Xi" symbol collectively embodies the optimistic and progressive spiritual qualities of the Chinese nation and fervent aspirations for a harmonious and fulfilling life. Its compositional methodology maintains highly consistent design strategies with the "Fu" character medallion. This compositional similarity creates harmonious and unified visual effects while semantically reinforcing the beautiful meaning of "fortune and joy arriving together, fortune and joy in constant companionship." The sophisticated combination of bat motifs and heart-shaped motifs not only strengthens traditional auspicious meanings but also emphasizes essential values of emotional harmony, familial happiness, and interpersonal concord in contemporary life. In Chinese traditional culture, "Xi" frequently correlates with significant life ceremonies and pivotal moments, including marriage, childbirth, academic achievement, and career advancement, embodying grand celebrations of important life milestones and earnest expectations for promising futures.

The combination of the four symbols forms a complete semantic system, representing not simple symbolic accumulation but mutual complementation and reinforcement creating an organic whole. This comprehensive system encompasses essential life aspects including personal cultivation, family harmony, social status, and spiritual pursuits, reflecting Chinese traditional culture's holistic understanding of ideal life conditions.

Table 2. Syntactic Analysis of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Pattern in Shu Brocade

Symbol Name	Symbol Visual Source: Digital reconstruction by Lei Xu, 2025, based on the original pattern from the Chengdu Shu Brocade Weaving and Embroidery Museum.	Semantic Analysis
Fu Character		Embodies the classical connotations of "Five Blessings," encompassing essential life aspects including longevity, wealth, health, virtue, and peaceful demise.

Lu Character		Represents achievement and social recognition, embodying status symbols attained through the integration of virtue and talent.
Shou Character		Reflects the pursuit of health and longevity, encompassing both physiological longevity and spiritual wisdom fulfillment.
Xi Character		Embodies optimistic and progressive spiritual qualities, expressing aspirations for a harmonious and fulfilling life and celebration.
Bat Motif		Utilizes the homophonic relationship between "bat" (fu 蝠) and "fortune" (fu 福) to reinforce auspicious meanings, symbolizing the arrival of good fortune.
Heart-shaped Motif		Emphasizes emotional harmony and familial happiness, embodying the beautiful vision of hearts in perfect accord.
Hui (Meander) Motif		Through continuous and unending visual characteristics, when combined with "Fu," it symbolizes the perpetual continuation of fortune and uninterrupted prosperity.
Wan (卐) Character Motif		The combination of "wan" and the "Shou" conveys infinite longevity, embodying expectations for life continuation.
Qin (Zither) Motif		One of the Four Arts motifs, representing musical beauty and temperamental cultivation, symbolizes refined scholarly accomplishment.
Qi (Go) Motif		One of the Four Arts motifs, embodying intellectual strategy and tactical application, symbolizes rational thinking capacity.
Shu (Calligraphy) Motif		One of the Four Arts motifs, symbolizing knowledge accumulation and cultural transmission, embodies reverence for learning.
Hua (Painting) Motif		One of the Four Arts motifs, conveying aesthetic pursuits and artistic creation, embodies aesthetic perception capacity.

Treasure Vase
Motif

One of Buddhism's Eight Auspicious Symbols, symbolizing auspiciousness and purity; "vase" (ping 瓶) is homophonous with "peace" (ping 平), conveying peace and tranquility.

Gold Ingot
Motif

Abstract patterns resembling gold ingots, reinforcing connotations of wealth and good fortune, embody expectations for material achievement.

4.3 Pragmatic Dimensional Analysis

From the semiotic pragmatic perspective, the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern performs distinct social functions across different historical periods and social contexts, clearly demonstrating the context-dependent and dynamically evolving characteristics of symbolic meanings. Morris (1946) emphasizes in "Signs, Language and Behavior" that the pragmatic functions of signs are often intimately related to specific social power structures and cultural contexts—a crucial theoretical insight that receives comprehensive verification and profound interpretation in the historical evolution of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern.

The "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern originated during the Ming dynasty, with the Ming and Qing periods representing the pinnacle of Chinese traditional auspicious pattern development, virtually achieving the absolute principle of "patterns must possess meaning, meanings must be auspicious." The social and cultural milieu of this era provided fertile ground for the flourishing of auspicious patterns. As an artistic medium, brocade patterns incorporate people's subjective aspirations and spiritual longings in every design and production process, carrying explicit ideological content that becomes particularly prominent in auspicious patterns.

Within historical contexts, the social functions of the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Shu brocade pattern primarily manifested in two significant dimensions: identity demarcation and cultural symbolism. Due to Shu brocade's extraordinarily complex production processes, exceptionally demanding technical requirements, and prohibitively expensive manufacturing costs—epitomized by the ancient adage "an inch of brocade equals an inch of gold"—Shu brocade remained primarily accessible to imperial nobility and high-ranking officials, representing quintessential luxury commodities and status symbols. Within traditional society's hierarchical framework, the capacity and privilege to possess and utilize the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern Shu brocade constituted significant identity markers and social stratification mechanisms, communicating and expressing specific social positions, economic capabilities, cultural refinement, and value orientations through symbolic ownership, display, and utilization.

Entering the contemporary era, this pattern's pragmatic functions have undergone substantial transformation. During the 1980s, concurrent with reform and opening-up initiatives, traditional craft preservation and inheritance efforts received renewed attention, facilitating the restoration and reproduction of "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Shu brocade. Shu et al. (1988) document that in 1978, Master Yang Zhixiu's woven "Fu Lu Shou Xi" brocade garnered appreciation from international visitors during live demonstrations at the "Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Traditional Technology" in Canada and the United States, marking this pattern's evolution from traditional internal cultural symbols to significant vehicles for external cultural diplomacy.

Accompanying evolving social structures and updated cultural perspectives, this pattern has gradually transformed from luxury goods exclusive to particular social strata to cultural symbols accessible to all citizens, with its pragmatic functions shifting from identity demarcation and hierarchical differentiation toward cultural identification, national pride expression, and traditional cultural preservation. In international cultural exchange

contexts, this pattern assumes crucial functions of displaying Chinese cultural excellence and disseminating Chinese civilizational ideals, serving as vital bridges for enhancing mutual understanding and exchange among diverse cultural traditions.

4.4 Comprehensive Findings

Through systematic analysis employing Morris's triadic semiotic theory, the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" Shu brocade pattern reveals three significant characteristics. First, regarding symbolic system composition, this pattern embodies the systematic and comprehensive nature of Chinese traditional culture. The four core symbolic elements form harmonious and unified visual systems at the syntactic level while constituting complete semantic systems encompassing multiple essential life dimensions, reflecting Chinese culture's holistic understanding of ideal life conditions.

Second, concerning cultural transmission mechanisms, this pattern effectively preserves and conveys profound cultural connotations through relatively stable symbolic forms, functioning as crucial cultural linkages connecting historical and contemporary realities. The relative stability of symbolic forms ensures cultural inheritance continuity, while the dynamism of symbolic meanings demonstrates traditional culture's adaptive development capacity. This unity of stability and change constitutes the fundamental principles governing traditional cultural symbol inheritance and evolution.

Finally, regarding social function transformation, this pattern has evolved from historical identity markers and hierarchical differentiation instruments to contemporary cultural symbols and identity vehicles, exemplifying the functional reconstruction of traditional cultural symbols within modern society. This transformation not only reflects social structural transitions but also demonstrates the vitality and adaptability of traditional cultural symbols, providing essential insights for traditional culture's contemporary inheritance.

5. CONCLUSION

This study conducted a systematic analysis of the Shu brocade "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern employing Morris's triadic semiotic theory, achieving significant findings. From the syntactic dimension, this pattern adopts diamond grid interlaced arrangements, forming four-way continuous structures that create "infinite extension" visual effects, with four core medallions presenting hierarchical characteristics while adhering to "unity in variation" aesthetic principles. From the semantic dimension, the four symbols constitute a comprehensive meaning system encompassing personal cultivation, family harmony, social status, and spiritual pursuits, reflecting the Chinese nation's holistic understanding of ideal life conditions. From the pragmatic dimension, this pattern has undergone functional transformation from Ming-Qing period identity markers through 1980s restoration weaving to contemporary cultural exchange vehicles, demonstrating traditional symbols' adaptive development capacity.

The theoretical contribution of this study resides in applying semiotic theory to traditional craft pattern analysis, providing innovative theoretical perspectives for the contemporary interpretation of traditional cultural symbols. The successful application of triadic theory in Shu brocade analysis demonstrates this framework's effectiveness in cultural research. The study reveals the dialectical unity of symbolic form stability and meaning dynamism within the "Fu Lu Shou Xi" pattern, offering valuable reference for understanding traditional cultural symbol inheritance patterns. At the practical level, this research provides a theoretical foundation for Shu brocade cultural preservation and inheritance. A comprehensive interpretation of Shu brocade pattern cultural connotations contributes to enhanced cultural confidence and promotes traditional craft development and contemporary transformation within inheritance frameworks. Simultaneously, this study offers analytical perspectives for traditional culture's

international dissemination, with thorough cultural interpretation contributing to enhanced Chinese culture's global influence and communication effectiveness.

This study acknowledges certain limitations: the research object remains confined to a single pattern, analysis primarily relies on documentary materials, and investigation of symbolic meaning changes within contemporary contexts requires additional empirical support. Future research directions include expanding the scope to conduct semiotic analysis on additional Shu brocade patterns, incorporating field investigations to understand contemporary usage patterns, and implementing cross-cultural comparative studies. As traditional cultural inheritance and development initiatives advance, semiotic analysis of traditional culture will assume increasingly significant value.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Lei Xu: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing—original draft; **Muhamad Fairus Kamaruzaman:** Conceptualisation, methodology, supervision, and writing—review and editing; responsible for correspondence and ensuring the integrity of the final manuscript; **Rusmawati Ghazali:** Writing—review and editing, and validation.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Claude in order to improve grammar and language clarity. After using this tool, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM Research Ethics Committee) (Approval No: REC/03/2024 (PG/MR/127)). All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the study.

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