

**Cute Visions:**  
*Designing an interplay between  
traditional Chinese auspicious patterns  
and Japanese Kawaii cuteness.*

Yuwei Ouyang

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

signed

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date

22, June, 2017

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I wish to express my deep thanks to all those who encouraged me throughout this journey.

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## Abstract

Chinese traditional auspicious patterns are an important part of Chinese auspicious culture. The patterns are associated with Chinese auspicious blessings and each has a rich background of auspicious meanings and symbolic design. However, traditional Chinese auspicious patterns have lost the original function of sending feelings and emotions to the audience. This project aims to explore the possibility of expressing the emotions, meanings and the content of the Chinese auspicious traditional auspicious patterns by integrating it with the aesthetic characteristics of Japanese kawaii illustration, a popular culture of cuteness. Through doing this, the aim is to discover a new way of visually delivering the meaning and emotion of Chinese auspicious patterns and to contemporize the traditional patterns in ways that can be appreciated by a modern audience. The output of this practice-based research is presented in a series of digital design works as examples of modern Chinese auspicious pattern design.

## Chapter One

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

---

## Chinese Auspicious Culture

Chinese auspicious patterns are decorative patterns with a content derived from puns. The patterns are usually comprised of animals, plants and other objects, where these objects “derive their iconic status from puns with auspicious words, depicted visually as rebuses” (Sung, 2002, p. 11). The patterns are designed to give people an auspicious blessing. There are five main themes for blessings, including good fortune and luck (福 Fu); prosperity (禄 Lu); longevity (寿 Shou); double happiness (喜 Xi), and wealth (财 Cai). The symbolism in these themes offers people material and spiritual richness in life. Prosperity is a symbol of status and fame. Longevity has safe and peaceful implications. Happiness is related to marriage, friendship and descendants. Wealth is about becoming rich and acquiring property. In Chinese folklore, people used auspicious patterns to decorate their rooms and to express their longing for a happy life. Giving gifts with auspicious patterns signifies the offer of best wishes and celebration.

Parallel to the Western concept of a creative work communicating and conveying meaning, Yi (意) refers to the auspicious meaning behind these particular patterns. It relates to the soul inherent in the auspicious pattern (Bi, 2007). The auspicious meaning is referred to in these auspicious patterns. The patterns are closely associated with the meaning in three metaphorical ways as discussed over.



Figure 1. Living a Rich Life Year after Year: Yangliuqing, Tianjin. Reprinted from *Folk New Year Pictures* (p. 80), by X. L. Lan. 2008. Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press.



Figure 2. Five Happiness. Reprinted from *The Visual Dictionary of Auspicious China: Happiness* (p. 99), by J. Zheng, 2015, Shanghai, China: Cishu.

### The use of homophones

Homophones play an important role in Chinese auspicious culture, and are used to transfer the non-specific form of an auspicious blessing to a real object, which can then be illustrated by means of an auspicious pattern. The Chinese language (both Mandarin and Cantonese) has very few spoken sounds but a large number of written characters and meanings. Homophones in Chinese relate an auspicious word that is pronounced the same or similarly to another word, and to the physical representation of the other word to represent the meaning of the auspicious word. For instance, a famous Yangliuqing Chinese New Year illustration shows a plump baby boy holding a big carp in his arms, with a lotus flower next to him (Figure 1). This pattern is called 连年有余 (LianNian YouYu), and the auspicious blessing literally means surplus year after year. Fish, which is pronounced yu (鱼), has the same pronunciation as yu (余), which means surplus. Lotus (莲 lian) is a homophone for (连 lian), means continuous and one by one. In this case, the auspicious word is yu (余) meaning surplus and this does not have a visual or physical form. The physical form of fish (鱼 yu), because it has the same pronunciation as surplus (余 yu), can therefore be used as a physical form for surplus.

Figure 2 shows an image of the Five Happinesses. Traditionally, Chinese people regard longevity, fertility, wealth, enjoying moral eminence, and dying a natural death as the 'five happinesses'. It is a common theme of birthday congratulations to an elderly person (Gong & Yun, 2009). The untrained eye may wonder where the five happinesses are in the design, but may notice the decorative bats. In Chinese, bat 蝠 (fu) sounds exactly like 福 (good fortune), so the pictographic form of a bat is used to represent fortune, luck and happiness. Chinese people beautify the image of a bat and make it a symbol of good fortune in auspicious culture. Figurative images are more straightforward and effective than text in terms of conveying blessings and expressing emotions. People easily understand and accept them, and the meaning can be remembered and spread. There are many auspicious patterns that share the meaning of fortune and good luck portrayed as bats, which emerge as interesting metonymies for auspicious blessings.

### *The use of symbolism*

Symbolism is another common method to transfer the auspicious meaning to patterns. There is no specific form that represents an emotional expression or auspicious meaning, so the use of a real object that has the spirit and quality inherent in the symbolism represents the emotion and meaning of the auspicious blessing (Zheng & Xu, 2015). For example, a pair of mandarin ducks is associated with affectionate couples because in China, mandarin ducks are believed to mate for life; pines are a symbol of longevity due to their long-lived characteristics. These objects are altered to have particular implications in Chinese auspicious culture.

To sum up the content of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns, it is the metaphorical objects that produce meanings through their metaphorical implications (auspicious meanings), which become vivid through the use of symbolic expression. As Figure 3 shows, auspicious patterns are a way of conveying blessings through symbolic interactions that link auspicious meanings and ordinary objects. This diagram shows the relationship between the two contents of auspicious blessing. The auspicious meaning and auspicious pattern are in a transformative relationship.

### *The use of deformation*

This is a method of deforming auspicious Chinese characters into patterns, such as “福” (good fortune), “寿” (longevity) and “万字符” (fylfot patterns). The medallion in the centre of figure 2 gives an example of deforming the character 寿 (longevity). It is a symbol of auspicious meanings. It can also be done by extending the shape of “囍” (double happiness) to represent eternal love and a happy wedding (figure 20). This method strengthens the significance of abstract symbols (D. Y. Zhang, 2011).

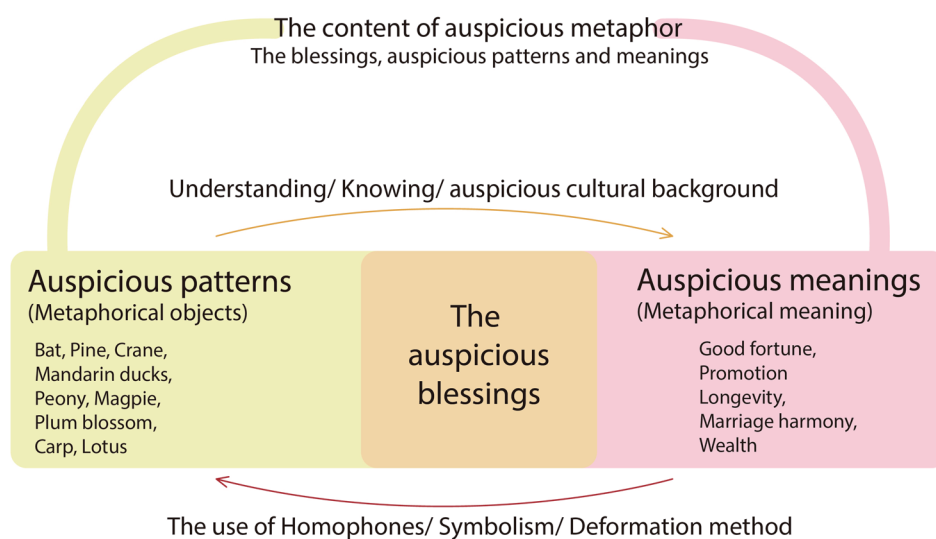


Figure 3. Ouyang, Y. (2017). The relationship in an auspicious blessing.



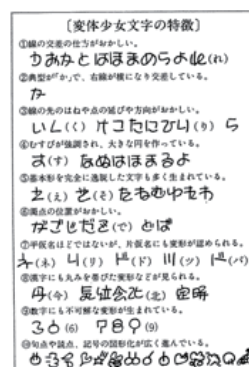
## Kawaii Culture



Figure 4. Chiyogami. Reprinted from *Kawaii Japan's culture of cute* (p. 13), by Y. Takehisa, 2013.



Figure 5. Samples of the Cute Handwriting from 1985. Reprinted from *"Cuties in Japan"*, by S. Kinsella, 1995.



Kawaii is a Japanese adjective meaning ‘cute and adorable’. It is an important aspect of Japanese popular culture, rooted in a sociohistorical aesthetic for things that are small, delicate and immature (Yomota, 2006). As Kinsella (1995) notes, “Kawaii celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances” (p. 220).

Girls’ illustrations, “shojo manga” (the Japanese phrase literally means “girls’ comics”), and the merchandising of fancy goods are the factors that contributed most to the development of Japanese kawaii culture (Kincaid, 2014; Okazaki & Johnson, 2013). According to Keiko Nakamura (as cited in Okazaki & Johnson, 2013), the concept of kawaii began in 1914. At that time the illustrator Yumeji Takehisa, known as “the godfather of Japanese cute culture”, opened a shop in Nihonbashi stocked with fancy goods aimed at schoolgirls. Until then, no shops were aimed at a particular clientele based on age or gender. The customers were mostly young women. Yumeji Takenhisa placed great importance on the cuteness of his designs. His illustrations of fancy goods roughly correspond to the kawaii character products of today (Nakamura, as cited in Okazaki & Johnson, 2013). In the figure 4, the flat design, solid colours, simplified features, and the repetitive patterns are commonly seen in many famous modern kawaii illustrations.

The development of kawaii culture in modern Japan started in the 1970s. Japanese youth, especially teenage girls, developed a childish handwriting style. This style of script writing differed from the traditional, which consists of vertical strokes of varying thicknesses, while the new childlike style, as Figure 5 shows, is written with rounded and curved lines, often combining characters with cartoon symbols such as hearts, stars, cute faces, and English words like “love” and “friend” (Cheok, 2010; Deng, 2014; Kinsella, 1995; Okazaki & Johnson, 2013).

Kawaii can be recognized by the characters' round, dewy eyes, soft, curved body shapes, and simple features (Johnson, 2007). Nittono (2016) suggests that rounded objects and certain colours are attributes that are perceived as cute, friendly, harmless, pretty and so on, and, "when they are evaluated as significant through cognitive appraisal processes, a psychological state that can be collectively described as kawaii occurs" (p. 88). Characters with simplified facial features, such as Rilakkuma (Bear Relaxing, figure 6) and Kogepan (burnt bread, figure 7), appeal to people from different cultural backgrounds. Herskovitz (as cited in Deng, 2014) summarized the appeal when discussing Hello Kitty (figure 8), the most famous kawaii character, which was designed by the Sanrio Company. Hello Kitty is a humanized kitten with a round face and eyes, but no mouth: "Without the mouth, it is easier for the person looking at Hello Kitty to project their feelings onto the character... The person can be happy or sad together with Hello Kitty" (Herskovitz, as cited in Deng, 2014, p. 12).

Imaginative, anthropomorphic and peculiar fantasies are potent features of kawaii. However a recent survey suggests (Nittono, 2016) that Japanese university students are attracted to kawaii by elements that include not only the shapes that can be seen or textures that can be touched, but also by the feelings that somehow move them. "The feeling of kawaii is not automatically evoked by the physical attributes of the eliciting entity, but is induced through a cognitive appraisal process" (Nittono, 2016, p. 9). That is to say, the perception of kawaii is based on the viewer's personal empathy. Rilakkuma (bear relaxing), who is always idle, relaxed and stress-free, is an example that confirms that his personality is appealing to people. Similarly Kogepan is a burnt bread character who is grumpy and sinister because of his burnt appearance. The unhappy personality strikes a chord with the audience; it makes them feel friendly and familiar, which makes Kogepan appear even cuter.



Figure 6. Rilakkuma. Retrieved from <http://www.san-x.jp/characters/rilakkuma.html>



Figure 7. Kogepan. Retrieved from <http://san-x.cupped-expressions.net/2013/01/kogepan.html>



Figure 8, Hello Kitty. Retrieved from <https://www.sanrio.com/>

Kawaii is anything that stirs feelings of love, care, and protectiveness. It is based on the adorable physical features of children and baby animals. Nakamura (as cited in Okazaki & Johnson, 2013), the curator of the Yayoi-Yumeji Museum, explains that the exact meaning of kawaii is “the appeal of adolescence... kawaii things are usually soft, bright, round and small... they give you peace of mind and a sense of security” (as cited in Okazaki & Johnson, 2013, p. 13). Others define kawaii as a childlike emotional and mental state (Deng, 2014), and a caregiving and protection for the young and the weak (Deng, 2014; Morreall, 1991). Cheok (2010) developed a definition of cuteness from a design perspective “Cuteness includes the feelings and emotions that are caused by experiencing something that is charming, cheerful, happy, funny, or something that is very sweet, innocent, or pure. It can stimulate a feeling of adoration, sympathy, or stimulating the care response” (p. 233). Therefore, kawaii has both visual and emotional aspects in its design aesthetics.

In conclusion, kawaii culture, the pursuit of cuteness, is a cultural phenomenon that is becoming more popular amongst some groups in society with the pressures of contemporary life. Simplicity is a characteristic of kawaii illustrations. The characters are designed to evoke a childlike state of mind, and their simple features give the audience an opportunity to project their own understanding and feelings onto the characters. Moreover, the characters that have a touching story are cuter than the ones that don't have a back story. The concrete manifestations of kawaii culture are the crude features that are nonetheless imaginative, personalized, and entertaining. This gives the audience a sense of relaxation and evokes empathy, the willingness to approach the characters, with a childlike emotional and mental state.

## Interplay: Chinese Traditional Auspicious Pattern and Kawaii Illustration

The social conditions in China and Japan are very different. Chinese people are generally more traditional, with only a minority able to access Japanese pop culture, even fewer of whom identify with kawaii culture. Although Japanese and Chinese cultures share some similarities, the awareness and appreciation of kawaii is very different, because a kawaii culture with Chinese characteristics is also being produced in China (Chuang, 2005). Japan's cute culture has been mainstreamed in China. Many brands in China do not use celebrity endorsements on the internet for publicity, but use cartoon images instead. This shows that now, kawaii culture is seen by people in China more often. The mascot for the 2008 Beijing

Summer Olympics, 福娃 Fuwa (Friendlies, figure 9), is a good example of the Chinese style of cuteness. 福娃 Fuwa literally means happiness/good fortune children. Each Fuwa relates to one of the colours of the Olympic Ring and one Chinese cultural inspiration. In this way blue ring is depicted in to a character of fish and lotus; black is a Panda; red is the Olympic flame, a fire design from the Mogao Grottoes; yellow is the Tibetan antelope, and green is the Beijing sand martin kite (Li & Li, 2009). The big rounded eyes, chubby limbs, and childlike drawing style are similar to kawaii characters. There is a detailed discussion about the similar aesthetic characteristics of Chinese traditional auspicious pattern and kawaii illustration in chapter 2.



Figure 9. The mascot of 2008 Beijing Olympics: Fuwa. Retrieved from <http://www.xltkwj.com/wendang/X4lB3TKvehHaDCOe.html>

Another example of the shared similarities is Pleasant Sheep (Figure 10), which is the most famous modern Chinese cute character. Pleasant Sheep is the protagonist of the cartoon “Pleasant Sheep and Big Big Wolf”, and is a clever little sheep. In Chinese language, Pleasant Sheep (喜羊羊) is a homophone for radiant and joyful (喜洋洋). The characters in this cartoon have been given names that are homophones. His friends’ names in the cartoon are also homophones to certain adjectives in Chinese. For example, a greedy and unresponsive sheep named 懒羊羊 (literally meaning lazy sheep), which is a homophone to 懒洋洋 (meaning comfortable and carefree). The characters are designed with smooth curved lines and big heads that occupy more than half their body size. “Pleasant Sheep and Big Big Wolf” has an important position in the Chinese animation industry, and the Lunar New Year film derived from the TV animation was very popular at the box office. Interestingly, the animation no longer attracts only young people, as many adults have also become consumers. This reflects the notion that not only children have the patent on relaxed plots and pleasant images. An adult desire for the relaxed and cute is receiving more and more attention in China (D. Q. Liu, 2010).

My research revealed that there are both similarities and differences between Chinese auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations on both the visual and emotional levels.

Kawaii illustrations possess a bold and fantastic imagination that lies beyond nature, which is the main reason for their extraordinary charm. Some of the creatures in Chinese traditional auspicious patterns are also depicted in a very unreal and imaginative way; for example, the bats in figure 2. Deformation and exaggeration are also obvious features of kawaii art, so the audience can break away from the constraints of reality. In the ideal world of the audience, they do not care much about the original structure of things. I find that I can use the deformation and exaggeration of kawaii illustration as a reference to investigate the redesigning of objects in Chinese auspicious patterns.

In a survey conducted in Tokyo, Kinsella (as cited in Nittono, 2016) reports that “respondents used kawaii when they felt that warm emotional contact between individuals had been expressed” (as cited in Nittono, 2016, p. 7). This could be a reason for the significance of combining kawaii with Chinese traditional auspicious patterns. The appealing and attractive patterns bring a sense of warm emotion to the audience through the kind regards and blessings of auspicious pattern.



Figure 10. Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf. Retrieved from [http://www.22dm.com/drama/dr\\_4.html](http://www.22dm.com/drama/dr_4.html)



Both Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations are intended to give pleasure to the audience. However, based on an analysis of a number of auspicious patterns during the research process, I found that the messages in the Chinese patterns are only accessible to those receivers who are familiar with the contents of the blessings. Despite having a long history, Chinese traditional auspicious patterns have lost the emotional content they used to have. Nowadays they become symbolic, and are only 'knowledge' and common sense to most Chinese, rather than conveying a feeling of being blessed and creating an emotional response. For a foreigner who does not understand Chinese auspicious culture, these patterns do not express their implications through a simple visual expression. An auspicious pattern has become a symbol, and the joy, enthusiasm and wisdom that underpin the blessing cannot be recognized, either artistically or psychologically.

On the other hand, kawaii illustrations give a pleasure that can be truly felt. Cute colours, shapes and other artistic elements evoke a loving feeling. As discussed before (p. 15), kawaii illustrations always suggest a story, so people can recognize a similar feeling in a particular situation as one the kawaii characters are in, which gives an intuitive pleasure and implies a cultural understanding on a deeper level. I think that the significance of auspicious symbols can only be expressed under the precondition of a good understanding of the auspicious implications. Such implications can make the viewers truly feel the emotion of the auspicious pattern.

In my research, I investigate auspicious patterns as more than a form that gives the audience an auspicious blessing. They also aim to convey auspicious meanings on a visual level. In other words, auspicious patterns will no longer be common sense handed down from generation to generation or knowledge that people have learned from a book. In order to achieve this goal, I explored the idea of combining kawaii elements with implications gained from researching Chinese traditional auspicious patterns. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Two

# PROJECT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

---

### *Overarching Design*

The aim of this project is to discover a new way of visually delivering the meaning and emotion inherent in Chinese auspicious patterns by applying kawaii elements to contemporize those Chinese auspicious patterns that have the potential to entertain an audience today. The images that are referred to in this creative project are kawaii illustrations and two traditional Chinese art forms; Chinese paper-cuts and Nian Hua (Chinese New Year painting). These together are the primary content of this practice-based research. The key output of this project is the set of rules I have developed for contemporizing Chinese traditional auspicious patterns, which guided me when creating the final work.

Figure 11 provides an overarching structure that demonstrates the role that Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations play in this research and how they affect the characteristics of composition, shape, colour and emotion. As the figure demonstrates, the content of philosophical concepts and methodological references both occur under the big picture of the design contexts, which consists of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns (grouped in transparent red) and kawaii illustrations (grouped in transparent blue). The art form, aesthetic value, and the philosophy of both Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations impact on the rules I developed for contemporizing the auspicious patterns. The philosophical ideas of Yin Yang and One to Many that exist in Chinese traditional auspicious patterns (the art form: Chinese New Year paintings and Chinese paper-cuts) also had an impact on kawaii illustrations and my practice work. The rules of composition I developed follow the ideas inherent in the

Taiji symbol. I believe complementariness within the individual pattern helps to create asymmetry while retaining the balance, instead of achieving a balance by making the pattern absolutely symmetrical. This idea exists both in Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and in kawaii illustration. The rules of shape and colour were developed from a visual analysis of the similarities and differences of shapes in kawaii illustrations, Chinese New Year paintings and Chinese paper-cuts. These media are the references that were used to develop my design methods. A summary then follows of the characteristics of the shapes that are used in my works. Also, the idea of how One to Many affected the development of shapes in my practice process is explained. In terms of the colours, I have retained the characteristics of Chinese New Year paintings and Chinese paper-cuts and integrated them with kawaii pastel colours. The emotion in my works is a unity of that found in auspicious blessings and the emotion found in kawaii.

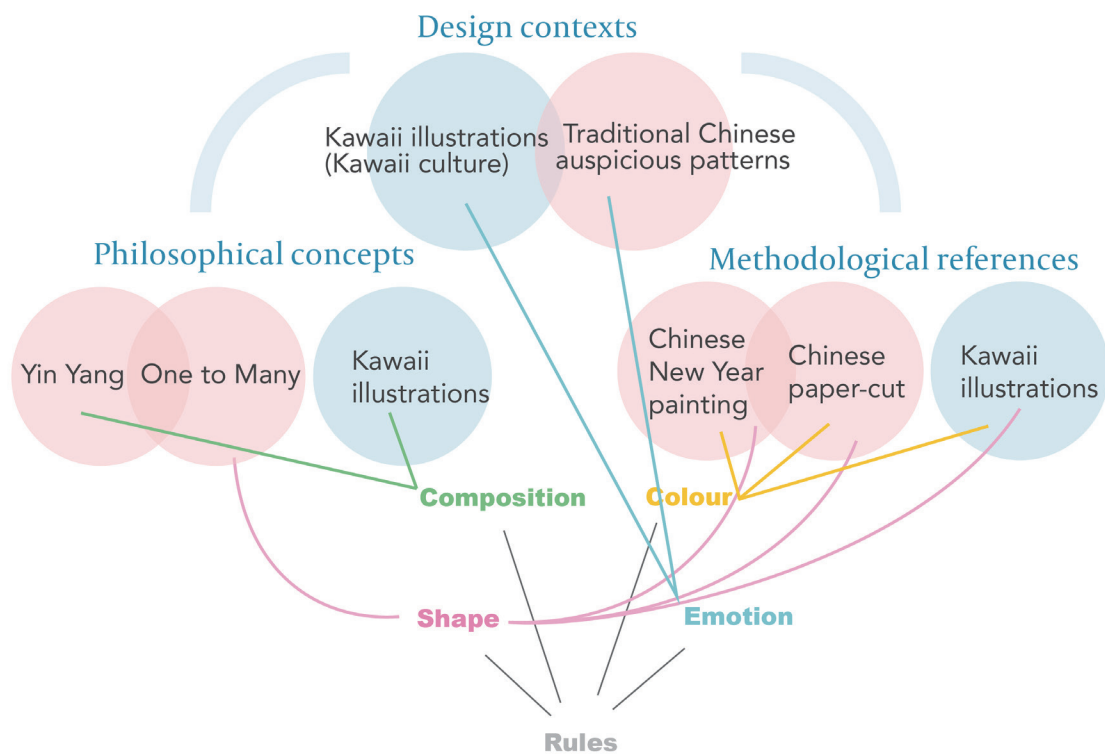
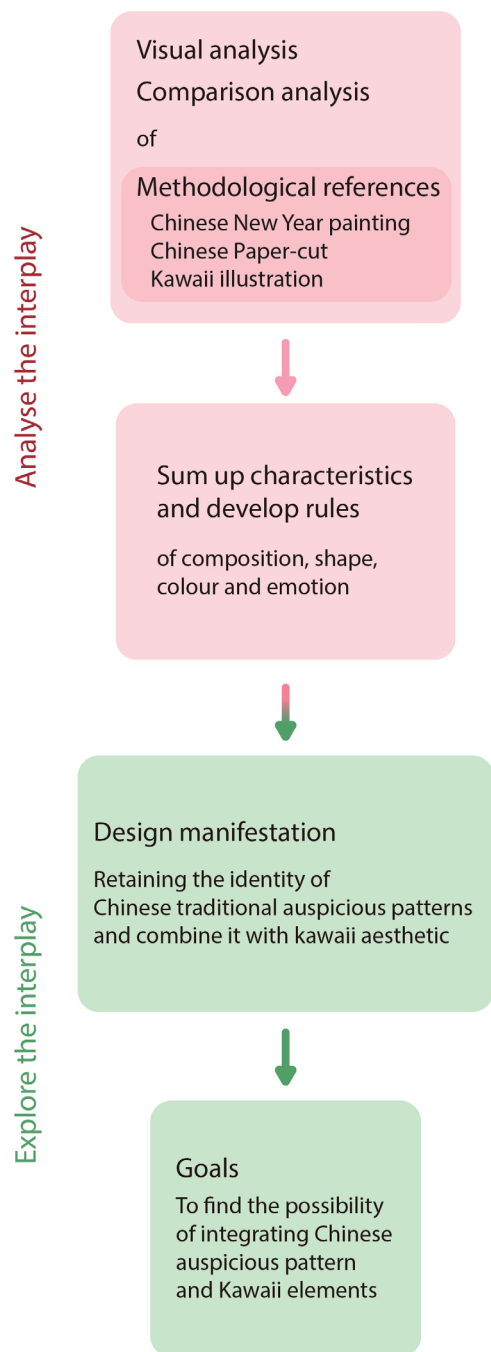


Figure 11. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Overarching structure of the project.





There are two main parts in the research method. Figure 12 shows the methodological structure. The characteristics of the composition, shapes, colours and emotions are summarized through a visual analysis of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustration and a comparative analysis of both. The analysis of the interplay eventually led me to develop the design strategies and find the possibility of expressing the emotion and meaning of Chinese auspicious patterns by integrating the characteristics of kawaii illustration.

Figure 12. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Methodological structure.

## Methodological Structure

The methodological approach for the practical work is guided by the development and establishment of an overarching structure which brings together the design context (see pp.10-15), the philosophical concepts (see pp.22-23) and the methodological references (see pp.) following a review of appropriate literature. This provides the rationale for the selection of further discovery modes including visual analysis (see pp.24-31) and comparison analysis (see pp.32) of auspicious blessings and kawaii illustration. The results of this led to other modes for addressing the research question including the development of design rules (see pp.33) to investigate the interplay between kawaii aesthetics and traditional auspicious blessings to manifest contemporary meaning and emotions (see pp.39-49).

## Philosophical Concepts

In this section some of the philosophical concepts that inform the Chinese traditional auspicious culture are discussed. These influenced the decision making of the patterns' composition, shapes and colour in my practical works.

Repetition is a significant feature of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns. Figure 13 demonstrates traditional Chinese floral patterns, which consist of a number of individual shapes. The theoretical reference for this is the concept of "One to Many" in chapter 42 of Daodejing ( 道德经 ). "Daoism construes oneness and manyness as interdependent ways of looking at the process of experience. Dao is said to engender both 'one' and 'many', both 'continuity' and 'difference'. Viewed as the creative source of all things that, at the same time, is only experientiable through them, dao is both continuity and proliferation" (Ames & Hall, 2004, p. 142).

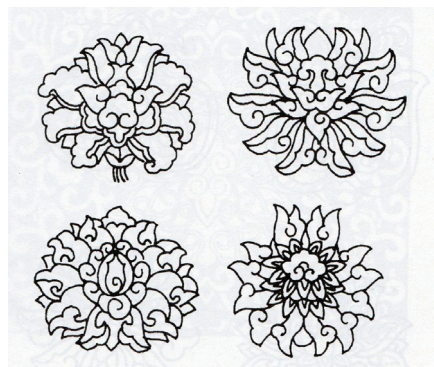


Figure 13. Floral patterns. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Patterns* (P.173) by Y. Wang, 2005, Tianjin, China: Tianjin Education Press.

“Way-making (dao 道) gives rise to continuity,  
 Continuity gives rise to difference,  
 Difference gives rise to plurality,  
 And plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (wanwu 万物).  
 Everything carries yin on its shoulder and yang in its arms  
 And blends vital energies (qi 气) together to make them harmonious (he 和).”

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。  
 万物负阴而抱阳，中气以为和。”  
 (Ames & Hall, 2004, p. 142).

The Taiji (太极) symbol (figure 14), primarily shown in black and white, forms a perfect circle to represent the harmony of conflicting forces inside everything in the universe. The Taiji is perceived to be the origin of the world. It is denoted by a circle with an s-shaped line in the middle that divides the circle into two equal halves. The black half stands for Yin, which “represents the ‘female’ energy, such as the moon, night, weakness, darkness, softness, and femininity” and the white half stands for Yang, the “‘male’ energy, such as the sun, day, strength, brightness, hardness, and masculinity” (Fang, 2012, para. 24).

“According to the Yin Yang philosophy, all universal phenomena are shaped by the integration of two opposite cosmic energies, namely Yin and Yang... The white dot in the black area and the black dot in the white area connote coexistence and unity of the opposites to form the whole. The curvy line in the symbol signifies that there are no absolute separations between opposites. The Yin Yang principle thus embodies duality, paradox, unity in diversity, change, and harmony, offering a holistic approach to problem-solving” (Fang, 2012, para. 24).

The Taiji symbol is a manifestation of the Yin Yang concept and influences the colours, shapes, and composition in both Chinese auspicious pattern design and kawaii illustrations on many levels. There is a further discussion in the following text.



Figure 14. Taiji symbol. Reprinted from *The Visual Dictionary of Auspicious China: Happiness* (p. 35), by J. Zheng, 2015, Shanghai, China: Cishu.

## Visual Analysis

In the following sections the visual characteristics of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations are discussed separately. Composition, shape and colour aspects are looked at.

### *The visual characteristics of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns*

#### *Composition*

The complex composition of Chinese auspicious patterns holds the viewer's attention and also fulfills psychological needs and aesthetic taste to celebrate affluence and prosperity (G. Liu, 2015). More closely, it can be seen that the patterns are made up of the same components, but they each have individual compositions and shapes. Take figure 15 as an example. The image is of peonies and each peony has its own unique details. Traditional auspicious patterns always look full and complex at first glance, but once the audience has deciphered the pattern they will be surprised by the uniqueness of each individual part, and consequently unveil the many as a wholeness.

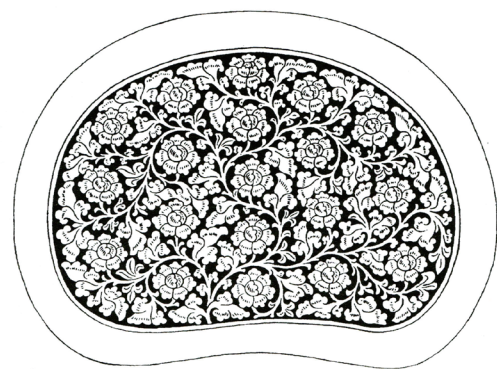


Figure 15. Peony. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Patterns* (P.187), by Y. Wang. 2005. Tianjin, China: Tianjin Education Press.

Another significant strategy in the visual content of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns is the conceptual pursuit of completeness and perfection (Wang, 2005). For example, the visual symmetrical balance of “dragon and phoenix” (Figure 16) is common in many other auspicious patterns. In figure 16, the medallion consists of a phoenix and clouds on the left half and a dragon and water on the right half. The composition was generated from the Taiji symbol (figure 14). The patterns of the two sides are never balanced, but are complementary to each other.



Figure 16. [Untitled illustration of “dragon and phoenix”]. (n.d.). Retrieved November 22, 2016, from <http://sc115.com/vector/140483.html>

Chinese traditional auspicious patterns carry the universal preferences of the nation to 圆满, ‘completeness’ and ‘fullness’. Chinese people regard completeness and fullness as good wishes for wealth and prosperity (Bi, 2007). Therefore, most traditional auspicious pattern designs (such as those in figures 16 and 17) are intended to make the pattern appear balanced, so the images are always filled with decorative patterns and have very little blank space. From a contemporary point of view, the designs and strategy of auspicious patterns are interactive, forming multi-layered interwoven concepts: the auspicious meaning and the pattern, the harmony between the objects in the pattern, the complementariness of the dynamic and the static.



Figure 17. The Double Happiness. Reprinted from *Chinese traditional culture of Xi* (p. 82), by W. Yin, 2005, Kunming, China: Yunnan Renmin Press.

## Shape

A distinctive feature in the ideological concept of Chinese culture is an emphasis on the harmonious unification of human and nature. Therefore, traditional auspicious patterns were created with a focus on the complementary within the individual patterns. Through a visual analysis of traditional patterns, I found that the cloud pattern is widely applied in Chinese traditional auspicious patterns. One reason for this is that the Chinese character for cloud (yun 云) is pronounced the same as yun (运) meaning "luck" or "fortune". Another reason is that the cloud pattern consists of s-shaped lines and whirls. Such shapes create visually stimulating, psychological touches (M. Zhang, 2006). They do not always come alone but are mixed with other patterns (figure 17, 19). Even in figure 15, the leaves and peony flowers are drawn with the features of cloud patterns, rounded shapes and smooth edges, showing the dynamic, graceful richness of the peony.

The "five happiness and longevity symbol" is a typical example (figure 18). In figures 18a and 18c, the pattern is a concentric circular medallion with three layers of patterns. There is a longevity symbol in the centre, a circle of five bats in the middle, and a circle of cloud patterns in the outer circle. Figure 18b illustrates the curved and whirling lines that are used to depict the body, which is combined with clouds (the outer circle pattern). In Chinese traditional auspicious patterns the wings of a bat are usually depicted by two big bow-shaped curves and decorated with swirling shapes and a series of short curves. The ears are curved to the same side with the body.

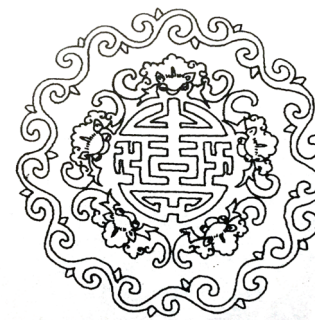


Figure 18 (a, b and c, from top to bottom)  
Five happiness and longevity symbol. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Patterns* (p. 13), by Y. Wang, 2005. Tianjin, China: Tianjin Education Press.



Decorative spiral and whirling patterns can be attractive and have a psychological touch. Abstract shapes and simple lines sustain relaxed and lovely feelings (M. Zhang, 2006). The pattern of peony flowers in figure 15 shows repetitive curved lines applied to traditional auspicious patterns. The very soft-feeling, rounded, cloud-shaped peony and the black negative spaces denote the harmony between the paradox and unity of dynamic and static.

In Chinese traditional culture, s-shapes are regarded as the source of the universe, representing a dualistic world view of the dynamic and static, life and death, Yin and Yang. As a symbol it represents the infinite cycle of movement and infinite continuity of life (M. Zhang, 2006). This vortex contains everything in the universe, and is a combination of circles and s-shapes. It was believed in ancient China that the circle is the basic shape of the universe, so the vortex has a profound symbolic significance.

Figure 19 is the character of 福 (good fortune), decorated with the twelve Chinese animals of the zodiac used to symbolize the year of one's birth. In this colour pattern we can see a number of traditional decorations, many of which share characteristics with kawaii elements. For example, each animal is depicted in different colours (just like the animals of Wishmemell in figure 23), and decorated with floral patterns and spiral shapes over the body. The monkey is personified by wearing cloth. The animal patterns show the same Chinese style of cuteness as the mascots of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (figure 9).



Figure 19. The Character of Fu Decorated with the 12 Symbolic Animals Used to Denote the Year of One's Birth. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Designs* (p. 4), by N. Gong & W. Yun. 2008, Beijing, China: China Intercontinental Press.

## Colour

Colours in China are associated with auspicious culture and the Five Elements. The five elements, jin (金 metal), mu (木 wood), shui (水 water), huo (火 fire), and tu (土 earth), are regarded as the foundation of everything in the universe (Bi, 2007). Each element has its own personality and is related to one colour. The colour of wood is green. Green is associated with health, prosperity, and harmony (Li & Li, 2009). Red relates to the element fire, symbolizes good fortune and happiness, and is widely used in auspicious patterns. Yellow represents earth, considered to be the colour of freedom and beauty. Chinese people call themselves 炎黄子孙, literally meaning “Descendants of Yan and Huang”, and “Huang” means yellow in Chinese; the Yellow River (黄河) in China is called the mother river. Chinese people believe yellow means wealth and honour (Gong & Yun, 2009; D. Y. Zhang, 2011). A lot of auspicious patterns use yellow as the main colour (figure 13). White corresponds to metal, signaling purity and righteousness. The element of water is represented by black.

A common characteristic of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns is the colour combinations. These are usually a combination of undiluted red and green or undiluted yellow and blue.

According to Itten (1970), such combinations are called “contrast of hue”. Which are “illustrated by undiluted colors in their most intense luminosity” (p. 33). Figure 20 shows a common colour combination in Chinese pattern design: a high saturation of red and green. Figure 21 applies the combination of bright yellow and blue. Replacing a proportion of saturated colours in the pattern by pastel colours is a key method in the process of combining kawaii elements with Chinese auspicious patterns. Pastel colours are often associated with the feminine and cleanliness and are commonly used in kawaii illustrations. I consider pastel and high-saturated colours to be a Yin and Yang complementary pair.

Chinese New Year painting has a very interesting kind of texture applied to the colouring method. There are irregular blanks between the colour and the outlines (figure 21), and the colour is mottled. This is because of the block printing technology behind making a New Year painting. I find that the mottled colour and irregular blanks in the colouring portray a childish style of imperfection, which agrees with the features of kawaii and demonstrates the cuteness of Chinese New Year painting.



Figure 20. Happiness, Wealth, Longevity and Happiness: Weifang, Shandong (P.122). Reprinted from *Folk New Year Pictures*, by X. L. Lan. 2008. Beijing, China: Foreign languages Press.



Figure 21. The God of Happiness: Weifang, Shandong (P.59). Reprinted from *Folk New Year Pictures*, by X. L. Lan. 2008. Beijing, China: Foreign languages Press.



## The visual characteristics of Japanese kawaii illustrations

### Composition

The Chinese traditional idea of balance also exists in kawaii illustrations, which helped me to maintain a balance when applying cute elements to Chinese traditional aesthetic symbols or patterns. The concept of balance is embodied in many opposites: symmetrical and asymmetrical; dynamic and static, femininity and masculinity (G. Liu, 2015).

Kawaii illustrations mostly employ characters, shapes and colours dispersedly all over the work, but there is a balance between the asymmetry of in individual and the symmetry within the whole image. For example, figure 22 shows this balance. Two characters stand vertically on the middle line with three characters on each side standing in the same position. Figure 23 has five animals on the left and four animals on the right, but the two animals on the bottom left are very close; they combine into one that is as big as the yellow bear on the bottom right. The same thing happens in figure 24, where the pink cloth-wrapper character and the yellow shrimp tempura character have the same rabbit ear shapes on their head. They have the same composition of the two sides of this illustration, which makes the image balanced and dynamic.



Figure 22. Mr. Men Little Miss. Retrieved from <https://www.sanrio.co.jp/character/mrmenlittlemiss/>



Figure 23. Wishmemell. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/Wishmemell/status/853488140631199744/photo/1>



Figure 24. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The colours in a kawaii illustration of Sumikkogurashi.

## Shape

In my redesigns of Chinese auspicious patterns, I considered the figures to be creatures as patterns rather than characters. However I still used the features of kawaii characters for reference. As discussed in Chapter One, a baby's helplessness and need for protection evoke a general desire to look after the young and the weak (Lorenz, as cited in Fournier, 2002). Animal features are also capable of bringing people a sense of cuteness. Animal ears, chubby pink paws and short tails are a common device for kawaii characters, as are fluffy fur and whiskers. Such features are generally illustrated with lines. A number of kawaii mascots and characters have various animal features, such as Hello Kitty's cat ears (figure 8), the rounded body of animal characters in Sumikkogurashi (figure 25) and the fluffy furs of Wishmemell (figure 23). The features of kawaii characters correspond to Lorenz's 1943 theory of cuteness. He suggested that cuteness is related to the physical features that infants and baby animals have. These features include:

- A head large in relation to the body.
- A large protruding forehead, with the eyes set relatively low in the head. (In adult humans the eyes are positioned about half-way down the head; in infants, they are about two-thirds of the way down the head).
- Round, protruding cheeks.
- Rounded body shape.
- Short, thick limbs.
- Soft body surfaces that are pleasurable to touch.
- Behaviour indicating weakness and clumsiness (Lorenz, as cited in Fournier, 2002, p. 133).

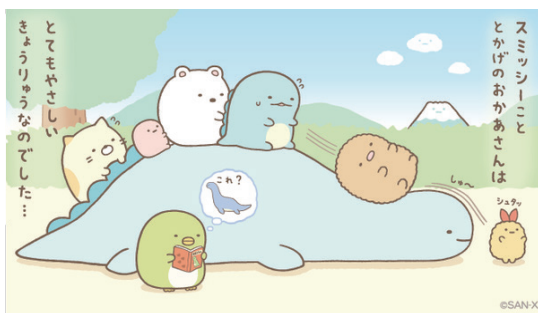


Figure 25. Sumikkogurashi. Retrieved from <https://webppt.com/m.aspx?n=bbs/San-X/M.1459602860.A.60B>.

In addition, during the visual analysis of a great number of kawaii illustrations, I found that the following elements are widely used in kawaii illustrations for decorative purposes to make the image feel rich and completed in content:

- Heart shapes (the most common shape for representing love)
- Stars (four-pointed, five-pointed and six-pointed stars, and crossed lines represent shining light)
- Flowers
- Clouds (usually in combination with rainbow or raindrops)
- Ribbons or lace (representing a girlish style)
- Sweet desserts (such as cakes, doughnuts, lollipops, candy, ice cream, chocolate, waffles,)
- Musical notes (used to represent good mood)
- Party stuff (such as colourful flags, banners, party hats, confetti, balloons)

Figure 26 gives an example of the application of the above elements. The application of different sized elements and the dots and check pattern on these elements make the images more colourful and rich.



Figure 26. [Untitled illustration of Sweetie Prism]. (n.d.). Retrieved May 15, 2016, from [http://www.mindwave.co.jp/character/product/sweetie\\_prism.html](http://www.mindwave.co.jp/character/product/sweetie_prism.html)

## Colour

As well as composition and shape, colour also plays a key role in making an image balanced. Kawaii illustrations commonly use soft, contrasting colours in combination, usually combining one reddish colour and one bluish colour. Pinks and blues, pink and purple, yellow and blue, pink and green, and yellow and green are often used in combination. In figure 23, the koala is mainly pink with a little amount of blue, while the kitten that stands opposite is mainly blue but has pink in a small shape. The panda and rabbit under them are in white and blue and white and pink respectively. In figure 24, the middle is a warm pastel green colour, with pastel pink and yellow on two sides, and with the addition of two subtle colours of grey and a low saturated brown.

The colour combinations of pink and blue, pink and purple, yellow and blue, pink and green, and yellow and green are common in kawaii illustrations. Pastel colours are very classic colours in kawaii illustrations (figures 23, 24, 25). Through a visual analysis of kawaii illustrations (figure 23, 24, 25, 27, 44), I extracted the colours and developed a palette (figure 28). I classified the colours into warm pastel colours and cold pastel colours in order to express vitality and calmness, and chose this palette for my work.

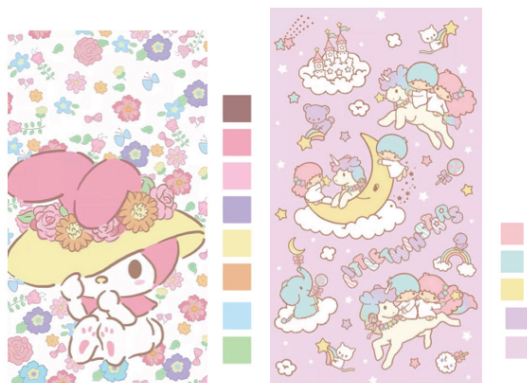


Figure 27. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The colours in a kawaii illustration.

The cold pastel colours are visually stronger and darker than the warm pastels, as the warm pastel colours are softer and create the illusion of dreams. Taking figures 25 and 23 as an example, the two kawaii illustrations are both characters that are depicted with semi-brown outlines and coloured with pastels. However, the emotion in the two is very different. I consider that the cold and warm pastel colours represent what Yin Yang stands for. Figure 25 has cold pastel colours, which create a calm, quiet and peaceful state of mind, while figures 23 and 27 use warm pastel colours, giving the viewer a feeling of delight and dynamism.

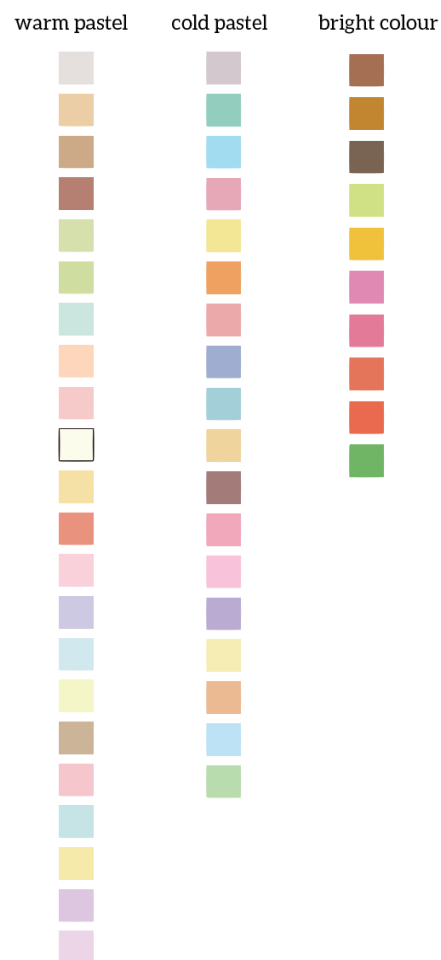


Figure 28. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Colour analysis of kawaii illustration.

## Analysis of the Interplay

The similarities and differences in the characteristics of colour, shape, composition and emotion were extracted from the previous analysis of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations (figure 29). Figure 29 shows how the characters were summarized and eventually developed to conform to rules. The characteristics shown at the bottom of figure 28 can be used to design patterns that have the identity of a Chinese auspicious pattern as well as having kawaii elements. For example, although used for different purposes and for the expression of different emotions, Chinese traditional New Year paintings are not fully coloured: there are white gaps between the colours and outlines, and also a mottled texture (figure 21), which shows a crude style. This is similar to kawaii illustrations, which usually create a sense of a childlike drawing style as in figure 26, where the colours run outside the outlines. Such features of colouring can be used to make the auspicious pattern childish and amusing.

Through a comparison analysis of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations, I extracted the following characteristics and applied them to my own designs. After multiple trials, I developed some rules about how to combine kawaii elements with Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and how to draw the characteristics of a traditional auspicious pattern in a cute way.

- Retain the contrasting colour hues and the unique shape of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns to retain Chinese identity.
- Use repetitive patterns.
- Use roundish shapes: curves are warmer, friendlier and cuter.
- Simplicity: avoid the scattering of visual focus caused by too many shapes and details.
- Texture: use simple lines and shapes to create different kinds of textures in order to make the pattern rich and interesting.
- Pastel colours: pastel colours are less intense, they are regarded as calmer and quieter and give the viewer a childlike feeling (Cheok & Fernando, 2012).
- Relate kawaii elements and Chinese auspicious patterns to the concept of One to Many.

characteristics of color    characteristics of shape    characteristics of composition    emotion

the characteristics of  
Chinese traditional  
auspicious pattern

red, yellow, green, white, black  
contrasting colour hue  
mottled texture

symmetry  
fullness  
complementary  
spiral pattern  
s-shaped lines  
roundness  
crude style  
precise linear

repetitive  
balance  
medallion

cheerful  
delightful  
amusing  
moving

the characteristics of  
Kawaii illustration

the combination of pastel colours  
balance in colour

kawaii elements  
roundness  
childlike style  
bold outlines  
solid colour without outlines  
soften edges  
irregular lines

balance within the asymmetry

desire to touch  
delightful  
amusing  
childish  
warm  
powerless  
willing to protect

contrasting colour hue  
the combination of pastel colours  
mottled texture  
balance in colour

repetitive  
balance within the asymmetry

desire to touch  
delightful  
amusing  
childish  
warm  
moving

soften edges  
fullness  
symmetry  
s-shaped lines  
complementary  
roundness  
spiral pattern  
childlike style  
solid colour without outlines

Figure 29. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Developing rules of cute Chinese auspicious pattern elements from the visual analysis of Chinese traditional auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations.

## *Design Manifestation*

In the following sections I elaborate the design strategies. I begin by introducing the auspicious metaphors of the seven Chinese auspicious blessings I chose to contemporize, as auspicious metaphor is the primary content that connotes the meaning and emotion of Chinese auspicious blessings. Metaphor in this project is a content of the practice. I then elaborate the visual characteristics of the Chinese traditional auspicious patterns that I have kept, in order to retain the identity of the Chinese patterns and the kawaii aesthetic elements that have been added to enrich the auspicious patterns.

### *The content of Chinese auspicious patterns*

The goal of this project is to visually express the emotion of Chinese auspicious patterns. The emotions I talk about here are the auspicious meanings of the auspicious blessings and the feelings that a viewer can receive from an auspicious pattern. Emotions are closely linked with understanding the meaning of an auspicious blessing. In this section, I explain the different stages in the design process that address the different layers of meaning in auspicious patterns: the literal meaning, the auspicious meaning and the emotional meaning.

I chose the following seven auspicious blessings to be the content of my design work. These auspicious blessings have a commonality in the objects and variations in the blessing, according to the five themes (see p. 10). The seven chosen auspicious blessings are composed of four Chinese characters with patterns that mainly consist of animal and plants, applying either homophone or symbolism to illustrate the auspicious meanings. A detailed explanation follows:



连年有余 (figure 30a)

Pinyin: Lian Nian You Yu

Auspicious meaning: Having an affluent material life year after year

Literal meaning: Having a surplus year after year

Auspicious symbols: Lotus and carp

Homophonic rhetoric:

Lotus (莲 Lian)– Consecutive (连 Lian);

Fish (鱼 Yu)– Surplus (余 Yu)

Emotions: Delightful, amusing and wealth

The carp fish is commonly seen in Chinese auspicious patterns because the Chinese character for carp (li yu 鲤鱼) is pronounced the same as “profit” (li 利), “strength” or “power” (li 力) and “more” or “surplus” (yu 余). Due to fact that the carp produces many eggs, it is also a symbol for an abundance of children. The carp pattern is usually shown with a lotus flower pattern, as in Chinese lotus (lian 莲) shares the same pronunciation as lian 连, meaning “one after another”. So the pattern of a carp and a lotus means having a surplus and abundance year after year. The pattern is sending a message that says “wishing you prosperity every year”.



Figure 30 a. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Having surplus riches and honor for years running.

白头富贵 (figure 30b)

Pinyin: Bai Tou Fu Gui

Auspicious meaning: Maintaining wealth and nobility to a ripe old age

Literal meaning: Gray hair (longevity), wealth and nobility

Auspicious symbols: A white-headed Chinese bulbul and peony

Auspicious metaphor:

White-headed Chinese bulbul – elderly;

Peony – wealth and nobility

Emotions: Delightful, dynamic, innocent, graceful and prosperous

The white feather on the head of the white-headed Chinese bulbul represents the elderly. The peony is known in China as the flower of wealth and honour, due to the way that it doubles as it grows. The peony appears to the Chinese like strings of cash coins. The blessing is “maintaining wealth and nobility to a ripe old age”.



Figure 30 b. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Maintaining wealth and nobility to a ripe old age.

鸳鸯贵子 (figure 30c)

Pinyin: Yuan Yang Gui Zi

Auspicious meaning: An affectionate couple and their baby who is a high achiever

Literal meaning: Chinese mandarin ducks and precious baby

Auspicious symbol: A pair of Chinese mandarin ducks, osmanthus and lotus

Auspicious metaphor and homophonic rhetoric:

Chinese mandarin ducks – affectionate couple;

Osmanthus ( 桂 Gui) – Precious ( 贵 Gui);

Lotus ( 莲子 Lian Zi) – Son ( 子 Zi)

Emotions: Delightful, love and dynamism

五福捧寿 (figure 30d)

Pinyin: Wu Fu Peng Shou

Auspicious meaning: Five happiness and longevity

Literal meaning: Five happiness/good fortune and longevity

Auspicious symbols: Five bats surrounding the Chinese longevity symbol

Homophone rhetoric:

Bat ( 蝠 Fu) - Good fortune ( 福 Fu)

Emotions: Happiness, amusing, innocence

As discussed in chapter 1, mandarin ducks is a symbol of affectionate couples. The spoken sound of cassia or cinnamon (gui 桂) in Chinese is same as high rank (gui 贵). Lotus seed (lian zi 莲子) is pronounced the same as “one after another” (lian 连) and “son” (zi 子). Therefore, a combination of cassia and lotus seeds expresses “the desire for many sons who will achieve high office” (The hidden or implied meaning of Chinese charm symbols, n.d.).

See the discussion on page 9.



Figure 30 c. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Mandarin Duck and Precious Baby.



Figure 30 d. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Five Happiness and Longevity symbol .



福在眼前 (figure 30e)

Pinyin: Fu Zai Yan Qian

Auspicious meaning: Happiness is before your eyes

Literal meaning: Happiness is in front of your eyes

Auspicious symbols: Bats and ancient coins

Homophone rhetoric:

Bat (蝠 Fu)– Happiness (福 Fu);

Ancient coins (钱 Qian) – in front of (前 Qian);

The hole in ancient coins (眼 Yan) – Eyes (眼 Qian)

Emotions: Delightful, amusing, innocent, happy and wealthy

A Chinese ancient coin with a square central hole is sometimes referred to as an "eye coin" (yanqian 眼钱). The Chinese word for coin or money (qian 钱) is pronounced the same as the word for "before" (qian 前). Therefore, a picture of a bat (fu 蝠) on (zai 在) an "eye coin" (yanqian 眼钱) creates a visual pun of "happiness is before your eyes" (fu zai yan qian 福在眼前).

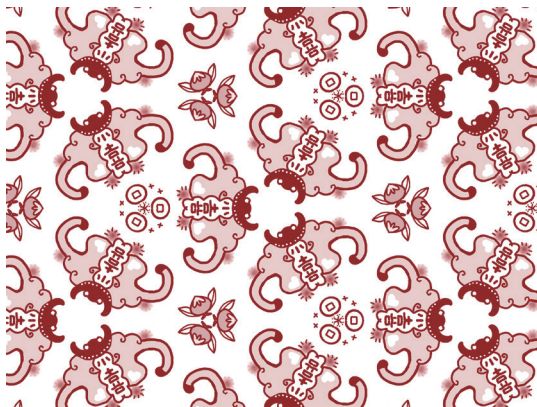


Figure 30 e. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Happiness is in front of your eyes.

松鹤长春 (figure 30f)

Pinyin: Song He Chang Chun

Auspicious meaning: Live as long as the pine and crane

Literal meaning: Pine, crane and a long spring

Auspicious symbols: Pine and crane

Auspicious metaphor:

Pine and crane – symbol of longevity

Emotions: Delightful, amusing, peaceful

Chinese people believe that cranes can live to a very old age, thus crane in Chinese traditional auspicious patterns is a symbol of longevity. The pine tree is also a very common symbol for longevity because it is an evergreen even in winters.



Figure 30 f. Ouyang, Y. (2017) Live As Long As the Pine and Crane.

喜上眉梢 (figure 30g)

Pinyin: Xi Shang Mei Shao

Auspicious meaning: Radiant with happiness

Literal meaning: Joy on the eyebrows

Auspicious symbols: A magpie standing on a plum tree

Homophone rhetoric:

Magpie (喜 Xi) – Joy (喜 Xi);

Plum blossom (梅 Mei) – Eyebrows (眉 Mei)

Emotions: Delightful, amusing and innocent

In the Chinese language, magpie (喜鹊 Xi Que) is pronounced the same as joy (喜 Xi). The Chinese word for eyebrows (眉 Mei) is pronounced the same as the word for plum blossom (梅 Mei). Therefore, a pattern of a magpie standing on a plum tree denotes that happiness is occurring. This is an auspicious blessing to wish people smile often and always have good things happen to them.



Figure 30 g. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Radiant with happiness.

## Exploration of the interplay and the emotions

The primary strategy in developing the creative practice is to retain some significant elements of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns while adding kawaii elements. With recourse to the philosophical concept of Yin Yang, which constantly strives for a balanced harmony, it is pivotal to control the balance between the contradictory elements of Chinese auspicious patterns and the kawaii elements in the design process, such as the contradiction between the simplicity of kawaii illustrations and the “fullness and richness” of Chinese auspicious patterns. The interplay between them informed the development of the rules. In order to retain the identity of Chinese traditional patterns I kept some of the significance of the shape, colour and composition of Chinese New Year paintings and Chinese paper-cuts. Some rules were developed as a platform for the explorations. The specific content is as follows:

To preserve the identity of Chinese auspicious patterns:

- Retain the contrast of the colours.
- Retain the peculiar shapes of traditional auspicious patterns.
- Retain the repetitive patterns.
- Retain a symmetrical balance.

To add the kawaii aesthetic:

- Soften or round the shapes.
- Simplify the shapes.
- Add pastel colours.

In this section, I have extracted some typical works to discuss the exploration of interplay and emotion and show how the works were developed to express emotion as a result of the interplay.

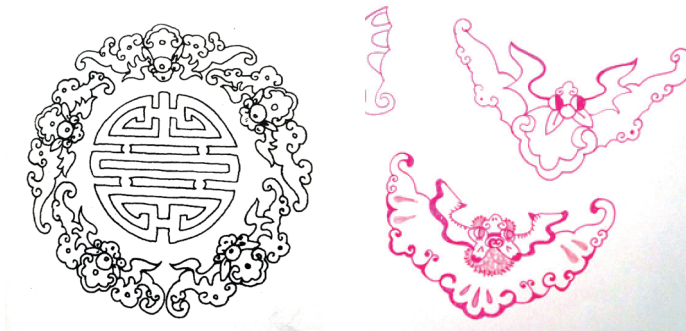
Figure 31 shows five trials of the bat pattern developed at the beginning of this research project. I started with the bat pattern because the bat is a symbol of good fortune, which is an important aspect of Chinese auspicious culture (refer to “The content of Chinese auspicious culture”). I started by copying the characteristics of shape and redesigned the body features with more roundness and neatness. Many more kawaii elements were added to the pattern. On the right are the bat patterns I designed, based on the Chinese traditional auspicious bat patterns on the left. I retained the characteristic shape of the body and the wings to indicate the traditional style. The traditional Five Happiness pattern has pretty lines on the body and decorative details on each bat, but as a whole it looks overly complicated. I attempted to make the pattern more regular and neater than the traditional ones to avoid the decorations interfering with the visual focus. I simplified the outlines and smoothed the sharp corners on the wings (figure 31b). I also tried to separate the components by applying different tones of colour to make the pattern clearer.



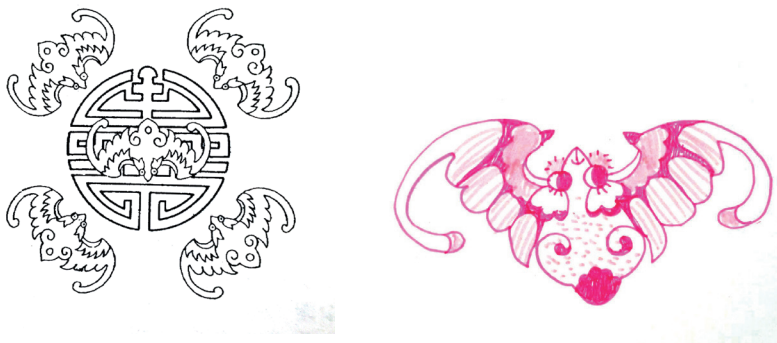
a



b



c



d

Figure 31 (a,b,c and d). Ouyang, Y. (2016). Development of bat pattern from Chinese traditional auspicious bat pattern.

I applied one of my bat designs to the “Five happinesses and longevity symbol” (figure 32), then found that the bat patterns I had designed were more like characters than patterns. As the body features are distinct, viewers will tend to focus on the personality behind the features rather than on the pattern. This led me to weaken the eyes and simplify the decoration on the bodies, I tried this in a few different ways (figure 33). I used thick strokes to emphasise the main body of the bat (figure 33 a), illustrating the wings with smooth curved lines, S-shaped lines and whirling lines to represent the variation of each part of the body, and I drew the body as a fluffy ball to refer to kawaii. The repetitive spots in a circle are regular to keep the symmetry of the pattern and make it neat. The one made of fluffy balls (figure 33a) tends to be more kawaii and playful, while figure 33b, with an emphasis on the mobility of the wings, looks more traditional Chinese. Figure 33c was a bold attempt and an improvement on figure 33a. With a heart shaped fluffy body and a more representational mouth it suggests the cartoonish and is amusing.



Figure 32. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Five Happiness and the Longevity symbol.

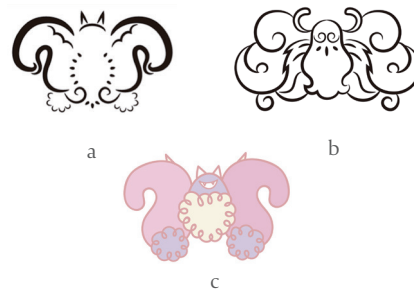
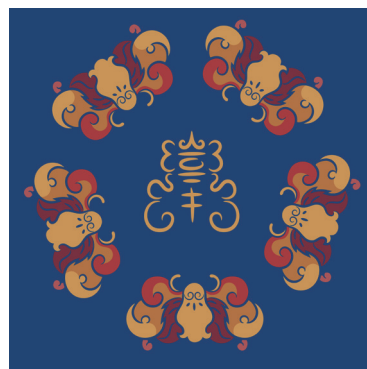
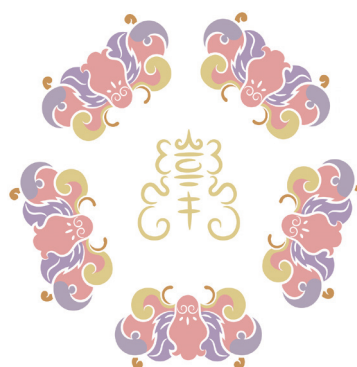


Figure 33. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Bat patterns.

Figure 34 is a further application of the bat pattern in figure 33b. I applied thick curved lines and whirling lines on the bats, as well as to the character of 寿 (longevity) to make the contours soft and round. I tested the pattern with a traditional auspicious pattern colour combination (figure 34a) and with pastel colours (figure 34b); with outlines and without outlines (figure 34c). The pattern in pastels and without outlines is cuter, while the one in a traditional Chinese colour combination with a dark blue background is colder and more serious. However, the pattern in figure 34d, which applied figure 33c as an individual component, suggests a totally different emotion, because it seems more joyful. I also found that the sparkles in figure 34d worked well on the decoration and helped the pattern meet the standard of Chinese richness and fullness.



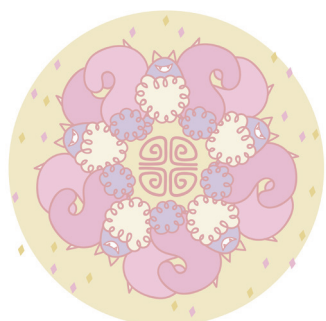
a



b



c



d

Figure 34. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Five Happiness and the longevity symbol.



As discussed earlier, contrasting colour hues are an important feature of Chinese New Year pictures but Chinese traditional colour combinations no longer suit the modern aesthetic taste. I attempted to find a balance between traditional Chinese colours and kawaii pastel colours. I re-designed Figure 35, The Twin Genii He-He, as an experiment to explore how the interplay can be affected by colour. I reduced the saturation of red and green to weaken the contrast so it was softer and less gaudy (figure 36). To balance the pattern, I coloured areas very carefully. I made the boys a complementary pair in red and green. One boy wears a red cloak with green cloth inside and has a green box in his hand, while the other boy wears a green cloak with a red cloth inside and holds a red lotus. Also, I applied the cloud pattern to the hair, which created an interesting and amusing effect. I found the outcome very interesting, so I made more experiments where I combined two auspicious objects together.



Figure 35. The Twin Genii He-He. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Designs* (p. 57), by N. Gong & W. Yun. 2008, Beijing, China: China Intercontinental Press.

Figure 37 is a combination of the bat and the peach of longevity. The body of the bat is shaped like a peach which is a symbol of Daoist immortality. Another feature of this pattern is its texture. I drew the contour with an irregular digital crayon brush in a computer program to imitate the mottled texture of Chinese New Year pictures. The crayon texture recalls a childlike drawing style, which makes the pattern appear childlike and cute.



Figure 37. Ouyang, Y. (2017) Good fortune and longevity bats.



Figure 36. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The Twin Genii He-He.



Another feature of traditional auspicious patterns that I feel is important to keep is the repetition. The design process was inspired by Laozi's (6th century B.C.) Daodejing (道德经): The individual "must remain provisional and incomplete. Otherwise true novelty – the spontaneous, uncaused, and unexplained emergence of the new and unique – will not be possible (Ames & Hall, 2004, p. 142)". I started by designing the individual components and then combined them regularly into a few different patterns. Each individual shape represents a small unity of 'one'; one evolves into two, and on into many.

Figure 38 illustrates my first attempt to combine the features of kawaii with repetitive patterns to design a lotus leaf. By doing this I tried to find a balance between simplicity and complexity within one pattern. In this work, the lotus leaf is made up of repetitive shapes. I started with sketches on paper to discover a way of depicting the lotus leaf pattern with individual shapes and lines (figure 38a). I tried curvy lines and straight lines to depict the veins and divided the whole pattern into individual components. Then I used the characteristics of kawaii illustration, simple shapes and smooth curved lines, to make up the digital version. Figure 38c illustrates the pattern of the lotus leaf, which consists of three individual shapes. The outer ring is formed by triangular shapes with curved lines, and the inner ring has repetitive diamond shapes with a sharp angle pointing at the circle in the centre. The gaps between each part are the veins of the leaf. Instead of colouring the pattern irregularly, I coloured the lotus leaf in four different greens and followed a designed layout (figure 38b). These individual shapes together create a dynamic flow between the different colours and shapes. They are repetitive and complicated, and they unify to become one simple pattern – from many to becoming a balanced one.

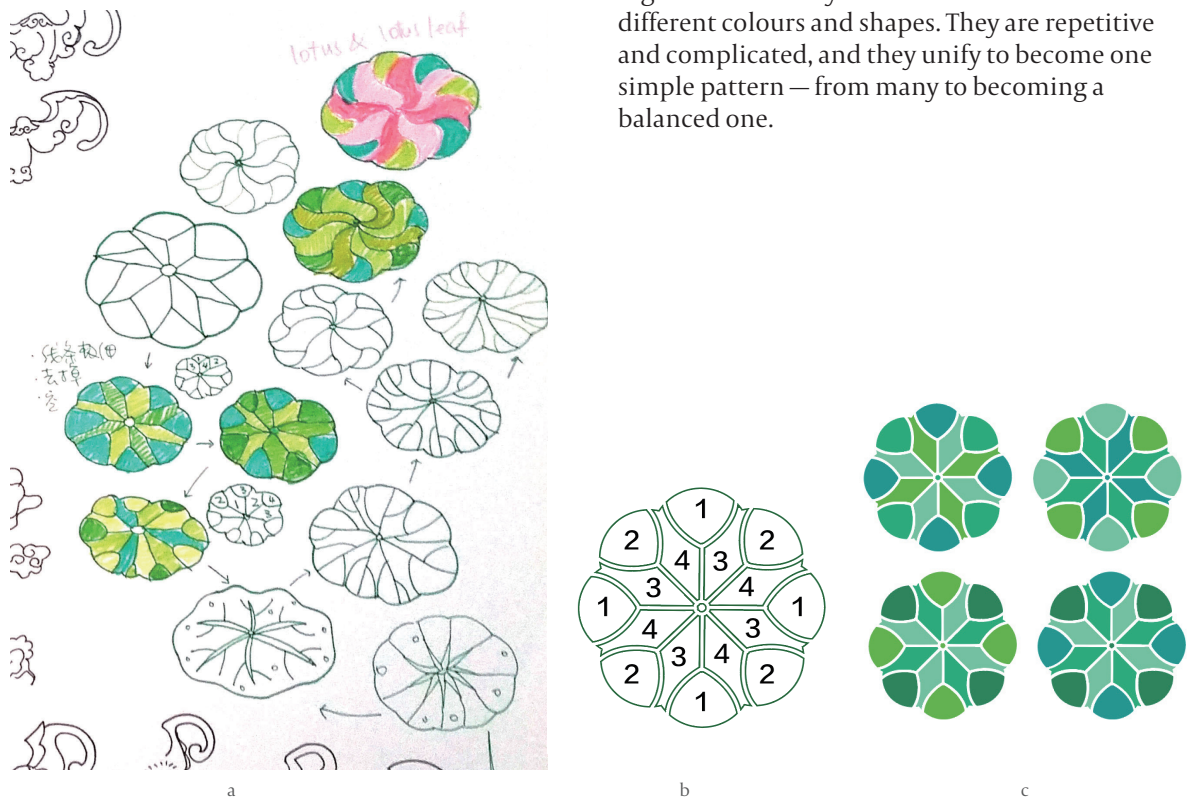


Figure 38. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The development of a lotus leaf pattern.

Figure 39 shows a further experiment to develop a pattern influenced by “One to Many”. One to Many helped me to figure out how to use simplicity (a characteristic of kawaii illustration) to form a Chinese “fullness” pattern. I started by designing several individual shapes using the features of kawaii, which include shapes like flowers, hearts and clouds, and overlapped them to form a peony pattern (figure 39a). In the digital works, I coloured the pattern with both solid and semi-transparent colours (figures 39c and d). Figure 39d appears more lively, flexible and light than the solid colour one (39c). I performed many experiments to form a pattern with the same individual shapes (figure 40). By changing the size and colour of each shape, the whole pattern becomes vivid and dynamic. This reflects the Dao concept of “both continuity and proliferation” (Ames & Hall, 2004, p. 142). Apart from the shapes, the colours were also used carefully to maintain the balance of the pattern. In figure 39d, the purple and dark pink are heavier than the yellow and light pink, and these colours are distributed evenly in the pattern.

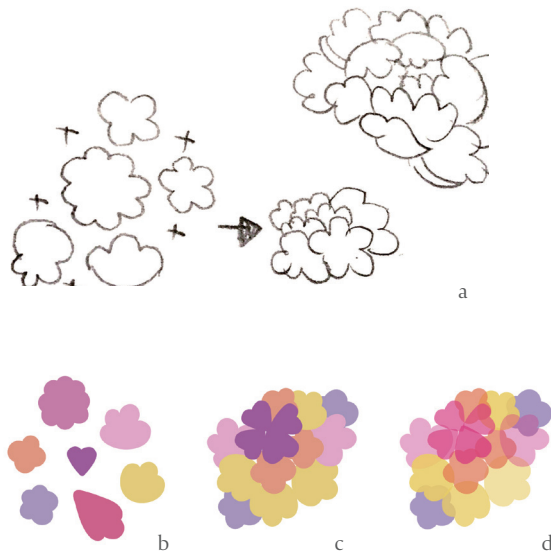


Figure 39. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The development of the peony design pattern.



Figure 40. Ouyang, Y. (2016). The development of magnolia and chrysanthemum pattern influenced by "One to Many".

In another experiment to design an auspicious pattern for 白头富贵 (maintaining wealth and nobility to a ripe old age), I designed a pattern with a simple bird above and a complex peony below (figure 41). The pattern connotes coexistence and the unity through the use of the light and heavy, the dynamic and static in the forms that make up of the whole. I attempted to instill the pattern with both peaceful and lively feelings. The individual shapes create a background to remind people of fullness. The whole pattern communicates the complexity that consists of the simple. However, the pattern has few Chinese traditional elements, therefore, I did another trial where I designed a peony and a Chinese white-headed bulbul pattern (figure 30b).

The peony pattern in figure 30b is based on a traditional peony auspicious pattern (figure 42), with similar repetitive yet varying petals. The thin smooth lines in the petals form a network of dynamic flow. I constructed the peony with solid colour shapes and without lines, which was inspired by another Chinese traditional peony pattern (figure 43). The pattern of the peony is full of complex lines, giving the viewers a feeling of richness and prosperity. I applied the bright colour combination to figure 30b (refer to figure 28 which is extracted from the analysis of the illustration of Rilakkuma figure 44). I used the combination of pink and pastel yellowish-green as an evolution of the Chinese traditional contrasting colours of red and green. I put a yellowish green circle behind the bulbul to balance the shape of the peony. This gave a highly ornamental impact. Figure 30b suggests a more dignified pattern than figure 41, while it also shows the vividness of the peony and the amusing nature of the bird.



Figure 41. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Maintaining wealth and nobility to a ripe old age.

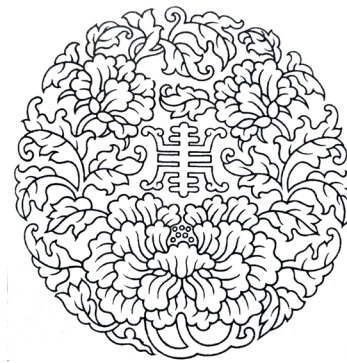


Figure 42. Peony and longevity. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Patterns* (P.205) by Y. Wang, 2005. Tianjin, China: Tianjin Education Press.



Figure 43. Peony. Reprinted from *The Visual Dictionary of Auspicious China: Happiness* (p. 41), by J. Zheng, 2015, Shanghai, China: Cishu.

Explorations in composition look place at philosophical concept in the project. For example, having surplus riches and honour for years running (连年有余) communicates the good wishes of superabundance and the hustle and bustle of New Year. The Chinese word for lotus is lian hua (莲花) or he hua (荷花). Lian is also the pronunciation of lian 连 (meaning continuous and one after another) and has the pronunciation as the word for harmony (he 和), so the lotus has the hidden meaning of "continuous harmony" and implies a harmonious marriage. Figure 46a shows one page of the sketches and several digital drafts (figure 45b and c) of the composition. I did many sketches of the combination of the carp and the lotus imitating the Taiji symbol (figure 14). I attempted to imply the combination of the dynamic (the carp), and the static (the flower) through recalling of the Taiji symbol.



Figure 44. [Untitled illustration of Rilakkuma]. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2016, from <https://nz.pinterest.com/pin/536843218053931626/html>



Figure 45. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Development of a carp pattern.



I did other interesting experiments with colours and emotions in other experiments with the auspicious pattern of 富贵有余, which literally means having surplus richness. It combines the meaning of surplus (represented by fish) and richness (represented by the peony). I extracted a typical carp shape from a traditional paper-cut carp pattern (figure 46). As can be seen in figure 47a, I enlarged the eyeball and added whirling lines to make the pattern amusing and cute. However, figure 47a did not produce a successful outcome. I intended to make the red more pastel to reduce the gaudy feel, but the colours ended up too sober and dim. Improvements were made in figure 47b. I increased the brightness and saturation of the colours in this work. Although the two images share the same elements, figures 47a and 47b express two different emotions. One suggests mature and steady while the other tends to be more active and vivacious. The scattered petals all over figure 47b imply the auspicious meaning of richness and superabundance. The shape of the petals reminds people of the debris of firecrackers on New Year's Day. When I deleted the colours, the pattern in Figure 47c looked delightful, lively and wealthy, and on a different level, also looked more complex and bewitching.



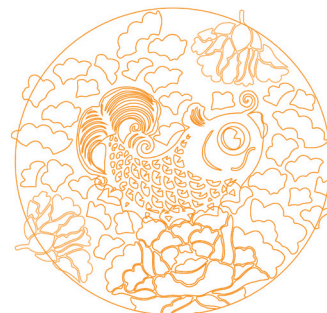
Figure 46. Carp leaping over the dragon's gate a paper-cut work of art. Reprinted from *Chinese Auspicious Designs* (p. 36), by N. Gong & W. Yun. 2008, Beijing, China: China Intercontinental Press.



a



b



c

Figure 47. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Having Surplus Riches and Honor for Years Running.

Through the re-design of the pattern of Mandarin duck and precious baby (鸳鸯贵子), I explored how different colours and shapes can create an illusion of symmetry, and therefore, demonstrated the complementary nature of the interplay. This auspicious blessing wishes a happiness for a family. The composition of the work refers to the traditional “Mandarin duck and precious baby” pattern in figures 49 and 50. Differently to figure 49, I broke the symmetry by depicting the two ducks with opposite body features and decorations. The one on the left has sharp, corner-shaped feathers at the back of the head and a smooth tail and downward wings while the one on the right has smooth-edged feathers at the back of its head, a sharp corner-shaped tail and upward wings. I intentionally coloured the two mandarin ducks in complementary colours (green and blue versus red and orange). These complementary differences show the inner balance of this pattern, and also imply the corresponding relations and contrasts of Yin Yang between the two individuals in the harmonious and complementary couples.



Figure 48. Ouyang, Y. (2016). Mandarin ducks and precious baby.

Figures 48b, c and d show the different emotions created by changing the background colour and not having a fill colour. Figure 48b has a graduated yellow and blue background, which makes the pattern a quieter picture compared to figure 48a. Without the colouring, figure 48c suggests a sense of the mystery. Moreover, by simply removing the yellow in the background (figure 48d), a more powerful and delightful feeling has been added to the pattern.

In summary, these experiments explored ways to embed emotions in order to contemporize Chinese auspicious patterns.



Figure 49. [Untitled illustration of paper-cut mandarin ducks]. (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2016, from <https://nz.pinterest.com/pin/536843218053931626/> <http://www.paoban.net/sifanglianxujianzhituan.html>



Figure 50. [Untitled illustration of paper-cut mandarin ducks]. (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2016, from <http://www.diyad.cn/aoicfqjmy/>

## Exhibition Documentation

July 28th, 2017, my exhibition was held in AUT Test space, M block. The exhibition consisted of seven wall prints and a booklet of my design process.

### *The wall prints*

The wall prints consisted of seven digital ink jet prints all the same size (1118 cm wide by 1118 cm high) and with a label (10 cm wide by 10 cm high) accompanying each print.



Figure 51. Ouyang, Y. (2017). The hovering evergreen, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.





Figure 52. Ouyang, Y. (2017). A noble oldie, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 53. Ouyang, Y. (2017). The whistling magpie, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 54. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Abounding fortune, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 55. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Cherishing a long life, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 56. Ouyang, Y. (2017). The adorable couple, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 57. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Bumping into happiness, 1118 cm x 1118 cm, digital ink jet print.



Figure 58. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Exhibition, complete view.



Figure 59. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Example of label for ink jet prints.

### *Poster and booklet*

The booklet is a compilation of my creative processes on the research project. This was displayed on a plinth below the exhibition poster on the wall opposite the four ink jet prints.



Figure 60. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Poster and booklet.

## Abstract

Chinese traditional auspicious patterns are an important part of Chinese auspicious culture. The patterns are associated with Chinese auspicious blessings and each has a rich background of auspicious meanings and symbolic design. However, traditional Chinese auspicious patterns have lost the original function of sending feelings and emotions to the audience. This project aims to explore the possibility of expressing the emotions, meanings and the content of the Chinese auspicious traditional auspicious patterns by integrating it with the aesthetic characteristics of Japanese kawaii illustration, a popular culture of cuteness. Through doing this, the aim is to discover a new way of visually delivering the meaning and emotion of Chinese auspicious patterns and to contemporise the traditional patterns in ways that can be appreciated by a modern audience. The output of this practice-based research is presented in a series of digital design works as examples of modern Chinese auspicious pattern design.

## The Chinese auspicious glossary

White headed Chinese bulbul, Pine and Crane longevity and noble

Peony, Fish affluence, wealth and honour

Magpie, Bat joy, happiness

Plum blossom perseverance

Lotus continuation

Lotus seed, Carp abundance of children

Mandarin ducks affectionate couple

Coin within sight



和鹤长春  
The hovering evergreen

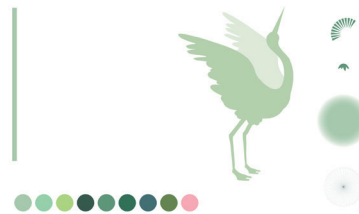


Figure 61. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Papers from the booklet.





Figure 62. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Papers from the booklet.

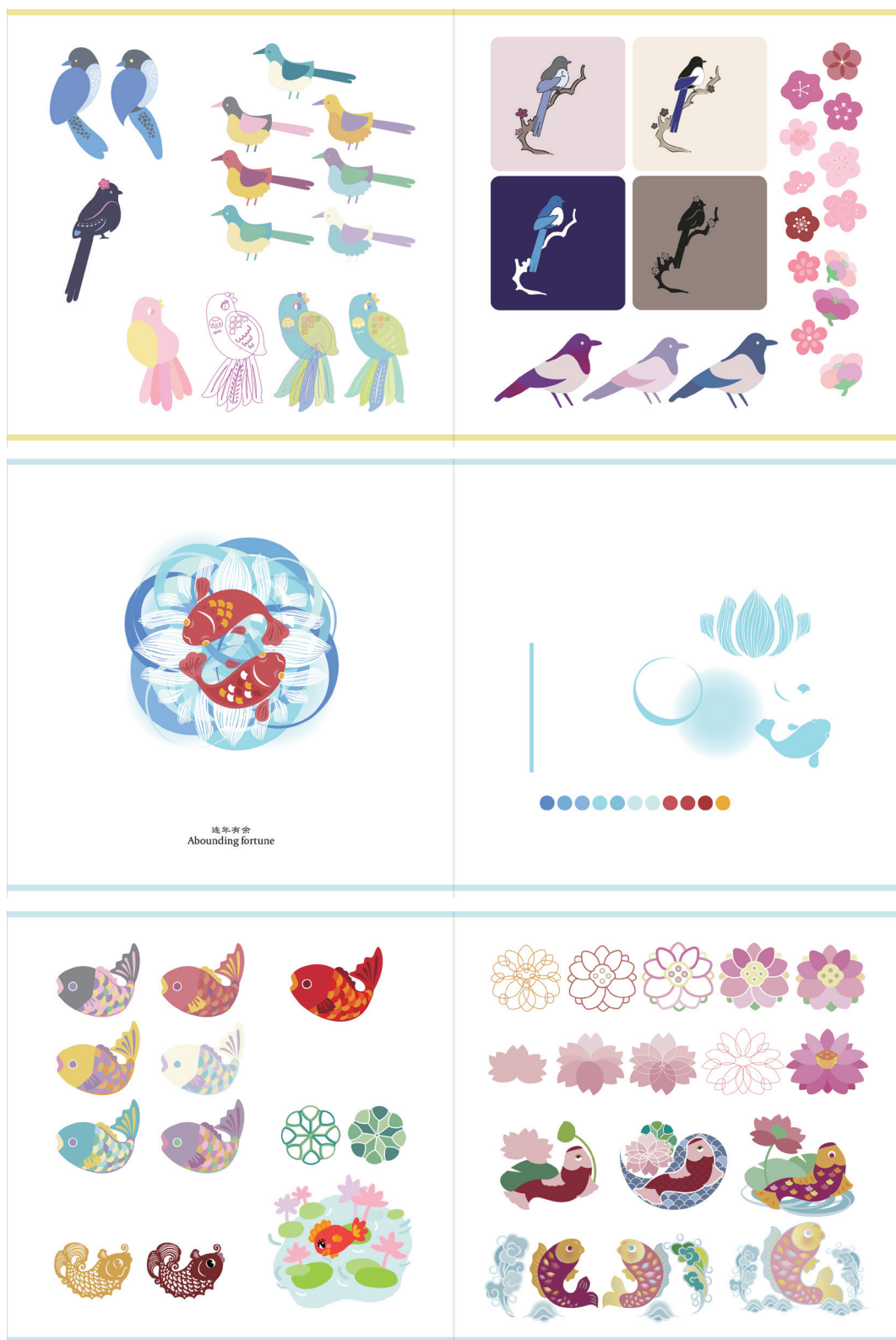


Figure 63. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Papers from the booklet.



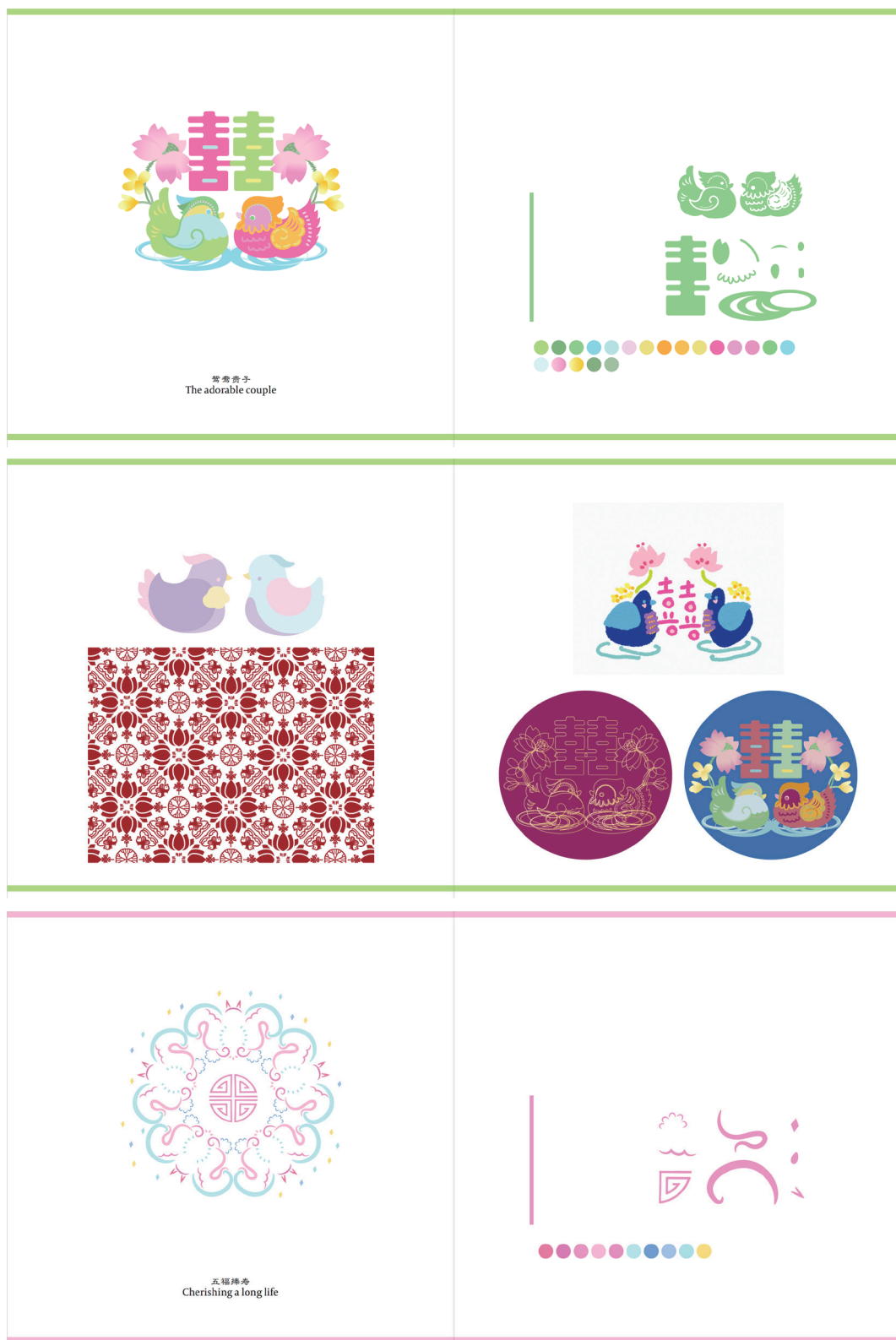


Figure 64. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Papers from the booklet.

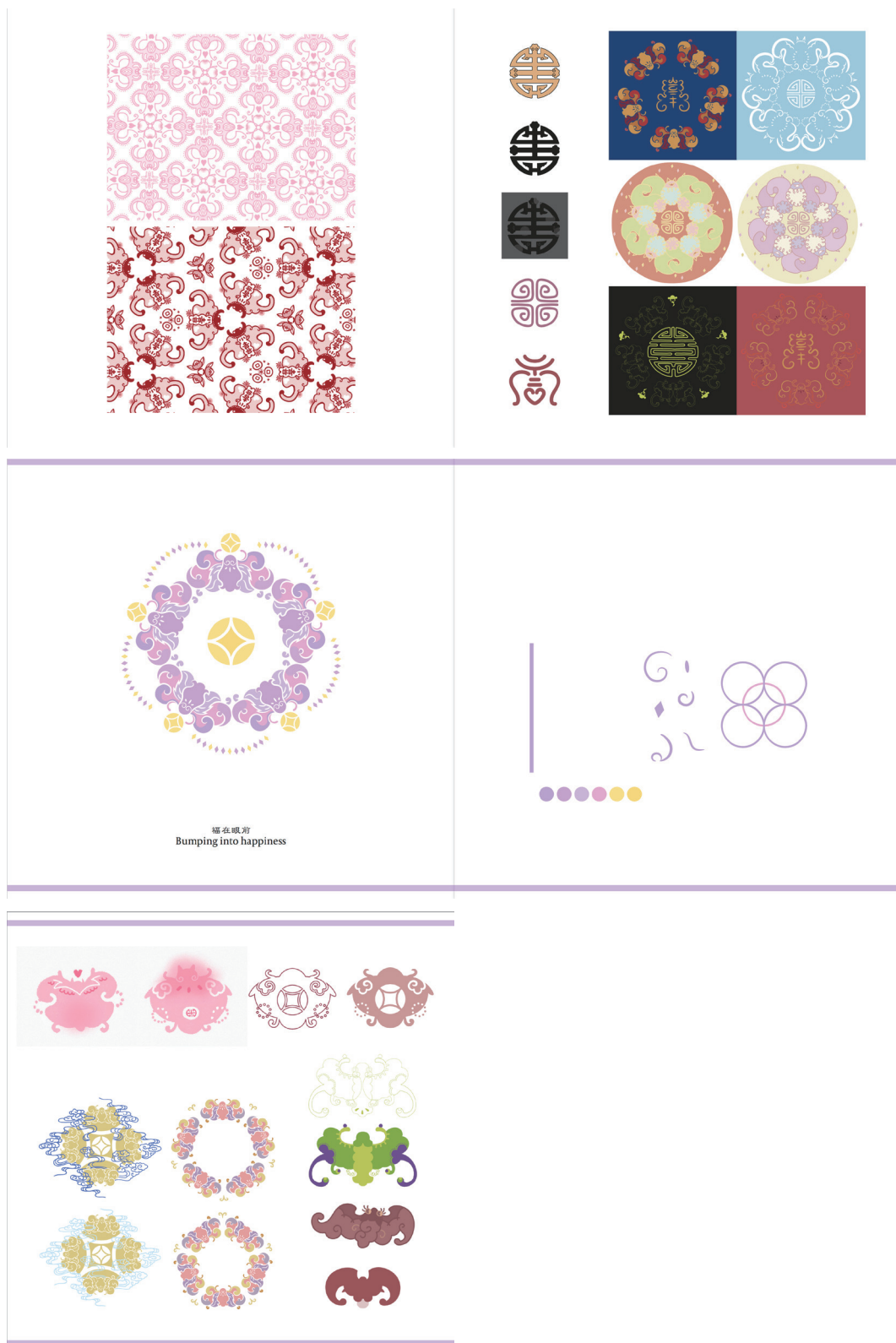


Figure 65. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Papers from the booklet.

## *Window display*

Following the examination exhibition, the prints were exhibited in AUT WE block from July the 28th to August the 17th, 2017.



Figure 66. Ouyang, Y. (2017). Window display, partial view.

## Conclusion

It is my personal view that Chinese traditional auspicious patterns no longer visually express the meaning and emotion of a blessing. This project explores how the aesthetics of cuteness in kawaii culture can enrich the emotions evoked in the Chinese auspicious patterns to the modern audience. Kawaii cute illustration strikes a chord with the audience, and similarly it is the meaning and emotion of a Chinese auspicious blessing that makes the auspicious pattern appealing. Therefore, to find a way of conveying the emotions and meanings of Chinese auspicious patterns, the value of Kawaii cuteness is important.

The approaches of the project and the methods developed are driven by the philosophical and aesthetic concepts and references involved. Also, the critical decision making arose from the context where the values of the research lie. The interplay between Chinese auspicious patterns and kawaii illustrations happened on many different levels including contextually, philosophically, methodologically and aesthetically.

The main contributions of this project are to provide visual and emotional connections between kawaii elements and Chinese auspicious patterns. Through the project I have progressively developed some rules that govern the methods, aesthetics and visual language of both the design process and the outcomes so that the emotions embedded in the Chinese auspicious blessing might be more effectively communicated. The practical component of the thesis, which comprised 80%, draws on a few common auspicious blessings from Chinese culture, to exemplify the development of methodological and design strategies to contemporize these Chinese auspicious patterns. This interplay involved balancing philosophical ideas and the design aesthetics of the traditional and the contemporary in order to propose alternative ways of designing, and of seeing and perceiving.

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