

# Research on inkstone carving design based on the cultural characteristics of Hunan Region

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## ***Abstract***

China's stone culture has a long history and is rich and colorful. Crafts carved from a good piece of stone can give people visual pleasure, trigger aesthetic enlightenment and association, and have certain ornamental, decorative, and economic value. The process of designing and carving a piece of stone is very complex, and it requires the efforts of artists. Due to the preciousness and rarity of stone materials in the Hunan region, they are often used to make inkstones according to their shapes, screens according to their types, and ornaments according to their preferences. Therefore, carving and decoration on the stone surface are important components of inkstone products. Good stones require good craftsmanship, and suitability is the finishing touch. Otherwise, not only a good piece of stone will be lost, but the butterfly effect may also be a major loss in the history of Chinese civilization. This report starts with the "Three Wonders" of stone materials in Hunan Province, exploring their design features and main composition genes, with the aim of using the past for the present and promoting Hunan culture.

***Keywords:*** Hunan culture, regional culture, inkstone, carving

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### 1. Introduction

China has a vast territory and abundant resources, with unique cultural products from various regions. They are the result of thousands of years of agricultural life in different areas, and have their own practical and aesthetic values, as well as their own ways of inheritance and development. With the transformation of China from an agricultural society to an industrial society, especially in recent decades and the development of economic globalization, various regional cultural products based on agricultural civilization in China are facing severe challenges from capitalism and its market economy. Whether they can survive and achieve greater development in this challenge depends on the improvement of regional cultural products themselves and the promotion of regional cultural characteristics. Having a strong regional cultural design should not be a simple localization of styling. It should enable design to harmoniously coexist with the regional environment and consumer groups, complementing each other. It should contribute to promoting the dissemination and development of regional culture.

The industry behind cultural and creative products is the high ground of national soft power competition in the 21st century. With the value chain of creative derivatives and value enhancement models, it has effectively promoted the transformation of the economic development mode. The practice of the development of cultural and creative industries at home and abroad has shown that cultural and creative industries have many important characteristics that other industries do not possess high knowledge, high added value, strong integration, low resource consumption, low environmental pollution, high demand potential, and broad market prospects.

Overall, the creative industry in China has generally emerged in major cities across the country, forming an overall pattern with leading cities as pioneers, large and medium-sized cities as the main force, and small and medium-sized cities rapidly following suit. From the perspective of protecting and inheriting intangible cultural heritage, cultural and creative products are derivatives of intangible cultural heritage. They carry the spirit and symbols of traditional culture and are an important means of inheriting and protecting intangible cultural heritage. However, the innovative development of cultural heritage cannot be achieved without the help of designers. However, most of China's cultural and creative products have several problems: firstly, they are conservative and adhere to traditional product design or production techniques, without optimizing themselves with the development of the times. The second issue is the lack of practicality, as many tourist souvenirs in China that are marketed as "cultural and creative products" do not have any practical use when purchased. Thirdly, there is insufficient expression of cultural charm, adhering to tradition without effectively promoting it. The truly good cultural and creative products should be works that combine traditional technology with exquisite modern design.

Hunan culture is a regional culture. The explanation of Hunan culture on Baidu is Hunan culture refers to a historical and cultural form with distinct characteristics, relatively stable, and inheritance relationships. The culture of Hunan during the pre-Qin and Han dynasties should be incorporated into another historical and cultural form - Chu culture. Qu Yuan's poetry and art, as well as the historical relics of Mawangdui, all have distinct Chu cultural characteristics. Since the Southern and Northern Dynasties and the Tang and Song dynasties, due to historical changes and developments, especially the large-scale immigration of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, significant changes have occurred in the population, customs, trends, and ideological concepts of the scholars and people in Hunan. This has led to the emergence of a series of thinkers, including Zhou Zi, the founder of Neo Confucianism, Wang Fuzhi, who advocated for the application of Confucianism to the world while opposing Cheng Zhu Neo Confucianism, and Wei Yuan, who advocated for "opening one's eyes to the world," thus combining and constructing a new regional cultural form called Hunan culture. Hunan culture is one

of the most distinctive and influential regional cultures in China. In recent years, Hunan cultural industry has embarked on a distinctive development path, creating a "Hunan cultural phenomenon", and has also accelerated the development of Hunan cultural creative products. Thousands of years of history and culture have formed countless design elements representing Hunan culture, such as ancient buildings in Hunan, cultural relics unearthed from the Han Tomb at Mawangdui, Longhui Tantou New Year pictures, gold and stone calligraphy, Hunan embroidery, bronze official pottery, Taoyuan stone carving, Yuezhou porcelain, Jiepai porcelain, Linwu dragon whisker mat, Yiyang Xiaoyu bamboo ware, Shaoyang turned yellow bamboo carving, Liuyang chrysanthemum stone carving, Changsha black crystal stone carving, Dongkou black crystal stone carving, Yuezhou Fan, Wangcheng Paper Cuttings, Chengxian Paper Cuttings, Huxi tiger carving, Tujia brocade, Miao brocade, Dong brocade, Yao brocade, Huxiang folk customs, etc. with a long history are the material shell and spiritual culture carrier of Huxiang cultural characteristics, It is the design source of our modern tourism cultural and creative products.

The art of carving various patterns and images on stones, usually referring to sculptural crafts carved from stones. Most inkstones in Hunan have these: **Qiyang stone**, produced in Qiyang County, Yongzhou City, Hunan Province. Inkstone is a type of slate or metamorphic rock that occurs in the Early Ordovician strata of Qiyang County. The Qiyang stone is smooth and sinking, warm and delicate, mostly purple red in color, with a uniform and clean color. Light green veins are commonly seen. It can be used for carving inkstones, and the finished inkstone is called "Qiyang Stone Inkstone" or "Qiyang Inkstone". The texture is clear and transparent, and the cloud is smooth and transparent. There are colors such as light green, gray green, vermilion purple, brown, etc; Microscopic fibrous structure, layered structure. Among them, the one called "Purple Robe Jade Belt" has a purple body with green and green stone patterns in the middle; Another type is shale colored stone, which is cut open and has multiple layers of color, including purple, yellow brown, milky white, and occasionally black layers. Although the reputation of Qiyang stone inkstone is not as prominent as Duanshi, good Qiyang stone is not inferior to Duanshi. The two famous Qiyang stone quarry "old pits" that still exist today are the ones left over from mining at that time. After the "Purple Robe Jade Belt" in Qiyang stone is made into an inkstone, it is a top-quality inkstone with a high price. The "Purple Robe Jade Belt Dragon Pattern Inkstone" on the desk of Emperor Qianlong is the Qiyang Stone Inkstone.

**Liuyang stone**, also known as chrysanthemum stone, is produced near Yonghe Town in Liuyang, Hunan, and is also known as Liuyang stone chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum stone is a natural inkstone with chrysanthemum shaped patterns at the bottom of the Liuyang River. The inkstone made from it is called "Chrysanthemum Stone Inkstone" or "Chrysanthemum Inkstone". Liuyang Chrysanthemum Stone is a fossilized soft bodied animal from the Triassic period of the Mesozoic era. Its shell is coiled into a spiral shape, white in color, and shaped like chrysanthemums. As early as over 200 million years ago, the Dongxiang area of Liuyang was a shallow sea. After going through many vicissitudes, the natural world gradually formed a radiating aggregate of small siliceous flint nodules without bluestone. Later, it was replaced and filled with calcium carbonate (calcite), forming a chrysanthemum petal shaped stone chrysanthemum flower composed of white calcite. This stone is like a chrysanthemum, with flower cores including single core, double core, three core, and no core, similar to bamboo leaf chrysanthemum, hydrangea dragon kui chrysanthemum, pu leaf chrysanthemum, and money chrysanthemum. Xiangzhong Chrysanthemum Stone was used as a stone carving material no later than the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, including carving inkstones. Similar chrysanthemum stones have been discovered in Luxi, Hunan, Yongfeng, Jiangxi, Xuanen, Hubei, and Ningqiang, Shaanxi.

**Shuangfeng Stone** is named after its production in Xuehua Creek, Shuangfeng County. The inkstone made from it is called "Shuangfengshi Inkstone" or "Shuangfengxi Inkstone". Inkstone is a silty clay shale, which is found in the Precambrian Banxi Formation in Shuangfeng County. The hometown of Zeng Guofan, a prominent minister of the late Qing Dynasty in Shuangfeng County, also produces a type of inkstone in a river. It is egg green in color and has a fine and smooth texture, making it a good material for carving inkstones. Zeng Guofan studied in his childhood and reportedly used this type of inkstone.

**Taojiang stone** is produced in Taojiang County, Yiyang City, Hunan Province. Located on the banks of Zishui River in Wufeng Mountain, Xiushan Town, over 20 kilometers away from Taojiang County. The inkstone made from it is called "Taojiang Stone Inkstone" or "Taojiang Inkstone". Inkstone is a greenish gray silty clay slate, which is found in the Yuannan Lengjiayi Group strata in Taojiang County. The texture is pure, dense and smooth, without sand or impurities, the color is crystal clear, resistant to weathering and corrosion, firm but not brittle, the ink is as oily as oil, the ink is silent when grinding, the pen is sharp and not damaged, the ink color is crystal clear and bright, it can be left for a long time, and the paper remains unchanged after falling. Featuring a wind hair pattern, full octagonal shape, beautiful and smooth, with sparkling and bright lettering. As early as the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was known as the "Phoenix Dance Tianchi Ink Fragrance". Taojiang stone water has a high degree of flushing. Due to its colorful surface, some people call it Nüwa Stone.

**Jiaoshi inkstone**, also known as Sinian Jiaoshi, is only produced in China and is also known as "Chinese Jiaoshi". Its appearance is like a pagoda, so it is also known as pagoda stone, straight angle stone, bamboo shoot stone, Tai Chi stone, and pagoda shadow stone. Sinian ceratoposite is a fossil of marine invertebrate mollusks. Sinian angle stone has a hard outer shell, which is either straight or coiled. The surface of the shell has wavy horizontal stripes, and there are many horizontal plates inside the shell. The longest length can reach more than one meter, usually between 20 and 60 centimeters. The shape is conical, with one end pointed and the other wide. The surface is developed with knots, vertical lines, etc., resembling a pagoda. Its stone surface has 20-30 circular ring shaped protrusions, similar to bamboo shoots. If the cross-section is horizontal, it resembles a Tai Chi diagram and has high scientific research, collection, and ornamental value. This stone is horizontally opened with a white circle, forming a Tai Chi shape; when opened straight, its sharp edge rises like a seven level floating butcher, hence it is also known as the Tower Shadow Stone. Some people have carved it as a screen insert.

The **Qianzhou stone inkstone** is named after Shuichong Bay, located two to three miles north of Yingbei in Xianzhen, Jishou City, Xiangxi. The inkstone made from it is called "Shui Chong Shi Yan" or "Shui Chong Yan". According to Volume 13 of the "Records of Qianzhou Hall" compiled during the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty, the water washed stone inkstone "has a light green color, firm and tender ink, slightly yellow texture, and patterns resembling mountains, waters, plants and trees." Its application history is long. Shuichuangshi is a sedimentary shale formed in the Cambrian period, dating back over 500 million years. This stone has a greenish gray color, a fine and warm texture, does not dry up or become dry, produces ink quickly, does not damage a single grain, and can form tides with just one breath. The ink is stored for a long time without drying up, and the stone layer has a natural texture with sparkling mineral bodies. The inkstone material is particularly precious when taken underwater, and the inkstone made from this stone is called "Shuichong Stone Inkstone" or "Shuichong Inkstone". It is exquisite and luxurious, unmatched by other famous inkstones, and stands out among the inkstone forest. After a long period of combined sedimentation, water washed stones form water washed stones with natural textures and sparkling mineral bodies. The water washed stone appears greenish gray in color, with delicate and warm texture that does not dry up or become dry. It quickly produces ink without damaging any hair, and can store ink for a long time without drying up. The inkstone made from this stone is exquisite and luxurious, and the stone is particularly precious, surpassing other famous inkstones and standing out among the inkstone forest.

**Changsha Gushan stone inkstone** is produced in Gushan, Changsha, Hunan, and is made of blue patterned flower stone. It is said to be named in memory of King Zhu of Changsha during the Ming Dynasty. Changsha's "Gushan Inkstone" has a long history and is one of the "Four Famous Inkstones" in the Hunan region. The site can be traced back to the Song Dynasty. According to Mi Fu's "Inkstone History" during the Song Dynasty, "The Gushan inkstone in Tanzhou (now Changsha) has a light green color and patterns that are like tangled threads. It is silent when pressed slowly. It quickly captures ink and emits ink light. The "Changsha Prefecture Annals" published during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty also recorded: "Gushan is located 70 miles west of the county. There is a spiritual valley on the mountain, a dragon pool below, and prayers for rain. There are stones with light green color, patterns like tangled threads, and silent knocking. They are inkstones that produce ink and light. The "Qing Yitong Zhi" records: "Gushan, located 70 miles west of Changsha County,

produces blue patterned flower stones that can be used as inkstones. The Tanzhou Gushan inkstone is made of Changsha Gushan blue patterned flower stone, with a light green color and patterns like tangled threads. It is silent when pressed, and can quickly obtain ink with a glossy finish. It can be called a good inkstone. The "Gushan Inkstone" quarry has lasted for thousands of years, witnessing the long history of Changsha's "Gushan Inkstone" inkstone industry.

The *Taojiang Fuqiu Temple tooth stone* inkstone is produced on Fuqiu Mountain in Taojiang County. There are two famous mountains in Taojiang, one of which is the Fuqiu Mountain in the northwest of the county, formerly known as the "Chu Nan Famous Mountain" and the "Xiao Nan Yue". The mountain has 48 flat peaks, which look majestic and stable on clear days, and seem to float in the clouds and fog during rainy days. Because of its name "Fuqiu", Pan Ziliang, who used to call himself "Fuqiu Zi", once boiled stones to satisfy hunger during his cultivation and alchemy here. Therefore, there are many "tooth stones" left by immortal cultivators on the top of the Fuqiu Mountain, and inkstones, seals, pillows, etc. made of tooth stones are still extremely precious items in Taojiang. The inkstone made of toothed stones is a local cultural feature, and its famous name is Taojiang Fuqiu Temple toothed stone inkstone, which is also one of the famous inkstones in Hunan. However, its production is too small and not well-known to the outside world.

**Changsha Green Stone Inkstone** (Changsha Tao Stone Inkstone): Produced in Changsha Prefecture, Hunan Province. Most of them are scattered on the surface of the stone, moist and shiny, but not affected by ink. Zhao Ruzhen's "Antique Guide": Tao stone inkstone comes from Changsha, Hunan, with a green color, so it is also known as green stone inkstone. Although it is fine and smooth, it is not affected by ink. It was very rare in the Song Dynasty. According to the legend of the elderly, although they knew about the Tao inkstone, they did not witness it. Nowadays, there may be green stone inkstones called Tao, most of which are lacquered stones. "Feng Yandeng of the Jin Dynasty wrote in his famous poem" Tao Stone Inkstone ":"... the river is very deep and rare. Today's Tao inkstones have the skin of Li stone, which is a stone in the valleys of Changsha. They do not emit ink when exposed to light. "Nowadays, those named Tao inkstones are the skin of Li stone, which is a stone in the valleys of Changsha, but they are shiny and do not emit ink.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Classification of cultural resources in the Hunan region.

Chinese stone carving can be divided into bluestone carving, marble carving, White Marble carving, talc carving, black crystal carving, colored stone carving, pebble carving, etc. The inkstone carvings in Dongkou, Hunan and Lichuan, Hubei are black and shiny. Colored stone carvings are mainly produced in Qingtian, Zhejiang, Shoushan, Fuzhou, and Liuyang, Hunan. Stone carving techniques include shadow carving (carving contours), shadow carving, relief carving, round carving (fully three-dimensional carving without any background), and openwork carving (also known as openwork carving). Looking at the numerous stone materials in Hunan, they are mainly classified from the perspective of inkstone materials. In addition to the ancient Yuanzhou stone, there are three types of inkstone that are extremely beautiful, with excellent qualities in both stone quality and texture, and are often used by high-ranking officials and scholars in Hunan. The first type is Liuyang chrysanthemum stone. This type of stone is used as an inkstone, which originated in the Ming Dynasty and developed in the late Qing Dynasty. It belonged to Zeng Guofan, a native of Hunan. Tan Sitong and others have all used it. Chrysanthemum stone is collected in the deep waters of Liuyang River. The stone is delicate and sturdy, and when used to craft inkstones, it showcases the natural and noble texture of chrysanthemums, evoking the leisurely state of mind of pottery collecting chrysanthemums from the eastern fence. The second type is the Xiangxi Qiancheng water flushing stone. This stone has a greenish gray color and a delicate and warm texture. The strange thing is that when the stone is cut open, there are often crystal clear yellow mineral particles attached to it. With a little carving, it becomes a beautiful landscape and figure attic painting, which is indescribable. The third type is Qiyang stone, which is warm and moist like jade, with a purple

like beauty throughout its body. Among them, there are blue-green stone patterns in the purple color, like green silk ribbons wrapped around the waist of the inkstone, called "Purple Robe Jade Ribbon"; There are shale colored stones with incredible natural wonders.

2.2 Extraction of cultural design factors from a typical regional culture in Hunan Province

Category analysis	Liuyang Chrysanthemum Stone	Xiangxi Qiancheng Water Chongshi	Qiyang Stone
Stone colored decorative patterns	Blue black color with natural chrysanthemum	Green gray in color, mixed with sparkling yellow minerals	The whole body is purple with greenish blue stone patterns
Stone	Tender and sturdy	Delicate and warm	Warm as jade
Functional	Practicality and ornamental value		
Technical process	Yin carving, shadow carving, relief carving, round carving, engraved carving, etc., reflect the rich characteristics of Hunan culture		
Development Trends	Developing towards ornamental stones and producing more stone carvings and ornaments	Gradually floating in the world, with practical and ornamental inkstones as the main focus	

2.3 Color gene bank

Most of the color genes it contains are the preserved primary colors of the stone: black; Grey white; Blue color; Purple red.

2.4 Morphological gene bank

Its forms are diverse, with most of them featuring traditional patterns and allusions carved on stone surfaces, depicting landscapes, flowers, birds, fruits, fish and dragons, palaces, and figures, all with a strong Hunan local style.

3. Result

3.1 Design methods for creative products of Hunan stone carving decorative art regional culture

Throughout history, the ultimate goal of design is to continuously improve and innovate old things to derive new values, thereby promoting economic development. The reverse inference method is used here to derive the design idea:

stone carving product innovate carving	←	Direct application of traditional patterns Multi-functional products Derivative design of traditional patterns Abstract stone carving decoration	←	Modern elements + Traditional elements
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3.2 Direct application methods of regional cultural genes

China has long carried out artistic decoration on inkstones, which are essential for literary houses. The Eastern Han inkstone unearthed in Xuzhou, Jiangsu (Liuhui Xi shaped box inkstone, now collected in Nanjing Museum) fully demonstrates that as early as the Han Dynasty, China's inkstone production level reached a very high level. This inkstone consists of three parts: the box body, the stone inkstone, and the box cover. The box body and lid are both made of steel gilded, with tight upper and lower covers, making it a complete, toad like mythical creature. It is worth noting that the divine beast has a small round button on its back, and its lower jaw is designed as an ink pool for storing water. The instrument is adorned with gemstones such as turquoise, red coral, and lapis lazuli. For a long time, the production of inkstones focused on practicality and was relatively

rough. It was not until the Han Dynasty that people began to pay attention to the decorative nature of inkstones. Not only were there various materials used to make inkstones, but they were also meticulously crafted, and some were even paired with exquisite inkstone boxes. From then on, the development of inkstone history entered a new stage that combines practicality and artistry. This gilded beast shaped box inkstone is undoubtedly one of the best inkstone products of the Han Dynasty. It has stood the test of time, remained unchanged for thousands of years, and never peeled off. The various gemstones embedded in its body, such as turquoise, still shine brightly. If we consider the complexity of the gilding process, this inkstone represents the highest level of gilding inlay technology at that time, and is also the most intuitive example of the direct application of regional cultural genes.

### *3.3 Indirect application methods of Hunan regional cultural genes*

#### 3.1 Modern graphics applied to traditional materials

Cleverly utilizing the cultural connotations of Hunan's original stone materials, applying artistic design principles to reorganize, integrate, summarize, and exaggerate traditional Hunan inkstone carvings, and integrating modern aesthetic concepts for innovative traditional Hunan design, namely the extraction of Hunan's traditional inkstone carving design genes.

#### 3.2 Application of Traditional Graphics in Modern Design

The extracted design elements of the Hunan region cannot be directly used in modern design, and we still need to reconstruct them. The redesign of inkstones focuses more on patterns, and the reconstruction of patterns can be achieved through the use of extraction and collage methods to express design ideas. Traditional patterns can also be innovated through techniques such as replication, imitation, variation, and evolution. The reconstruction of form requires exploring the design source in Hunan culture and timely innovation. Furniture in the shape of Bagua, cloud patterns commonly seen in inkstone carvings, hollow carving designs for lighting fixtures, and so on. Reasonable reconstruction is the basis for better utilizing the traditional design genes of Hunan. Design without genetic reconstruction can only be mechanical and rigid. Simply using the inherent symbols in traditional design, or stacking or piecing them together, cannot be considered an innovative application of Hunan inkstone design.

## **4. Conclusion**

Art can create beauty very well, and it can also be said to be a creative way to add fun to life. Art creation is the best white paper for humans to express their thoughts, emotions, and subjective consciousness. Due to differences in lifestyle, attitude, customs, culture, geographical environment, and other aspects between China and most other countries, there are significant differences in the aesthetics expressed in artistic creation and the value of the final artistic product. This article explores the stone materials in the Hunan region, reflecting the aesthetic value of Hunan culture and art in current design. From collecting materials for Hunan inkstones to comparing the "Three Wonders of Inkstones" in Hunan, and then to analyzing the lines, colors, and charm of the "Three Wonders of Inkstones", the noble and elegant art of Hunan culture has given me unimaginable artistic inspiration and creative desire. I deeply realize that in many modern designs, rich material resources have also been drawn from sculpture art and fully utilized in real design, such as posters, folding, and some home designs. However, local Hunan culture has not been fully valued, and relevant departments have not paid attention to the preciousness of Hunan culture, which has led to the decline of this art world. The aesthetic value of Kuibao has not been fully developed, Still stuck in the traditional aesthetic stage of the feudal era. Throughout history, the ultimate goal of design is to continuously improve and innovate old things to derive new values, thereby promoting economic development. I hope that this article can awaken the value of discovering the beauty of "Huxiang inkstone", lay a foundation for understanding the three wonders of Huxiang inkstone as a "Hunan brand" in future design and promotion, deepen the understanding of regional, cultural, and visual research on China's regional cultural aesthetic consciousness, and enhance the aesthetic value and development of China's

national art.

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