

The Humanistic Expression of the Imagery of Flying Apsaras from Dunhuang in Contemporary Fashion Design

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Abstract: As a spiritual symbol and cultural emblem of ancient Chinese art, the Flying Apsaras (飞天) of Dunhuang encapsulate a synthesis of religious faith, aesthetic pursuit, and humanistic spirit. Centering on the artistic imagery of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras, this paper explores its humanistic expression and spiritual continuity in contemporary fashion design from the perspective of cultural aesthetics. Employing methods of literature analysis and semiotic interpretation, the study systematically examines the religious symbolism, morphological language, and aesthetic philosophy embodied in Feitian art, revealing its transformation from religiosity to secularity and from divinity to humanism throughout history. The research argues that the aesthetic features embedded in the Flying Apsaras—such as the Aesthetics of Motion (动势美), Ethereal Artistic Conception (空灵意境), and the awakening of feminine spirituality—provide significant inspiration for contemporary designers to reconstruct Eastern Aesthetics and cultural confidence. Furthermore, this paper elucidates the contemporary pathways through which the Imagery of Flying Apsaras is visually translated and reinterpreted in modern design, emphasizing its practical value in bridging traditional art and modern fashion innovation. Ultimately, this study seeks to offer a new theoretical perspective and design approach for the creative transformation and cultural regeneration of traditional art in the modern era.

Keywords: Dunhuang Flying Apsaras; Cultural Imagery; Humanistic Expression; Eastern Aesthetics; Fashion Design

Published: Nov 3, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/chst.v2i4.790>

1.Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Dunhuang, located at a strategic point on the ancient Silk Road, served as a vital hub for exchanges between Eastern and Western civilizations and stands as one of the greatest treasures of ancient Chinese art. The murals of the Mogao Caves are renowned for their grand artistic scale, profound religious spirit, and exquisite craftsmanship, among which the image of the Flying Apsaras is particularly remarkable. As one of the most representative symbols of Dunhuang art, the Flying Apsaras embody a synthesis of Buddhist faith, Eastern philosophy, and humanistic spirit^[1]. Since the excavation of the Mogao Caves, the image of the Flying Apsaras has evolved across more than ten dynasties and over a thousand years, transforming from the original celestial musicians (伎乐神祇) into a symbol that carries the beauty of Eastern femininity and humanistic ideals^[2]. With the rise of contemporary cultural consciousness and the revival of national aesthetics, the artistic value of the Flying Apsaras has regained renewed attention. An increasing number of scholars and designers have drawn inspiration from traditional culture, and the incorporation of Dunhuang artistic elements into sportswear and fashion design has gradually

become a new research direction^[3]. The “Beauty of the Flying Apsaras” has thus been reinterpreted as an artistic symbol that harmonizes classical aesthetics with modern sensibilities. The Feitian is no longer merely a carrier of religious belief, but rather an important emblem of Eastern spirituality and cultural confidence in contemporary visual culture and fashion design. Existing research suggests that the “Rebirth” of the Flying Apsaras does not represent a continuation of religious worship but rather a transformation from divinity to humanism, in which the Aesthetics of Motion (飞动之美) embodies the dynamic vitality characteristic of Chinese art^[2]. Other studies note that the serenity and ethereality of the Flying Apsaras reflect the integration of Buddhist cosmology with the traditional Chinese philosophy of “The unity of heaven and humanity” (天人合一)^[1]. These aesthetic traits not only demonstrate the artistic depth of the Flying Apsaras but also provide valuable spiritual resources for the cultural innovation of traditional art in contemporary society.

Therefore, examining the cultural imagery and humanistic expression of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras from the perspective of fashion design not only helps to reveal the mechanisms of traditional art’s regeneration in the modern context but also offers new theoretical and practical directions for the contemporary expression of Eastern aesthetics. By reinterpreting the Feitian’s visual forms, chromatic systems, and morphological language, designers can reconstruct the aesthetic value of the Eastern spirit within modern design discourse, transforming traditional culture from a visual symbol into a vehicle of humanistic meaning. This integration of historical tradition and contemporary design thinking not only promotes the innovative development of traditional art but also provides valuable reference for constructing fashion expressions rooted in Eastern aesthetic characteristics.

1.2 Research Status

The art of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras represents a quintessential synthesis of ancient Chinese religious art and Eastern aesthetic philosophy. Scholars in China generally agree that its aesthetic essence lies in the unity of “Movement and stillness” (动与静) and “Form and spirit” (形与神). The rhythmic linearity of the Feitian’s form embodies the Buddhist ideal of “Emptiness and harmony” (空寂与圆融), expressing a transcendence of the material world^[1]. The theory of the “Rebirth of the Flying Apsaras” further posits that the Feitian image has transcended the singular meaning of a religious icon to become a universal symbol of human spirituality and faith^[2]. These academic achievements have provided philosophical and religious foundations for understanding the spiritual dimensions of the Feitian, deepening insight into its aesthetic connotations and symbolic meanings, and illuminating the integration of religious faith and humanistic spirit. They have also laid a solid groundwork for subsequent interdisciplinary research^[4]. However, most existing studies focus primarily on theoretical explorations from the perspectives of religion and aesthetics, while research on the morphological language and visual design characteristics of the Flying Apsaras remains relatively insufficient.

In terms of morphological features, scholars have primarily explored the visual language and formal aesthetics of Dunhuang’s Flying Apsaras. Morphological analysis of Tang dynasty representations reveals that the Feitian often features S-shaped curves and composite dynamics characterized by “Torso rotation and fluttering ribbons” (身体回旋 — 衣带飞动), whose aesthetics of movement and sense of flowing lines exhibit pronounced rhythmic vitality and structural tension, providing important inspiration for modern fashion silhouette design^[5]. From a visual design perspective, the Feitian is characterized by “Graceful lines, symmetrical structure, and bright colors,” which align with modern aesthetic sensibilities. The dynamic interplay of body posture, ribbon trajectories, and flowing background motifs conveys the beauty of “Motion within stillness and rhythm within motion” (静中有动、动中生韵), reflecting the unique rhythmic quality of Eastern art^[6]. Together, these studies reveal the gradual transformation of the Feitian from a religious symbol to an artistic expression, and from spiritual iconography to design semantics, providing a theoretical foundation for the semantic extension of traditional artistic elements in contemporary design. However, there remains a lack of systematic investigation into the mechanisms of cultural semantic transformation and the innovative application of the Feitian motif in modern design.

In the contemporary era of rapid digital advancement, scholars have begun to reexamine Dunhuang art through the lens of cross-media innovation and design technology. The digitalization and creative reconstruction of Dunhuang motifs have emerged as new research hotspots. As shown in Figure 1, some researchers have utilized three-dimensional virtual modeling techniques to integrate the Feitian image into digital fashion design, establishing an innovative chain of “Traditional art–

digital media–fashion design”^[7]. Meanwhile, through analysis of the attire and patterns of donor figures (供养人服饰纹样), researchers have uncovered connections between ancient aesthetic systems and sociocultural contexts, providing a theoretical foundation for reinterpreting Dunhuang design elements^[8]. International and cross-media studies often focus on digital humanities and virtual reconstruction, employing 3D modeling and algorithmic visualization to recreate the “Beauty of the Feitian” in virtual space, thus achieving the transformation of traditional art from physical heritage to digital regeneration^[9]. Moreover, digital reconstruction not only preserves the formal characteristics of Dunhuang art but also establishes a dialogic mechanism between ancient and modern aesthetics, offering an operable pathway for the redesign and cultural renewal of traditional patterns^[10].

In summary, domestic research tends to emphasize the spiritual symbolism and visual form of the Flying Apsaras, while international scholarship focuses on its digital preservation and cross-media dissemination. Together, these studies have laid an academic foundation for the continuous renewal of the Feitian motif within the fields of cultural creativity and fashion design, providing both theoretical support and practical inspiration for this study.

Figure 1 Virtual Clothing Effect - Ma Xintian (2022)



1.3 Research Purpose and Significance

This study takes the cultural imagery of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras (敦煌飞天文化意象) as its core focus, exploring the interaction between humanistic spirit and fashion aesthetics. By analyzing the religious symbolism, aesthetic philosophy, and morphological language embedded in Feitian art, the research aims to reveal how these elements are reinterpreted and visually represented in contemporary fashion design, thereby demonstrating the humanistic continuity and aesthetic innovation of traditional culture in a modern context.

Previous studies have primarily examined the spiritual connotations and formal characteristics of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras from the perspectives of art history, religious studies, and form aesthetics, emphasizing the philosophical unity of “Movement and stillness” (动与静) and “Form and spirit” (形与神), as well as the symbolic meaning of Buddhist culture. However, these studies largely remain at the level of theoretical interpretation, lacking in-depth exploration of how the imagery of the Flying Apsaras can be systematically integrated into contemporary design practice and visual communication contexts. While some scholars have attempted to apply Dunhuang elements to clothing patterns or digital modeling, most efforts focus on morphological reproduction rather than on the interpretive and innovative expression of the Feitian’s cultural spirit within contemporary fashion design.

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To approach the subject from the perspective of cultural aesthetics and design integration, focusing on the continuity and contemporary reinterpretation of the Feitian’s humanistic spirit, thereby bridging the existing gap between spiritual analysis and design practice; (2) To systematically explore the modern transformation pathways of the Feitian image in terms of silhouette, line, color, and structure, based on its visual morphology and fashion design semantics, offering actionable design strategies for integrating traditional art into fashion design; (3) To examine,

from the standpoint of digital media and cultural communication, the mechanisms through which the cultural imagery of the Feitian is regenerated within new media and global fashion contexts, and to explore how Eastern aesthetics can be expressed in a contemporary manner.

The significance of this study lies not only in extending the academic discourse of Dunhuang art but also in constructing a cultural framework that integrates traditional Chinese art with modern design. By recontextualizing the classical image of the Flying Apsaras within contemporary design discourse, this research seeks to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional art, allowing the “Beauty of the Feitian” to regain vitality and spiritual resonance in the cultural landscape of the new era. At the same time, the findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for the cultural and creative industries, fashion design education, and digital heritage preservation, carrying both theoretical research value and practical applicability.

2.The Origin and Spiritual Connotations of Dunhuang Feitian Cultural Imagery

2.1 The Origin and Artistic Evolution of the Flying Apsaras

The image of the Flying Apsaras originated from the Indian Buddhist figures Gandharvas (乾闥婆) and Apsaras (伎乐天). As Buddhism spread eastward into China, the image gradually underwent Sinicization under the influence of Central Plains culture. By the Northern Wei and Western Wei dynasties, the Feitian had developed into an independent artistic form, reaching its aesthetic peak during the Sui and Tang dynasties^[11].

As shown in Figure 2, the Flute-playing Flying Apsaras (吹笛飞天) of Cave 158 and the Flower-scattering Flying Apsaras (散花飞天) of Cave 320 at the Mogao Caves are representative masterpieces of Feitian art. The compositions vividly capture the rhythmic interplay between the figures' postures and the flowing lines of their ribbons, creating a strong sense of movement and elegant dynamism. This juxtaposition of “Fluidity and serenity” embodies the aestheticized vision of the Buddhist concept of the “Realm of emptiness and tranquility” (空灵之境).

The form of the Flying Apsaras is not merely a visual manifestation of religious belief but also a symbol of the ascension of life and the transcendence of the spirit. Their graceful, floating gestures and fluid, elegant lines express humanity's yearning for freedom and its pursuit of transcendence beyond worldly constraints, symbolizing the aesthetic ideal of ascending from the earthly realm toward a spiritual paradise.

Figure 2: Flute Flute Soaring in Cave 158 of Mogao Cave



2.2 The Aesthetics of Movement and Eastern Aesthetic Philosophy

Scholarly research has pointed out that “Movement” (飞动) in the art of the Flying Apsaras is not merely a visual form but also a spiritual symbol—an emblem of the soul's ascension and the freedom of the mind^[2]. In Buddhist thought, the act of dance symbolizes the liberation of all beings from suffering and their journey toward nirvana (涅槃); while in the broader

context of Chinese philosophy, this movement embodies the pursuit of harmony between heaven and humanity and the ideal of spiritual transcendence^[12].

In Tang dynasty depictions of the Feitian, the fluttering ribbons, graceful curves, and swirling spatial compositions convey a vivid sense of rhythmic dynamism within motion. The painters of the Tang period skillfully expressed this rhythmic beauty of lines in motion through the rise and rotation of the ribbons, successfully creating a sense of airflow space, which serves as a visual manifestation of the concept of qi (气)—the vital energy fundamental to Chinese aesthetics^[13].

The ribbons and dance gestures of the Flying Apsaras thus serve as a concrete embodiment of this aesthetic spirit. Through fluid lines, light and graceful postures, and elegant rhythm, the Feitian achieve a perfect harmony between “Motion and stillness” and between “Form and spirit”, revealing the poetic sensibility and vital imagery characteristic of Eastern art. Therefore, the Aesthetics of Movement is not only a formal feature but also a profound cultural metaphor—it symbolizes the cosmological spirit of “Heaven’s vitality is ever vigorous” (天行健) and “Ceaseless generation and renewal” (生生不息) in Eastern philosophy, making the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras a quintessential symbol of Eastern aesthetics.

2.3 Serenity and Ethereality: The Spiritual Dimension of Buddhist Aesthetics

The spiritual connotation of the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras murals is primarily embodied in the dual aesthetic concepts of serenity and ethereality that characterize Buddhist aesthetics. As studies have suggested, serenity originates from the meditative tranquility cultivated in Zen practice (禅宗修行), symbolizing the pursuit of inner liberation and spiritual composure; while ethereality reflects the transcendental aesthetic ideal in Buddhist and Daoist thought—an aspiration toward purity, detachment, and spiritual freedom beyond the material world^[1].

As shown in Figure 3, the Flying Apsaras depicted in Mogao Cave 321 often appear with gently closed eyes and serene smiles, their postures light and graceful, expressing a sense of calm beauty that transcends religious devotion to embody a humanistic spirit (人文精神) of peace and gentleness.

Figure 3 Dunhuang Mogao Caves Cave 321



This transformation in aesthetic perspective enabled the Flying Apsaras to transcend their purely religious functionality and become a universal symbol of humanity’s spiritual aspiration. Research has pointed out that the “Rebirth” (再生) of the Feitian is essentially a process of the secularization and humanization of religious imagery, reflecting the eternal vitality of art itself^[2].

3.The Female Image and Humanistic Symbolism in the Flying Apsaras

3.1 From Divinity to Humanity: The Evolution of the Female Image

In the history of art, the Dunhuang Flying Apsaras are not only incarnations of divine beings but also aesthetic symbols of the female image. The early Apsaras primarily served as figures of religious devotion and offerings, whereas by the Tang dynasty, the Feitian had evolved to embody qualities of independence, confidence, and resilience that characterize the feminine spirit^[8].

Morphological analysis of the High Tang period Feitian reveals that their characteristic postures often feature S-shaped curves and composite dynamics defined by torso rotation and fluttering ribbons (躯干回旋 — 衣带飞动). Their figures are full and rounded, their lines smooth and flowing, while the intricate details of their hairstyles and garments reflect the aesthetic preferences and cultural sensibilities of Tang society^[5] (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: South Wall of Cave 320 at Mogao Caves



The image of the Flying Apsaras during this period was endowed with increasingly humanized characteristics. They were no longer depicted merely as attendants serving the Buddha but instead as symbols of self-awareness and individual spiritual autonomy. This transformation from divinity to humanity marks a crucial spiritual turning point in the aesthetic representation of women in ancient Chinese art.

3.2 Spirituality and Softness: The Feminine Dimension of Humanistic Aesthetics

In modern design, the imagery of the Flying Apsaras embodies an aesthetic value of soft power—expressing feminine spirituality and inner strength through the interplay of line and flow^[1]. The beauty of the Feitian arises not only from their visual lightness and ethereal movement but also from the spiritual tension they contain—a philosophical aesthetic of “Gentleness overcoming strength”.

Scholars have further emphasized that the Flying Apsaras symbolize the spiritual freedom of Eastern women, representing an essential motif in the transcendence of the human spirit^[4]. This feminine symbolism transcends gender boundaries, evolving into a synthesis of spirituality and humanity, serving as an archetype of aesthetic and cultural integration that continues to inspire contemporary artistic creation.

3.3 The Humanistic Symbolism of the Female Feitian Image

The graceful movements and serene smiles of the Flying Apsaras express not only feminine beauty but also humanity’s aspiration toward an ideal world. The Feitian’s visualization of the “Pure Land” (极乐世界) serves as an artistic metaphor for inner peace and spiritual purification. In this humanistic context, the Flying Apsaras are no longer merely “Sacred dancers” but have become “Humanistic flyers” (人文的飞翔者)—representing humanity’s faith in goodness and beauty, as well as the longing to transcend worldly limitations.

Recent studies have pointed out that the reapplication of Dunhuang mural art in contemporary fashion design is not simply a formal reproduction of traditional motifs but an act of cultural awakening and spiritual inheritance. Through fashion as

a medium, the art of the Flying Apsaras has been reintroduced into modern life in an accessible form, evoking a sense of cultural identity and national confidence while highlighting the enduring spiritual strength of Eastern art^[14].

The agility, transcendence, and serenity of the Feitian woman have become emblematic symbols connecting traditional culture with modern humanistic values. In contemporary fashion design, this imagery is frequently reinterpreted through ribbon-like silhouettes, light gauze materials, and flowing linear compositions, forming a poetic visual metaphor for the spiritual essence of Eastern femininity^[15].

4. The Visual Language and Fashion Aesthetic Transformation of the Flying Apsaras

4.1 Color Imagery: The Resonance of Spirit and Vision

The color system of the Dunhuang murals is composed primarily of high-purity mineral pigments, creating a visual language imbued with sacred luminosity. Vermilion (朱红) symbolizes flame and light, signifying wisdom and salvation; azurite (石青) and malachite green (石绿) symbolize life and tranquility, evoking an ideal realm beyond the mundane world.

In contemporary fashion design, this chromatic system has been reconstructed: designers reinterpret the Feitian color palette through high-saturation warm-cool contrasts and mineral tonalities, reestablishing its visual logic while transforming the symbolic brightness and mystery of mural hues into modern aesthetic expressions. This color innovation retains the tactile qualities of traditional pigments while reflecting the spiritual vitality and transcendence embodied in the “Feitian Spirit” (飞天精神)^[16].

The aesthetic features of Dunhuang colors—high saturation, strong contrast, and harmonious unity—interweave symbolic meanings from both Buddhist doctrine and natural philosophy. For example, as shown in Figure 5, the Hanfu brand Shisanyu (十三余) extracted a tri-color combination of red, turquoise, and white from the Flying Apsaras of Cave 320 for its “Feitian Series.” Through the lustrous sheen of silk, the brand enhances visual layering and imbues traditional hues with renewed fashion semantics, achieving a dialogue between historical elegance and modern sensibility.

Figure 5: Over Thirteen Hanfu Brands’ “Flying Sky Series”



4.2 Imagery and Line: The Poetics of Dynamic Structure

The visual essence of the Flying Apsaras lies in the movement of lines. The distinctive charm of Chinese art is found in the principle of “Depicting form through lines” (以线写形), where the fluidity of line conveys the rhythm of life itself^[12]. In the Dunhuang murals, the ribbons, long sleeves, and cloud motifs of the Feitian interweave to form a network of dynamic momentum, imbuing the compositions with an aesthetic quality of “Motion within stillness and rhythm within movement” (静中有动、动中有韵)^[17].

Modern fashion designers reinterpret this imagery through forms such as streamlined structures and encircling curves, translating the flowing ribbon lines into the contours of skirts, shoulders, or waists to evoke a visual perception of “The garment moving with the wind” (风动衣随). As shown in Figure 6, in ZIFEI WANG’s Autumn/Winter 2025 collection “Dust and Shadow” (尘沾影覆), this design approach vividly embodies the dynamic rhythm of the Feitian.

These flowing lines not only reproduce the physical beauty of the Flying Apsaras' form but also embody the aesthetic conception of balance between void and fullness rooted in Eastern philosophy. The interplay of lineal movement, spatial blankness, and compositional rhythm collectively constructs a poetic visual structure in which the work achieves spiritual equilibrium and tension between motion and stillness.

This structural beauty is not merely a formal language of Feitian art but also an enduring source of inspiration for contemporary fashion design. By reimagining the relationship between line and space, designers can extend the lively rhythm and spiritual grace of the Flying Apsaras into modern garments, thereby realizing a contemporary expression of traditional aesthetic spirit.

Figure 6: ZIFEI WANG2025FW “Dust-Touched Shadow Cover”



4.3 Digital Reconstruction of Patterns and Motifs

The digital deconstruction of Dunhuang motifs is a crucial approach to the modern reinterpretation of traditional art^[18]. Through digital scanning and vector-based modeling, researchers modularize the mural motifs of lotuses (莲花), clouds (云气), and scroll patterns (卷草), enabling their reappearance in textile prints and garment surface design.

This technology not only preserves the aesthetic charm of hand-painted craftsmanship but also establishes an innovative chain that links “Traditional patterns – algorithmic generation – fashion design.” Through the coordinated application of high-resolution scanning, vector modeling, and parametric algorithms, designers are able to recreate these motifs while honoring the original artistic spirit of Dunhuang.

Digital reconstruction transforms the Flying Apsaras from static historical relics into a reconfigurable, regenerative, and transmissible visual language. It expands the expressive potential of traditional art and provides a sustainable pathway for its cultural renewal and long-term development.

5.The Humanistic Regeneration and Global Dissemination of the Feitian Cultural Imagery

5.1 From Religious Art to Humanistic Narrative

The modern dissemination of the Feitian imagery embodies a shift from religious symbolism to humanistic narrative. Studies have noted that this transformation essentially constitutes a “Reproduction of the classics”, in which both art criticism and public aesthetics propel the Feitian's evolution from a religious icon into a cultural symbol^[3].

In contemporary design contexts, the Feitian is no longer treated as a Buddhist decorative element but as a visual emblem of Eastern spirituality and national identity. Its humanistic value is reflected in the integrated expression of freedom (自由), goodness (善), and spirituality (灵性)—qualities that closely align with the modern pursuit of individualization and inner

expression in design.

5.2 Cultural Innovation within the “New Chinese Style” Context

Research indicates that the essence of New Chinese Style design lies in reconstructing traditional symbols through modern methods. Dunhuang decorative motifs have thus become exemplary models of cultural regeneration^[19].

Further studies point out that caisson patterns (藻井纹样), with their symmetrical structures and symbolic connotations, are reinterpreted in contemporary fashion as visual signs of philosophical beauty. For instance, the “Double Dragon Lotus” (双龙莲花) motif symbolizes the balance of yin and yang and the cyclical nature of life^[20].

These design practices demonstrate that the Feitian culture and its associated motifs are not merely decorative languages but embodied forms of cultural spirit. Through modern design expression, they have become vital cultural bridges for presenting Eastern aesthetics on the global stage.

5.3 International Communication and Cultural Soft Power

The explorations of Aurel Stein first introduced Dunhuang art to Western academia, initiating international scholarly exchanges in Buddhist art^[21]. The global dissemination of the Feitian image has since demonstrated the cross-cultural resonance of Dunhuang art.

Today, Feitian imagery frequently appears in international brand collaborations, fashion week runways, and digital art exhibitions, becoming an important medium for expressing the spirit of Chinese art. This cross-disciplinary dissemination of “Feitian aesthetics” allows the Eastern artistic spirit to enter the global visual vocabulary of fashion. It not only affirms cultural confidence but also promotes humanistic empathy across cultures, revitalizing traditional art through contemporary modes of expression and ensuring its continual rebirth.

6. Contemporary Value: Spiritual Revival and Humanistic Resonance

The contemporary expression of the Feitian cultural imagery represents not merely a formal replication but a spiritual revival. The innovative application of Dunhuang art constitutes, in essence, a process of reawakening national spirit and cultural identity^[14].

The artistic elements of the Dunhuang murals provide new inspiration for modern fashion design. The creative reinterpretation of their forms and meanings enriches design language while advancing the contemporary expression of traditional culture^[22]. On a practical level, the rebirth of Dunhuang patterns through modern techniques—in their curves, colors, and ornamental structures—embodies the fusion of traditional aesthetics and modern design concepts.

In an era defined by fast-paced globalization, the imagery of the Flying Apsaras—with its serenity, ethereality, and motion—offers spiritual solace to the modern individual. It symbolizes humanity’s enduring quest for freedom and transcendence—where “Flight” represents not only physical movement but the liberation of the soul.

Through creative reinterpretation, designers reconstruct the balance between spirituality and beauty on a visual level and achieve the contemporary articulation of cultural memory on a symbolic level. The Feitian stands as a paradigm of the rebirth of Dunhuang art—its renewal embodies the secularization and humanization of religious art, reflecting not only an artistic phenomenon but also a psychological awakening of society.

The Dunhuang Flying Apsaras have thus become a cultural bridge connecting past and future, symbolizing the pathway through which Chinese aesthetics journey from tradition toward global dialogue.

Conclusion

The Dunhuang Flying Apsaras represent not only the sacred essence of ancient religious art but also a cultural symbol embodying Eastern aesthetic philosophy and humanistic thought. Centered on Feitian art, this study explored the interaction between cultural imagery and fashion design, analyzing its reinterpretation and transformation within a contemporary context. Findings reveal that throughout history, the Feitian imagery has undergone a transformation from religious symbolism to humanistic narrative. Its characteristics—dynamic beauty, ethereal charm, and feminine spiritual awakening—serve as major sources of inspiration for designers reconstructing Eastern aesthetics in modern fashion.

In contemporary practice, the revival of Feitian imagery manifests not only as a formal reference but also as a continuation of

spiritual essence. By reinterpreting elements such as line, color, and motif, designers revitalize Dunhuang art within modern garments. This fusion of tradition and modernity embodies the awakening of cultural confidence and highlights the unique expression of Eastern art within the global fashion system.

Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a feasible pathway for the contemporary expression of traditional art. The modern reinterpretation of the Dunhuang Feitian signifies not just an aesthetic innovation but a response to cultural identity and spiritual aspiration. Future research may further integrate digital technologies and global dissemination perspectives to explore how traditional art continues to sustain its vitality across broader cultural contexts—allowing the “Beauty of the Flying Apsaras” to become a visual language linking history and modernity, East and West.

Funding

No

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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