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## The Dragon Image of Ly-Tran Dynasty: Application in Historical Comic Characters

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### Abstract

The theme of decorative patterns of lotus, chrysanthemum, dragon, cloud, and water waves is a commonly used image in Ly-Tran's decorative designs that are still used today. Others are an endless source of inspiration for application design and themes that have become fashion trends with ethnic elements. Contributing to promoting and preserving the value of Vietnamese fine art in the modern period, this article surveys and analyses the formation and transformation of water waves through the ages and their applications in contemporary packaging design. The research shows that the water wave pattern is a long-standing symbol and decorative pattern in ancient Vietnamese visual arts; it not only has artistic value but also contains religious and spiritual value and the profound Eastern philosophical concept, reflecting the constant rotation of life on each winding rhythm. This pattern under the Ly-Tran dynasties has both practical significance and represents the peak shaping value of the dynasty. Integrating the rhythm of contemporary life into application design, using water wave patterns in packaging design, aims to promote and spread more widely to the public in modern life.

This article aims to study the social context and creative forms of recreating and using water wave motifs in general application design and packaging in the field of art and design today. At the same time, analysis of new design methods continues to develop, convey, and even expand the symbolic meaning of the motifs through the aesthetic orientation of contemporary people and by inheriting and promoting traditional good culture.

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background on the Ly- Tran Dynasty

The sacred nobility symbolises the Dragon in our country. It is the head of the "four spirits" (four holy animals: Dragon, lion, devil, phoenix). It is often carved in sacred places, with a very formal shape and symbolises the king's power. It also symbolises a good omen of prosperity. Since ancient times, it has been considered a totem of wet rice farmers. During the Hung King period, the people of our country worshipped the dragon god (Giao Long) with the hope that the god would bless the rain and wind, good crops, prosperity and happiness. During the Ly Dynasty, the image of the Dragon was depicted with a soft, petite body that bends many rings and gradually decreases towards the tail. There are four legs; each has three pointed claws, the head is raised, the mouth is wide open with small teeth, and a firecrest symbolises strength and authority, calling for rain and thunder. By the Tran Dynasty, our country had defeated the powerful Nguyen Mong army three times, keeping the borders of the realm calm and developing stably. They all proved their strength, strategy in combat, and the will to be independent and self-reliant. Therefore, the Dragon no longer meanders regularly and softly; the image of the Dragon is depicted with a strong, fat body, winding like a saddle; the Dragon's tail has many forms, sometimes pointed, sometimes spiral, varied scales, sometimes curved, occasionally semi-circular like a flower, flower buds... Especially on the head of the Dragon, there are new details, such as horns and ears, and the majestic appearance of the dynasty of the Trong Vo period. The article researches and analyses the main

characteristics of shaping and applying them to the design of historical comic characters to create heroic characters of the Tran Dynasty with spiritual and cultural values of the Vietnamese period, contributing to the orientation of aesthetic tastes and conveying national history.

## 1.2. The image of the Dragon in the Tran Dynasty

### 1.2.1. Dragons in Eastern culture

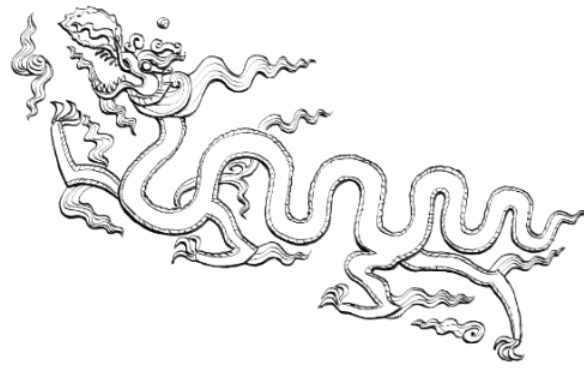
Asian dragons, also known as oriental dragons, are made up of thousands of years based on a collection of various elements of several animals or natural phenomena, of which the main prototypes are snakes and crocodiles. Eastern dragons are considered creatures that represent the primordial forces of nature and the universe and are a great source of wisdom, capable of influencing everything, especially water. The Eastern Dragon is also known as the Dragon King, a guardian god who protects people in river areas. Dragons can bring life and prosperity to agriculture but can also create storms, thunder, and floods when angry. In the cultural history of some Eastern peoples, such as China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, the Dragon has become a symbol of beauty, power, luck, prosperity, development, etc., sometimes representing superhuman, mystical, and mighty forces. Sometimes, they are representatives of secular royal power... The Dragon originated over 8,000 years ago in Chinese culture, meaning it was a lucky animal. By the time of the Xia - Shang - Zhou Dynasty, the Dragon had penetrated deeply into the spiritual life of the people, considered as a mount of the gods and emperors. During the Spring and Autumn Period - Warring States, the image of the Dragon marked a vivid development in the style and shaping of the Dragon, showing freedom in expression and having many different archetypes. During the Three Kingdoms - Wei - Jin - Northern and Southern Dynasties, Chinese dragons were popularised, existing in parallel with the image of the royal Dragon. Entering the Song-Yuan Dynasty is a harmonious combination of the image of the Chinese Dragon and Buddhism, once again affirming the perfect harmony between the two endogenous and exogenous elements in Chinese dragon worship culture. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the image of dragons was the cult of the ruling class; they differentiated into two main types of dragons, royal dragons and dragons (serpents) in folklore, and at the same time, created differences in the structural parts of dragons such as the number of fingers, horns, etc. Nowadays, Chinese people use the image of the Dragon in various cultural and artistic styles, often comparing the Dragon with outstanding figures who have significantly contributed to the nation's development.

Dragons in Eastern culture must also be mentioned in Korea. Dragons in Korean culture usually have long bodies; they look pretty like Chinese dragons but have long moustaches, symbolising patriotism. Dragons in Japan are associated with beliefs, religion, and folklore. The Japanese Dragon is representative of the simple but noble wishes of the people: to multiply, to flourish, to rain and wind. The Japanese believe that people born in the year of the Dragon are healthy

and energetic... In the culture of traditional Vietnamese people, dragons are both mascots of indigenous origin, formed from the integrated thinking of ancient Vietnamese agricultural residents based on the psychological desire to dominate nature and rise to master their destiny. In Vietnamese culture, the Dragon is the most famous cultural symbol. Originating from crocodile dragons, through interacting with Chinese and Indian cultures, Vietnamese dragons gradually shaped into snake-bodied dragons, depending on each historical period and dressed in the colours of Buddhism or Confucianism. Finally, Vietnamese dragons blended with folklore, symbolising proliferation, holiness, and y and n. Over thousands of years of existence and development, dragons in Eastern culture have been diverse in form and form in culture, art, and life. The Dragon can be a representation of natural power, a representation of the mystique of the universe, a representation of national prosperity, and a representation of royal power. Dragons are also compared to patriotic heroes and represent people's beliefs about the ideal of life. Dragons in Eastern culture have become traditional mascots, representing the sacred and being worshipped. As for the Vietnamese Dragon, although influenced by two different cultures (China and India), the Vietnamese Dragon has common symbolic values: representing water and the sky and being a mascot associated with the royal power of the government. Vietnamese dragons are always associated with the Vietnamese national consciousness, always looking for the most suitable shape and meaning for each era, constantly moving and changing as if that constant movement and transformation is a vivid expression of Vietnamese cultural identity.

### 2.2. Characteristics of dragon formation in the Tran Dynasty

The dragon symbol in Vietnam has had many changes and inheritances throughout historical periods. From the time of the Hung King, it was a long-bodied mascot with scales like a crocodile carved on bronze objects, especially copper drums. By the Ly Dynasty (1010 - 1224) of the independent and autonomous Dai Viet country, the Dragon clearly showed its origin as a snake through the gradual intersection of Indo-Southeast Asian culture and Chinese culture. Dragons of the Ly Dynasty are often created with a long, smooth body in the shape of a snake, or almost a 12-piece sinusoid, representing the 12 months of the year, symbolising the change of the weather over the years, the abundance and prosperity of the wet rice civilisation. Along the spine of the Ly Dynasty Dragon is a row of low scales; the Dragon has four legs, each of which has three fingers protruding forward. The Dragon's head is raised high, and the Dragon's mane is long, sloping backwards, winding towards the tail. The Dragon's mouth opened wide to catch the jade. The two jaws have long, sharp teeth that protrude into the nose, from which the crest of fire comes out (the nose is elongated like a beak, so it is often called a crest). On the Dragon's forehead is a pattern resembling the shape of the letter "S", symbolising thunder and rain clouds.



**Fig 1:** Dragon of the Ly Dynasty

The Dragon of the Ly Dynasty carries Buddhist altruism with the popular motif of a dragon rolled in a title. Even its beak is rolled in the image of a title; the Ly dragon represents imperial power, a symbol of the country's new capital, showing the proud self-respect of the Ly dynasty court. The above motifs and layouts are strictly regulated for the dragon image of the Ly Dynasty. In the Tran Dynasty (1225 - 1400), Dai Viet experienced many upheavals but was also a dynasty with proud historical features. Facing the disaster of destruction from the invasion of Yuan Mong, the Tran Dynasty won three glorious victories, peacefully plundered from Chiem Citadel, and maintained the edge of the realm. The Tran Dynasty is to build a stable country and bring Confucianism and Taoism into our country, along with economic, cultural, military and educational reforms. In that situation, the Tran dragon has both inherited the beauty of the Dragon of the Ly dynasty and developed the following unique characteristics: When excavating the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long, archaeologists found that the Tran dragon also existed on the leaves but with a fat body, short snout, giant claws, scales all over the body... In addition, dragons appear in Buddhist works, such as on the doors of Pho Minh Pagoda (Nam Dinh). Tran dragons are also famous for tattooing dragons on the thighs of soldiers, on the abdomen, and on the back. They are called Thai Long (flower dragon). The history book also records that in 1299, the Emperor of the Tran Dynasty said that the Tran Dynasty originated in the sea; from kings to soldiers, they all tattooed dragons to pass on the old customs. The image of the Dragon in the Tran Dynasty still retains the same shape as in the Ly Dynasty. However, the victory over the powerful Nguyen Mong army and the establishment of national stability affirmed sovereignty and military strength and promoted national pride. That spirit was put into art and began to change the appearance of the Dragon image. In the architecture of palaces, mausoleums, temples, pagodas. Dragon artefacts have appeared as shaped motifs with their characteristics of generosity and strength:



**Fig 2:** The Dragon body of the Tran Dynasty winds in many postures

The Tran Dragon exudes a strong, healthy appearance with a thicker, shorter body and decisive, intense movements. Scales appear on the body, so they are strong and increase their combat power. Along the back of the Tran dynasty dragon are large, pointed, serrated dorsal scales; sometimes, each scale is divided into two tiers.

**Tran Dragon Legs:** The dragon's legs in the Tran Dynasty had four claws with shorter, sharper and more giant claws.



**Fig 4:** Dragon's Feet in the Tran Dynasty

The tufts of feathers in the vacuum fly out in a particular direction, like the dragon of the Ly Dynasty, but fly forward or backward depending on the space.

#### Tran Dragon Head



**Fig 5:** The dragon's head of the Tran Dynasty

The Dragon's head is more straightforward than the Dragon of the Ly dynasty. The Dragon still has a leaf-shaped proboscis, which rises upwards but does not bend many bends. The front fangs are large, squeezed through the tap waves. The Dragon's mouth is wide open but sometimes does not bite the orb. Thus, the above specific shaping characteristics will help identify the image of the Dragon in the Tran Dynasty. Although it still bears the symbol of the king, of royal power, and also the symbol of an independent



country like the Ly Dynasty, the Dragon of the Tran Dynasty carries the ideology: Strong and majestic represents a period of extreme prosperity of the Tran Dynasty: Victory over the powerful Nguyen Mong army; the country is stable and robust with many talented heroes such as Tran Hung Dao, Tran Quoc Toan.

### 3. Application of the Dragon image of the Tran Dynasty in the design of historical comic characters

#### 3.1. Historical comics

Comics are an artistic medium that combines words and images (the story is represented by drawings accompanied by the characters' dialogues). Thus, historical comics take historical themes (national history, ethnicity, lineage, celebrities, etc.) as the main content. While recounting events and characters, historical comics often revive a vast and vivid picture of a past historical time and bring readers new perceptions or profound lessons.

When looking for historical comic books, in addition to watching attractive stories, readers understand memorable events and characters in the nation's history. The transmission of national history through vivid comic books is considered a positive direction in orienting aesthetic tastes and contributing to solving historical education. The comic book market in Vietnam is increasingly diverse and rich from genres to content. In particular, Vietnamese historical comics are a genre focused on because they are an effective means of conveying culture and traditions and because the treasure of stories spanning thousands of years of civilisation of the nation is an extraordinarily vast and rich resource for this genre. Currently, several historical comics have been invested in research and publication: Young Publishing House with the series "History of Vietnam": The thick series consists of 8 volumes, divided by each stage of national development; The thin-set consists of 50 episodes, built on typical characters, events or issues. Kim Dong Publishing House built a bookcase, "Vietnamese Historical Stories", with nearly 30 books, sending young readers the stories of historical names such as Dinh Bo Linh, Mai Thuc Loan, Phung Hung, Ngo Quyen, Y Lan.

#### 3.2. Historical comic character design

Comic book character design is understood as creating characters for the story, human characters or anthropomorphic animals and plants. In each story of a historical comic, character design helps the reader visualise the character himself in its historical space and time. Therefore, including the symbolic elements of the historical period in the character not only clarifies the historical space and context but also clarifies the historical person. That is the condition to attract viewers or readers, help them love the characters, and appreciate the historical value of the nation. In some historical comics, the character's script may not be ready. In those cases, collecting much information and studying historical documents to describe the character is necessary. The aesthetic features and shaping symbols of history will provide effective material for character design. During the Tran Dynasty, the image of the Tran dragon, with its distinctive and symbolic features, was an essential factor in effectively applying historical comic characters.

#### 3.3. Application of Tran Dragon image to design characters

The structure of the method of applying the image of the Tran Dragon in the design of historical comic characters is as

follows:



#### 3.3.1. Character design Tran Hung Dao

##### 3.3.1.1. Character Research

Historical background: In 1225, Tran Canh ascended the throne at the beginning of the Tran Dynasty. The Tran Dynasty is one of the most prosperous dynasties of Vietnamese feudal history. In 175 years of reign with 12 kings and seven years of the Later Tran era with two kings, the kings of the Tran Dynasty were mostly talented, heroic and patriotic people. The Tran Dynasty was also the dynasty that created the aura of East Asia. My King agreed that the brothers were in harmony. Many outstanding and talented national heroes were born during the Chan period, such as Hung Dao Vuong - Tran Quoc Tuan, Tran Quang Khai, Tran Nhat Duat, Tran Quoc Toan... Character Tran Hung Dao: During the Tran period, there were three times of resistance against the powerful Nguyen - Mong army and victory. Associated with those three victories is the famous general Tran Hung Dao, also known under the title of Hung Dao, the Great King. After his death, the people revered him as Saint Tran, the Nine Heavens Emperor. Building the character of Tran Hung, Dao is a resolute general with armour with the story of his feats.

##### 3.3.1.2. Sketch the character's shape

**Anatomical sketch:** Apply proportions to build shapes and pose characters. If the character is going to dress his entire body in clothes, then drawing the perfect anatomy is unnecessary. As long as there is an accurate and appropriate ratio of Vietnamese people, it is enough to integrate clothes and accessories coherently.

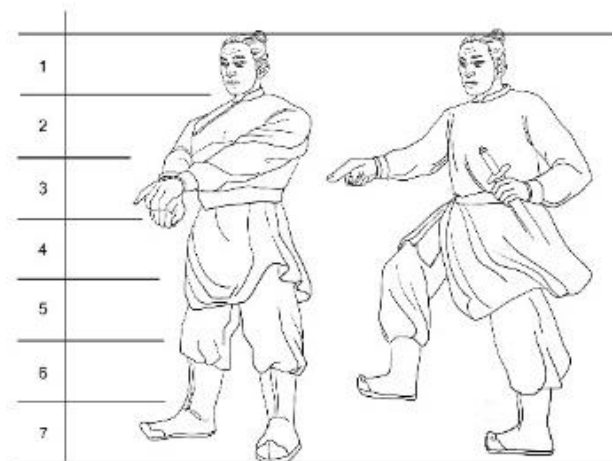


Fig 6: Character Ratio

They use the "hero" ratio for Tran Hung Dao, measuring seven heads. They are broken down as above.

*Character sketching:* there are basic shapes and proportions, posing and coordinating costumes to show the role and position of the character part of the character personality through appearance. Tran Hung Dao is a general, so he sketched him wearing a war shirt.

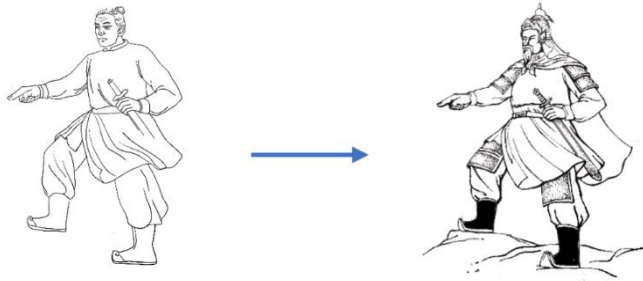


Fig 7: Sketch of a war cell for a character

Characters must be drawn from multiple angles, front, back, tilt, and various moves to fit the segments and story situations.



Fig 8: Sketch characters with many shapes and postures

The application of shaping language to express the character's personality through appearance; for example, curved strokes show softness, ky strokes create stubbornness, triangles are often applied to villains to express dangerous thorns, etc., the circle represents the gentle or young characters, the square represents the character with strength, solidity or framework it is necessary to flexibly apply lines and array shapes to express character characteristics clearly. 3. Apply the image of the Tran Dragon to create details for the drawing and complete the character. The sketches are satisfactory and closest to the idea for the designer to apply the modelling characteristics to the character, add details and redesign the character more thoroughly to choose the perfect version.

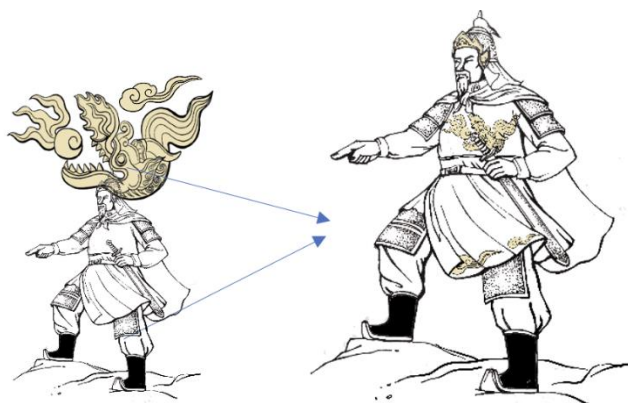


Fig 9: Apply the Dragon pattern to the character's costume

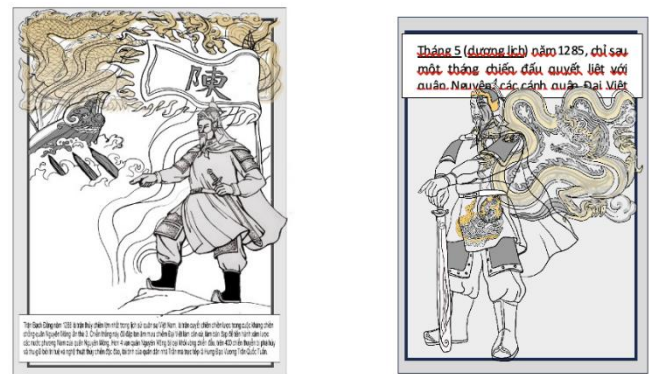
**3.3.2. Apply the image of the Tran Dragon to the background and context: Use the space of coordinating characters to tell about the era and spiritual power**



Fig 10: Apply the Dragon pattern to the background

**3.3.3. Sketch the final details to complete the character**

Design that character in multiple comic pages to match the content and set up a layout combined with dialogue to create an appeal for each story scene.



**4. Conclusion**

From a visual perspective, a beautiful historical figure effectively conveys the content of the historical comic genre. With the shaping characteristics of the image of the Dragon in the Tran Dynasty, the reasonable application to the context and costumes will help the character become vivid, full of realistic and symbolic meaning of the Tran Dynasty. Especially for the heroic history of the nation, it is a way to bring readers closer to the heroes who built and preserved the country. Viewers not only love the characters but also love the aesthetic beauty of national art. With the criterion of maintaining and preserving traditional cultural values, this is a suitable way to develop the historical comic genre in the current comic ecosystem.

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