

## Curriculum Creation of Foshan Cai Zha Culture in Early Childhood Education

### —Educational Practice from a Semiotic Perspective

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**Abstract:** Kindergarten local cultural education often prioritizes formal presentation over meaning transformation. This study focuses on Foshan Cai Zha (a traditional craft) and examines, from a semiotic perspective, how its cultural symbols can be transformed into early childhood curriculum. It systematically analyzes the three-step process of framing, covering, and decorating, and distills three translation strategies: from conventional structures to play modules, from cultural textures to sensory dialogue, and from fixed narratives to puzzles of meaning. Using the thematic activity "The Birth of My Magical Companion," the study presents a practical pathway from semiotic analysis to curriculum creation, aiming to integrate intangible cultural heritage into early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Foshan Cai Zha; Cultural symbols; Curriculum creation; Early childhood education; semiotics

#### I. Introduction

Foshan Colorful Lanterns, a national-level intangible cultural heritage, are a cultural emblem of Lingnan, known for exquisite craftsmanship. However, this ancient art faces an inheritance dilemma, drifting away from the younger generation. Meanwhile, early childhood education in China often reduces local culture to superficial embellishments. This study focuses on Foshan Cai Zha, asking: How can its complex cultural symbols be transformed into educational resources for young children? Existing research lacks in-depth educational transformation studies. Following a framework of theoretical foundation→semiotic analysis→strategic translation→curriculum creation, this study aims to produce an operational Cai Zha-themed curriculum plan.

#### II. The Value and Mechanisms of Integrating Foshan Cai Zha into Early Childhood Education

A. The contemporary value of integrating intangible cultural heritage

The Preschool Education Law of the People's Republic of China (effective June 1, 2025) explicitly stipulates in Article 4 the inclusion of fine traditional Chinese culture in preschool education, providing a fundamental policy basis for integrating local intangible cultural heritage into curricula.

B. The unique educational value of Foshan Cai Zha Culture

With its distinctive visual symbolism, comprehensive craftsmanship, and profound folkloric significance, Foshan Cai Zha demonstrates multi-dimensional educational potential. The

three-step process of framing, covering, and decorating aligns closely with young children’s “learning by doing” cognitive characteristics.

C. The coupling mechanism between Cai Zha and young children’s cognition from a semiotic perspective

According to Saussure’s semiotic theory, Cai Zha is a sign system composed of signifiers and signifieds. Peirce’s triad (icons, indices, symbols) further reveals

its meaning network. Piaget noted that preschool children are in the preoperational stage, struggling with highly abstract symbols, while Vygotsky emphasized that children possess the emerging ability to “substitute one object for another.” Therefore, the integration of cultural symbols with children’s cognition is not a matter of simplification, but of transforming a closed system of signification into an open, manipulable “playground of meaning.”

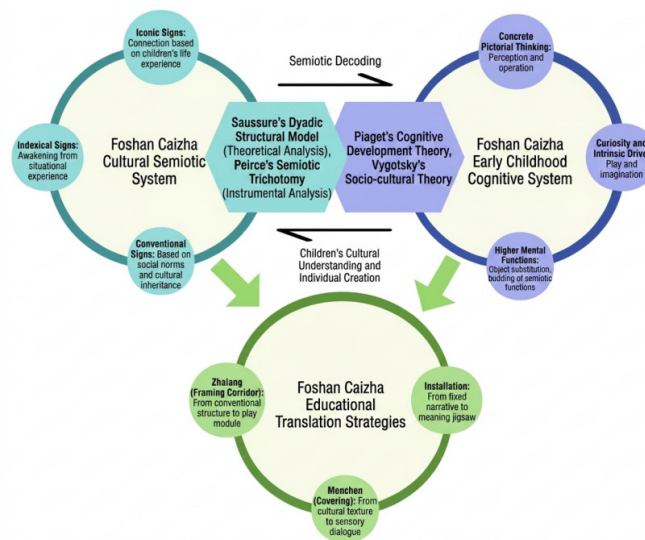


Figure 1 Research Logic Framework: A Bidirectional Construction Model from Cultural Symbol Decoding to Young Children’s Meaning Generation

### III. Systematic Analysis of the Cultural Symbols of Foshan Cai Zha

We do not seek an encyclopedic record of Cai Zha craftsmanship; rather, guided by the principle of “whether and how it is possible to engage with

young children,” we use the three-step process of framing, covering, and decorating as an analytical framework, focusing on the core elements with the greatest representational power, perceptibility, and potential for transformation.

Coding Action	Symbol Type	Signifier System	Signified system	Cognitive challenges for young children	Preliminary educational strategies
Framing—Structural Symbols	Index: structure indicates form; Symbol: specific frame conveys specific spirit	Linear combinations of bamboo strips, geometric spatial frameworks	Skeletal Form and Presence: first definition of the work’s spiritual character	Hidden internal structure difficult to perceive; bamboo strips risky to handle	Provide safe, malleable materials; reduce complex forms to 2-3 basic geometric shapes
Covering—Textural Symbol	Symbol: red silk symbolizes festivity; Icon: paper texture imitates skin/natural textures	Overlay of paper/satin, base colour, surface texture	Surface and sense of vitality: endowing the work with visual volume and an initial emotional tone	Difficulty understanding 2D→3D transition; vague perception of “tension” and “texture”	Use easy-to-shape materials; focus on the magic of 2D→3D and visual differences of materials
Installation—Narrative Symbols	Symbol: auspicious clouds, coin patterns carry fixed meanings; Icon: biomimetic flowers, animals	Painted patterns, contrasting colours, additional decorative elements	Narrative and Auspiciousness: each motif as a cultural word, establishing cultural identity and narrative theme	Abstract and obscure pattern meanings; high fine-motor demands; complex color combinations	Use easy-to-handle decorative materials; distill traditional patterns into basic visual elements and allow recombination

Figure 2 Analysis of the Symbolic System and Educational Transformation Index of the Three-Step Foshan Cai Zha Process

#### IV. Strategies for the Educational Translation of Cultural Symbols

##### A. Framing level: from conventional structures to play modules

Transform implicit structural rules (e.g., the mnemonic for a lion's head frame) into playable construction tasks. Deconstruct complex forms into basic geometric combinations, replace bamboo strips with safe modular materials, and encode the process as a "crack the structural code" game, allowing children to internalize "structure determines form" through play.

##### B. Covering level: from cultural texture to sensory dialogue

Convert symbolic colorings and material choices into sensory-experiential language. Turn social symbols (e.g., red for festivity) into personal emotional vocabulary, making color an emotional index; establish texture-exploration workshops for children to discover the feelings conveyed by different textures.

##### C. Decorating level: from fixed narratives to puzzles of meaning

Deconstruct fixed, high-context cultural narratives and reconstruct them as freely combinable meaning components. Break down complex patterns into basic units (dots, lines, spirals) to create mix-and-match graphics; create a "self" narrative context, guiding children to express personal meanings, turning the traditional symbolic system into an open "sentence-making" playground.

#### V. Curriculum Creation of the "My Magical Companion" Thematic Activity

Near the end of the "Emotional Little

Monsters" activity, children discussed "what makes me feel safe." One child said, "I wish there was an invisible superhero living in the little lamp by my bed to chase away nightmares." The teacher seized this growth point and initiated the inquiry activity "The Birth of My Magical Companion," with the driving question: "How can we create a unique guardian companion for ourselves?"

##### A. Constructing the skeleton—my little beast stands up

Provide safe materials such as twisty sticks and building blocks, allowing children to freely construct three-dimensional skeletons, experiencing the joy of "from nothing to something" and establishing basic form intentions.

##### B. Bringing it to life—cladding the creature in skin

Provide "skin" materials like crepe paper, gauze, and non-woven fabric. Children wrap and cover their skeletons, feeling the folds and volume created as flat materials become three-dimensional, achieving a rich visual image.

##### C. Telling the story—enchancing the little creatures

Provide colored stickers, pom-poms, googly eyes, and other decorative materials, guiding children to "write" stories with visual elements—e.g., lightning bolts for speed, spirals for happy magic.

##### D. Awakening and performance—the little creatures' magical debut

Organize a "Guardian Beast Launch Event." Children combine imagination, language, and movement through dramatic play and storytelling, completing the leap from "making an object" to "bringing a life story to life."



Figure 3 Flowchart of the 'The Birth of My Magical Companion' themed activity: the curricular presentation of translation strategies

## VI. Conclusion

The core value of this study lies in revealing that for any ancient craft to truly enter children's lives, it must undergo a profound translation from "cultural grammar" to "child grammar." The practice of "My Magical Companion" demonstrates that when craft learning serves children's self-expression, cultural transmission becomes a creative dialogue rather than a one-way teaching relationship.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations: the scope of practical validation is limited; assessment tools for translation effectiveness have yet to be established; and there has been insufficient discussion of professional support mechanisms

for teachers as "translators." Future research may focus on tool development, evaluation system construction, and migration to other intangible cultural heritage projects.

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