

# Study on Furniture Product Configuration Design from perspective of Traditional Pattern Symbols

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## Abstract

In this paper, cultural symbols of traditional patterns were analyzed according to consumer demand. And modern furniture design method featuring generalization and concretization and configuration, reference and mutual fusion, restructuring and inheritance was discussed. It will provide scientific references for the design of modern furniture owning cultural connotation, suitable function, regional culture and national features.

**Keywords:** Traditional patterns; Modern furniture; Symbol; Configuration design

The unique spiritual cultures of Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, etc. in ancient China have far-reaching influence on the formation and development of traditional furniture. However, with the influence of new thought, new concept, foreign cultural and artistic ideological trends, people's lifestyle has changed, along with their aesthetic ideas, which brings new opportunities and challenges to furniture industry in China.

## 1. Status analysis

At present, the furniture enterprises in China start to attempt to apply elements of traditional Chinese arts in modern furniture products, which emphasis on furniture brand gradually. From the perspective of the industry as a whole, such phe-

nomenon is generally existed, i.e., focus on material rather than design, weak in design ability, insufficient in senior designers, and severe product homogenization [1].

It's found that, based on investigation by the author, in term of selection of furniture product style, consumers choose furniture "more design-oriented" account for 55.8%, and select "acceptable once aesthetically pleasing" is 34.3%, while few customers(only 9.9%) choose "popular style" [2-3]. It's clear that the consumers prefer furniture "more design-oriented". It's also found in the investigation that male consumers focus on function and comfort, with clear purchase targets. In contrast, female consumers are more emotional. In terms of choosing furniture with "popular style", female consumers are obviously much more demanding than their male counterparts, focusing on appearance. Hence, for design of furniture products, designer should not only pay attention to product functions, but also focus on product appearance, and even design details to attract consumers' attention.

## 2. Analysis on traditional Chinese pattern culture symbol

Traditional patterns are reflections of objective things in human brains, which are orderly and rhythmic images well processed from things exist in actual natural world through processing by using certain

artistic skills. The traditional Chinese patterns are rich in contents and extensive themes. The artistic language is constituted in the form of geometric patterns, realistic patterns, combined patterns and so forth, using technique of pictographic characters, homophones, ideographs and metaphors.

The ancient painted pottery patterns and rock painting symbols carved in the cliff during the neolithic age have recorded human's initial recognition, understanding and expectation for the nature. Geometric patterns, such as S-shaped thunder patterns, dot patterns, cross patterns and diamond patterns are commonly emerged on sacrificial vessels in the Bronze Age and on the fabrics from the warring states period to the early Han Dynasty. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, in the process of combining with foreign cultures, the patterns with auspicious implications, such as Tang dynasty flower patterns and Baoxiang flowers are created. During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the auspicious patterns are constantly influenced by the Taoism, Buddhism and the folks, with themes becoming increasingly abundant and skills of expression becoming diversified. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the development of commodity economy, the traditional auspicious sign thought has changed to concept of "pattern always having its meaning, which meaning is necessarily auspicious". With changes of history, fusion with foreign cultures and development of scientific technology and material processing technology, the traditional patterns have obtained extension, turning into artistic and cultural symbols in China.

### **2.1. Traditional geometric patterns**

The geometric patterns play an important role in traditional Chinese patterns. The constitution form of geometric patterns can be generalized as separate patterns, two sides continual patterns, four sides

continual patterns and mixed patterns, featuring concise, refined modeling and owning basic characteristics of modern symbols.

The separate geometric patterns means that patterns using geometric shape in constitution, with complete meaning individually, which can act as a whole. The form of those patterns can be classified as concentric type, radiation type, convolution type, vortex line type, combined type, joining type, eclipsed type, coupling type, coil type, accumulated type, staggered type, etc. They're characterized by the fact that the silhouette is generally well-shaped and the construction is much more uniform.

As one kind of continuous pattern, the two sides continual pattern can be shown as continuous fold lines and continuous wave lines in arrangement. The four sides continual pattern is generally formed by one or more geometric shapes, extending in four sides in the form of a sudoku unit combining horizontal and vertical branching as a basic skeleton form. Also, it's a type of continuous pattern.

Mixed pattern is characterized by mixed application of geometric shapes and non-geometric shapes, that is to say several different types of decorative forms appear on the same image. It's a decoration technique with strong sense of form. For instance, Taotie pattern and twisted dragon pattern embody solemn and mysterious ritual system ideology of the Legalism, as shown in Fig.1 and Fig.2. The main feature of those patterns is tidiness, summarization, symmetry, integration, compromise, conformation, orderliness and repetition. Reasonable application of those mixed patterns in furniture design could reflect Chinese charms and cultural connotations completely.

### **2.2. Auspicious realistic pattern**

The modeling art of the traditional patterns is a materialized image of cultural ideology of praying for luck in China,



Fig.1: Taotie pattern

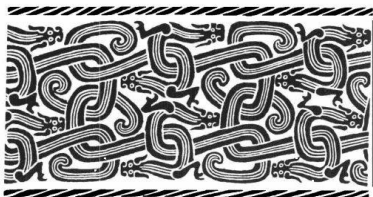


Fig.2: Twisted dragon pattern

where the homophones are used to express people's aspiration for good life. The realistic patterns usually include natural forms, such as plants, landscapes, figures, and fur and feather, which stand for luck, satisfaction, happiness, safeness, wealth, etc.

In generally, common fur and feather patterns include dragon, phoenix, red-crowned crane, bat and magpie pattern. Phoenix, as a legendary queen of birds, is an auspicious symbol, which means peace and happy life. The homophone is used to express its symbolic meaning. For example, the "fu" in "bian fu (bat)" is a homophone for "fu (happiness)", so bat is considered as a symbol for happiness, such as "Wu fu peng shou". In addition, nine lions imply "nine generations under one roof".

As far as plant patterns are concerned, the vines and allseeds are mostly adopted, such as Chinese wistaria, grape, calabash, pomegranate, etc, which symbolize things to be continuous, and imply generations of descendants. Flowers unique in four seasons are used to express safeness in four seasons. The pine, bamboo and plum blossom is metaphorized as integrity and nobleness, reflecting aesthetic ideal and taste of literati. The traditional auspicious

patterns are full of emotional elements of praying for luck, which conform to modern people's aspiration for happy and peaceful life.

### 2.3. Metaphorical combined pattern

The combined patterns, from the perspective of blessing, emolument, longevity and happiness, present the Confucianists' thought in terms of country governing, family management and self-cultivation vividly. In addition, they are often used with Bogu patterns, geometric patterns and characters to express ideal of life and spiritual consolation, which owning traditional cultural characteristics and spiritual connotations.

The pattern combining red-crowned crane, a legendary bird with long life, with pine branches is metaphorized as longevity. The pattern combining red-crowned crane and deer means "He Lu Tong Chun (prosperity)", implying longevity and high post with matched salary. The pattern combining phoenix and dragon means "prosperity brought by the dragon and the phoenix", which implies nobleness and luck. The pattern with bats, peach and twining branches and tendrils presents "continuous happiness and longevity".

The magpie is a symbol for "luck", and the chirping of magpie is considered as a metaphor for "announcing good news". There're a number of patterns have something to do with magpies. For example, the pattern of "Zhu Mei Shuang Xi" describes the scene of two magpies resting on the bamboo and the plum branch, implying happy life and sharing of happiness. The pattern of "Xi Shang Mei Shao" portrays the scene of magpies flying onto plum branches. And the pattern of "Xi Bao Zao Chun" describes the scene of magpies singing on plum branches in the early spring. Moreover, there're lots of themes like "Xi Bao Ping An", "Xi Cong Tian Jiang" and "Xi Bao San Yu-an". Multiple technologies, such as lac-

querware carving, wood cut printing, lacquer painting, printing and dyeing can be applied in furniture design, which can be mixed with modern design ideology to represent patterns with auspicious implications, thereby reflecting formal beauty in furniture products.

### **3. Configuration design of traditional Chinese pattern symbols in modern furniture**

Throughout the development history of the traditional Chinese pattern decoration, it is clear that pattern is not only a method for human to perceive into the objective nature, but also an aesthetic form of human loved. In the field of furniture design, we can extract cultural symbols from the traditional Chinese patterns based on aesthetic taste and consumption value orientation of modern people, to design modern furniture with more national meaning and cultural identification.

#### **3.1. Generalization and concretization and configuration**

The relationship between generalization and concretization in furniture acts as a key basis for establishing aesthetic conception. The alternating appearance of generalized and concretized bodies brings formal beauty including levels, rhythms, rhymes, etc, in comparison of which occurs concrete patterns or regular shapes, which form decorative effect on furniture surface, allowing previous tedious form to become vivid [4].

For configuration design method of furniture products, the concept and imagination can be transformed into visual images firstly. The abstract geometric patterns are concise and generalized, rich in rhythmic formal beauty, express supernatural modeling ability and have strong creative potential. In furniture design, the ways of expression and formal beauty that can best show the nature of

inspiration should be studied to attract consumers' aesthetic pursuit and responsive chord.

Secondly, the appearance form, spiritual connotation and material technology of furniture products are highlighted. The appearance form should fully represent visual aesthetics. The spiritual connotation of product can be reflected designer's recognition and perception into social life and natural scenes. The material technology means that technician's ability of manipulating materials. The modeling elements of furniture, such as appearance, texture, color decoration and spatial shape should be synthesized, analyzed and researched to create furniture images with new, beauty, peculiar, special and reasonable function properties [5].

#### **3.2. Reference and mutual fusion**

The design principle, culture ideology and expression technique of furniture is followed with modeling art. In the process of furniture design, modeling elements of traditional art can be employed to extract cultural symbols. The modern symbolic characteristics of auspicious traditional patterns should be strengthened [6], then can be transformed, fused and applied into furniture products.

Mutual fusion is a method that fuses and restructures different types of modeling elements. Concise artistic language is used properly to express the external and connotation of a thing, and unify the conflicts between simple and complicated, irregular and regular, movable and stationary, risk and safe. Take "Y-shaped Chair" by Hans Wagner as an example, as shown in Fig.3, the whole modeling follows the style of the Chinese Ming-style round-backed armchair, modifies the backrest part and fuses with the model of the letter "Y", boasting well-planned conception. Furthermore, the color is diversified to meet demands of different consumers. By the furniture products, the connotations of the Chinese and foreign

cultures are metaphorically expressed, enabling the furniture products and the culture to mutually fuse as an integral whole.



Fig.3: Y-shaped Chair



Fig.4: Chinese Chair

### 3.3. Restruction and inheritance

The traditional patterns have rich ideological connotations, which come from observations, reflections and experiences concerning life and aesthetic choice for things in the world. On the one hand, traditional Chinese patterns beautify the pursuit for artistic formal beauty. On the other hand, it contains abundant ideological connotations. People's desire for "luck" can be expressed in the aesthetic form by using of artistic techniques.

The modern furniture products should be innovated in their forms [7]. According to modern people's aesthetic idea, the form of furniture should be simplified, altered and re-designed, providing the basic style and features of traditional fur-

niture could be retained. For example, the Chinese Chair by Hans Wagner is a successful embodiment that applies restruction technique to modernize traditional furniture, as shown in Fig.4. In term of design, restructuring is finished after re-fined each fractional element of the Chinese round-backed armchair. For material, a flexible package decoration is applied to make the furniture more comfortable. The mysterious and reserved property of this furniture boasts much more Chinese charm and cultural artistic conception, which inherits the culture while realizing conception of making past serve present, affording the furniture products new spirit and vitality.

### 4. Conclusions

At present, highly-technology and information-oriented society has exerted great impact on modern design. However, the introduction of new concept and way of thinking has provided us with more thinking aspects in reviewing the traditional culture, meanwhile the emergence of new technology and new material has provided furniture design with diversities and possibilities.

The profound connotations of traditional patterns should be exploited. And the main features of the traditional patterns should be highlighted to extract cultural symbols. Combining modern design philosophy and represent form of cultural symbol with the characteristics of national feature and regional culture, the new image and artistic conception of furniture can be obtained by using design method of generalization and concretization and configuration, reference and mutual fusion as well as restruction and inheritance. It will provide scientific references for the design of furniture featuring regional culture and national characteristics to meet modern aesthetics idea.

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