

Aesthetic Analysis of the Evolution and Aesthetic Taste of Rose Chair

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Abstract—Throughout the history of Chinese arts and crafts, Chinese furniture is an indispensable part of it, and its emergence, development and evolution have always been closely related to people's lifestyle. Rose chair is an essence of traditional Chinese furniture, and contains rich aesthetic design principles and profound cultural connotations. As a typical representative of traditional Chinese furniture styles, rose chair is simple and natural without complicated carvings. This paper attempts to firstly know about the development and evolution course of rose chair through an exploration and research on rose chair, then to learn from its natural, exquisite and also skillful aesthetic taste and aesthetic features, and finally to experience the cultural connotation of Eastern philosophy exuded by the rose chair and appreciate China's profound artistic and philosophical views.

Keywords—*rose chair; design aesthetics; artistic characteristics; aesthetic taste*

I. INTRODUCTION

Rose chair is a typical representative of traditional Chinese furniture, and is one of the three kinds of major arm chairs. It has the beauty of "as clear as lotus, looking natural without artificial carving", with a light and spiritual shape and implicit and graceful appearance, and is often linked to traditional Chinese women. The specific source of the name "rose chair" is unknown, but it can be imagined that the chair, no matter in its name or structural characteristics, is not a reflection of authority or rationality, but convey a concept or spiritual character. Being appreciated by literati, or hidden in the women's room, rose chair has its unique rhythm. This paper will analyze the artistic characteristics of rose chair produced in different eras according to historical records and analyze its evolution process.

Rose chair belongs to one type of traditional Chinese furniture. At present, there are many sayings about the source of its name. In general, it is believed that rose chair is a name called by people in North China. But, its name can also be inferred from many sayings. Rose chair is shaped like a southern officer's cap chair, and there is also a saying that rose chair is a kind of southern officer's cap chair. Some rumors hold that the name of rose chair can be verified according to the word itself, including the saying of jade culture, and the saying that the word can be replaced with

"ghost", and other sayings. In this paper, it is believed that all the sayings are too lacking basis and specific analysis.

II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION PROCESS OF ROSE CHAIR

The shape and structure of rose chair is one of the three major types of traditional Chinese armchairs. Its formation should be a process of historical change, and its form is constantly changing with the changes of dynasties. The earliest prototype appeared in the paintings of Song Dynasty¹, and the exact stereotype was formed in Ming Dynasty. The rose chair was added with a variety of decorative effects during the development from Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty, but the general structure of the chair was not changed. Wang Shixiang first divided rose chair into as many as seven styles according to the different decorative effects on the backrest of the chair.

A. Evolution in Style of Rose Chair

The early style of rose chair can be traced back to Song Dynasty in China, and can be commonly seen in literati paintings of Song Dynasty ("Fig.1"). Rose Chair in Song Dynasty is large in size and has pedal. It is not sure whether the rose chair was called rose chair at that time. But, it can be seen that the frame structure of the rose chair in Song Dynasty is the predecessor of typical rose chair ("Fig. 2") after Ming and Qing Dynasties. Rose chair in this period were mostly taken by literati and officers. As for whether the rose chair was placed in women's room, it is still uncertain.²

The common rose chair that can be seen nowadays is a typical style of that after Ming Dynasty (as shown in "Fig.1"). After Ming Dynasty, the name and general structure of rose chair had been formed; however compared with rose chair in Song Dynasty, the rose chair after Ming Dynasty reduced many components and was going to be simplified. After Qing Dynasty, rose chair might be added with complicated decorative pattern, but its overall size and form structure became similar to those in Ming Dynasty. Rose chair was shaped in Ming Dynasty. Compared with other arm chairs (circle chairs, or cross chairs, an ancient folding chair), its

¹ (Refer to "18 Bachelor's Figure Painted Scroll Painting" drawn in Song Dynasty)

² (Refer to Wang Shixiang's "Appreciating Ming and Qing Furniture")

backrest is relatively low and is only half of the height of the common chair backrest. The backrest, armrest and seat plate of rose chair are perpendicular to each other, and are composed of a plurality of narrow and long wooden strips. The whole looks like a rectangular box and the volume is relatively low. And few large piece of wood may be used; even the seat plate may be replaced with other materials. Therefore, this chair looks very small and beautiful, and just has a little bit of decorative pattern for decoration.



Fig. 1. Rose chair made of rosewood in Ming Dynasty: collected by Mrs. Chen Mengjia.

B. Change in Materials of Rose Chair

In Song Dynasty, rose chairs were made of a wide range of materials. Some of the rose chairs were not only woven with rattan wood but also used some other materials such as bamboo. Produced in this way, the entire chair not only costs less and but also may preserve the simple and elegant features of rose chair.

In Ming Dynasty, royal nobles basically had such chair made of very valuable woods, represented by rosewood or wenge, in order to showing their identity and status. They mainly used rosewood or wenge wood. Because the furniture in Ming Dynasty mainly took use of the texture of wood, and combined with superb and mature splicing technique to realize a high degree of craftsmanship. In production, the rose chair sought for smooth lines. For example, the L-shaped intersection part often used structure of de-angled corner, or dug bowl of a pipe tenon to make it smooth and flat, and achieve the effect of simple artistic beauty³.

However, as can found from the chairs as collected in museum or some folk people, actually the rose chair in Qing Dynasty was often made of padauk, and the rose chair made of padauk was rare in Ming Dynasty. This is mainly judged by the reason that rose chairs in Qing Dynasty prefer complicated carvings and pursuing luxurious texture.

III. EVALUATION IN SIMPLIFICATION AND BEAUTIFICATION OF THE SHAPE OF ROSE CHAIR

From the perspective of the cutting of wood, rose chair has been mainly light and simple since Song Dynasty (such as the one shown in "Song · South Tang Literati Painting Collection"). Most woods used are narrow strips to minimize the use of an entire piece of wood. Therefore, the overall structure is vertical, and the chair body is close to a rectangular frame (as shown in "Fig. 2"). In this way, the use of wood is more economical; moreover, as narrow wood has no curved surface shape, (compared with the curved structure of officer's cap chair, as shown in "Fig. 3"), the loss of large piece of wood due to cutting for shape can be reduced; in material usage, the rose chair in Ming and Qing Dynasties continued the structural form of that in Song Dynasty, but the material used was gradually single.

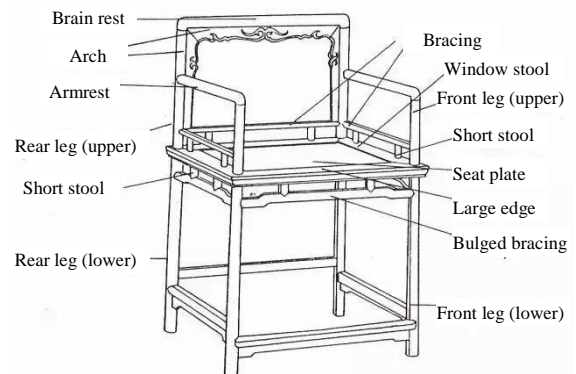


Fig. 2. Rose chair of scroll pattern made of rosewood in Ming Dynasty.

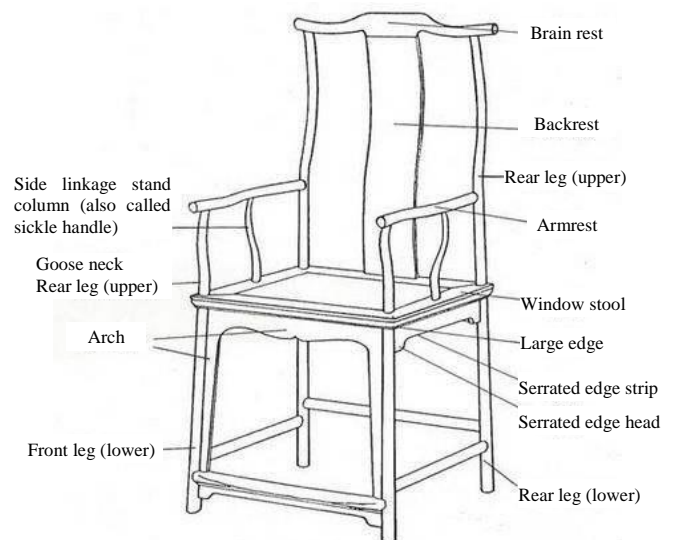


Fig. 3. Officer's cap chair with four corners protruded and made of rosewood in Ming Dynasty.

³ (Refer to "Wangdi, Zhu Jiebing. Chinese Traditional Furniture Wood Structure and Technology Analysis — Rose Chair in Song Dynasty")

Seen from the evolution of rose chair, the general structure follows the narrow and squared framework, while the other aspects are further simplified. The predecessor of rose chair shown in paintings of Song Dynasty of had pedal and the texture of pedal and seat surface were both in rattan-surface soft drawer structure. As for those shown in paintings after Ming and Qing Dynasties, few of them had pedal and the sizes of armrest, backrest and seat plate were all reduced till a general style was produced in Qing Dynasty.



Fig. 4. Part of "18 Bachelor's Figure Painting" drawn in Song Dynasty.

A. Structural Cost: Application of Rattan Drawer

The seat surface of rose chair often uses a rattan drawer surface, namely the frame shape on the seat plate ("Fig. 4"), similar to the structure of a drawer. The rattan seat plate can be used to replace the whole piece of wood surface. According to "Xiangshan Notes · Property" and Mr. Wang Shixiang's saying, rattan weaving skill is often used in Ming and Qing furniture. Stools, couches, and beds all require a rattan drawer to form the shape. The seat surface in soft rattan drawer structure can greatly reduce the use of precious wood, save cost, reduce weight, have toughness and breathability, and give people a touch feeling of not that cold in winter and not that hot in summer. While ensuring comfort, it also looks elegant. Rattan drawer is also often used in rose chair.

The typical disadvantage of rattan drawer is that the rattan part has short service life and is difficult to store, and the existing part of this cultural relics is mostly newly woven. According to ancient paintings, it is suspected that except soft rattan drawer, the seat surface may also be made of cloth mat. The seat pad shown in the painting may also be made of cloth.

Above all, the reason why the style of rattan drawer was preserved from Song Dynasty till Ming and Qing Dynasties is mainly because its advantage is in line with the aesthetic pursuits of rose chair and even Chinese tradition.

B. Structural Aesthetics: Omission of Pedal

Rose chair basically omitted pedal when it was developed up to Ming and Qing Dynasties. According to legend, there are four reasons: The first saying is that if pedal was equipped with, it would be indecent that guests may need to lift their feet. The second saying is that it is intended to restrict people's seating position to show a solemn style. The third saying is that the chair in Song Dynasty often had pedal, which is related to the comfortable and calm living attitude of Song people. At that time, pedal was either mounted on the chair or separated from the chair. In the development after Ming and Qing Dynasties, pedal became not conducive for literati to handling when going outside to meet others. In addition, as people in Ming Dynasty pursued simple artistic beauty in aspect of structural beauty, the ornamental significance of the chair was increased and the practical significance brought about by comfort was neglected, hence the gradual omission of pedal.

Over an analysis on the design concept of rose chair based on the abovementioned several reasons for the omission of pedal, it is inferred that the reason for the omission is that after the orientation of rose chair was gradually determined in Song Dynasty and even after Ming and Qing Dynasties, namely the appearance pursued to light and beautiful while the users were mainly literati, nobles and even women. Over an analysis on the aesthetic evolution of the shape of rose chair from the perspective of social consciousness, it is guessed that the name of "rose chair" was sourced after Ming and Qing Dynasties.

C. Shortcomings in the Development Process of Rose Chair

Although rose chair is small and beautiful, it is uncomfortable to seat, and this feature became more prominent in the later stage of its development.

In early Song Dynasty, rose chair not only had large size, but also had pedal and wide backrest ("Fig. 4", "Fig. 5"), so that the sitter could seat on the chair with whole body stretched. This seating posture was loved by literati and nobles and was very common in ancient paintings (such as Yang Zihua's "North Qi Proofreading Painting"). However, the typical rose chair ("Fig. 1") formed after the Ming and Qing dynasties reduced the heights of backrest and armrest by half, making it difficult to lean, and also reduced the width of seat plate so that the area for hip to disperse the gravity and the space for changing sitting posture was reduced and thus the sitter should keep waist and back straight and sit uprightly. As a result the backrest and armrest were almost of no use. In addition, the pedal was also omitted. Hence the sitter had to maintain a restrained bearing. According to (Tang Dynasty) Li Kuangyi's "Zi Xia Lu", "Recently, chair has lowered backrest; hence, this chair type is called 'folded backrest style'. The height of backrest is less than half of people's back; when leaning on it, you may feel backward and cannot find place for laying the backbone. This style is also created by the middle-level and noble people. Although they lived in private houses, they did not dare to relax their bodies; hence they often practiced in respectful bearing". It is learned that in ancient China, especially for women in rich family, their sitting requirement

was also that the hip placed on seat should not exceed 1/3 of the seat plate, the backrest and arm rest should also not be touched. This rigid requirement is sourced from the social consciousness of the era. The characteristics of rose chair are also in line with this requirement. The reason for saying that its design itself has a restraint on sitting posture should also be aimed at realizing the purpose of "being respectful". It can be inferred that the shape and culture characteristics rose chair at that time was closer to the social requirement for women. Since Ming Dynasty, the concept of this restraint etiquette generated in Tang Dynasty was adopted as the design criterion of rose chair. This kind of "disadvantage" should be intentionally formed to cater to the thought of the times in the development process of rose chair. It is assumed that the name of rose chair and the saying that rose chair is a necessary property in ancient women's room was sourced after Ming and Qing Dynasties.⁴

IV. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ROSE CHAIR IN MATERIAL USAGE: ANALYSIS FROM PERSPECTIVES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND COST OF MATERIALS AS WELL AS AESTHETIC PURSUIT

First of all, rose chair in Song Dynasty can be made of extensive kinds of materials. As shown in the painting drawn in Song Dynasty (see "Fig. 5"), this rattan rose chair may be made of bamboo. In terms of performance, the intersection part adopts rattan woven process; this process is relatively simple compared with cutting corners of mortise and tenon joint and digging the arch.

Classical furniture in Ming Dynasty, even the rose chair, is often made of rosewood. Both in color and texture, rosewood is in line with the aesthetic level of nobles in Ming Dynasty. From the perspective of material properties, rosewood has both good toughness and hardness and high durability, so that the furniture produced by this material is not easy to crack and be broken. Rosewood can be said a representative material used in furniture in Ming Dynasty. Hence the rose chair made of rosewood should be the typical example among the typical furniture. From the perspective of material cost, rosewood is expensive and thus the furniture produced by rosewood are almost used by rich and noble men; meanwhile, the furniture made of rosewood and used by nobles often also pursue excellent process and simplified and elegant artistic effect. Therefore, it can be analyzed as follows: "The hierarchical property determined by the material cost of rose chair is derived from the basic role that economy plays in the superstructure; and the aesthetic orientation of rose chair in production is also in line with the guidance of politics to aesthetics. This is the common law of development of the society".

⁴ Refer to "Yang Rui. Discussion on the Shortcomings of Ming Style Furniture Design from the 'Xingyuan Elegant Party'. Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts".



Fig. 5. Part of "18 Bachelor's Figure Painting" drawn in Song Dynasty.

If rose chair is continuously simplified from the perspective of longitudinal development, it is also affected by the overall development trend of furniture in the same times such as in Ming Dynasty from the perspective of horizontal development.

Why was padauk, which was not commonly used in Ming Dynasty, often seen on the rose chair made in Qing Dynasty? It can be said that the rose chair was also affected by the overall development trend of furniture in Qing Dynasty. In fact, padauk is not the best material for producing rose chair. Hence, there are few rose chairs made of padauk. Although padauk also belongs to superior wood, it is too hard to keep high roughness and it is so dense that it is easy to dry and crack; if it is used for making rose chair which has narrow framework strips, it may be easier to be broken and hard to be preserved. As for why so many rose chairs of Qing Dynasty can be preserved up to now, in some sense from the perspective of aesthetics, it should be said that rose chair reflects the aesthetic thought of "purple is the superior color" in the ancient Chinese traditional aesthetics. In terms of material cost, furniture of Qing Dynasty had to be made of padauk as imported from Southeast Asia to meet the large demand of the upper class, as rosewood was advocated in Ming Dynasty and thus had already been over felled. In terms of material properties, padauk also has an advantage: it is easy to make fine carvings. In Qing Dynasty, the carving of patterns on furniture pursued complication. Thereby, the selection of rosewood for making rose chair in Qing Dynasty also conformed to this trend.

The above description shows the structural aesthetics of rose chair. From complicated to simple, rose chair was gradually evolved and reached a perfect combination between structure and shape, function and aesthetics. As a kind of traditional Chinese furniture, rose chair has its unique structural beauty. It not only absorbs the connotation of elegance and rationality of Song Dynasty, but also has the exquisite, concise and elegant details of Ming and Qing furniture. It is believed that the manufacturing process and aesthetic connotation of rose chair can represent the highest development level of ancient Chinese furniture. Even seen

from modern design aesthetics, the shape, process and aesthetic design of rose chair also has very high artistic value.

V. INTERNAL AESTHETIC TASTE OF ROSE CHAIR

As one of the traditional Chinese chair types, rose chair not only has an exquisite shaping process, but also has its unique aesthetic taste and cultural connotation. In Chinese furniture, people often give it a beautiful meaning, and they can make some hints and expectations through their sitting facilities. For example, people often give cross chair a meaning of rights. Therefore, when it comes to cross chair, the first impression come into mind is to try the best to sit on the first chair, which indicates to be the No.1, or to stand on the peak of rights, and has an up-and-coming meaning. For another example, the well-known circle chair has unique model and wide shape, and is made of valuable material; the backrest and armrest is shaped like C and the middle backrest plate is shaped like S, in line with the ergonomic requirement; the curved armrest can not only get sitter's arm relaxed and rested but also restrict the sitter to maintain a dignified image; the users are either officers or famous businessmen, indicating their wealth and position which cannot be reached by ordinary people. However, as traditional furniture, rose chair precisely has more strange characteristics and differences. In ancient times, rose chair was regarded as the object used by women, and was generally accepted. Although rose chair can be seen in a large number of paintings in Song Dynasty and was also sought after by literati and nobles, as one of many chair forms, rose chair is the only one kind of chair that can reflect the characteristics of women.

A. Rose Chair Reflects the Elegant Beauty of Ancient Women

It's worth noting that this light and exquisite chair is not comfortable to sit. The armrest and backrest's positions are moved downwards, and the whole body is symmetrically perpendicular at right angles. Rose chair has fine and beautiful decoration. Compared with those chairs having obvious object orientation such as officer's cap chair, cross chair and backrest chair, it would be more convincing to link the production and existence of rose chair to women. Thereby, it is appropriate to call rose chair a lady chair.

From another point of view, the armrest and backrest and height of rose chair determine that the sitter can't get the whole body stretched, and the chair has high requirement for sitting posture. The so-called "to stand and sit properly" was a basic requirement for women in noble families and even was a little over strict: women were required to sit elegantly and behave gently and virtuously. Under this circumstance, this kind of chair can also be used as a means of guiding people. It was right because of the discomfort that the chair gave people so that it could remind the sitters who were reluctant to practice normalized sitting posture. Therefore, for many scholars, it was not unreasonable to place rose chair inside their house. As can be seen in the eighth painting "Sewing Under the Candle Light" of the Qing Dynasty paintings "Women's Life in Book Room titled by Prince Yingzhen (Yong Qin Wang Shu Tang Shen Jv Tu)" ("Fig. 6"), the

woman in the painting sits in a rose chair with small, exquisite and elegant shape made of fine material, and the armrest is not higher than the table face. The backrest is empty and cannot be leaned on. The woman sits on the 1/3 part of the chair. Under the illumination of the candlelight, the dignified and virtuous image of an ancient Chinese woman is vividly displayed; but it can be intuitively felt that this sitting posture is sufficiently elegant but cannot get body relaxed. Therefore, the female characteristics reflected in the form of rose chair is not so much a female characteristics granted by the nature as a requirement or shackle that male adds on female in the patriarchal society. Therefore, it is believed that the social rules hidden behind the inflexible image of those chair are precisely the fundamental source of inspiration for the design aesthetics of rose chair. From another point of view, compared with circle chair more in line with the ergonomic requirement, rose chair undoubtedly abandons the pragmatism of the product and pursues the formal aesthetics to a greater extent. This is a manifestation of the old feudal ideology's coercion on female's characteristics. The initial generation of rose chair is not so much a reflection of female's natural beauty as for catering to male's regulation on female.



Fig. 6. "Sewing Under the Candle Light" drawn in Qing Dynasty.

B. Internal Beauty of Rose Chair Is Reflected Among Literati

Among traditional chairs, rose chair is like an elegant woman in room quiet and down to earth. It is quiet and low-key. It is not like such cross chair, circle chair and officer's

cap chair that symbolize right and position, and is also not popular in the circles of noble and rich people and celebrity knights due to its simple shape and cheap material. But it has a very elegant name "rose". Hence, it is very advocated by ancient literati. In many famous paintings of Song Dynasty, there were many pictures showing the scenes that literati and poets sit in rose chair and talk with each other. For example, in (Song Dynasty) Liu Songnian's work "18 Bachelor's Figure Painting" ("Fig. 7"), it can be clearly seen that several literati properly sit in front of a table while the attendant is preparing qin (a seven-stringed plucked instrument in some ways similar to the zither). It is well known that the leisure life pursued by ancient literati and philosophers is to play lyre and chess, produce painting and calligraphy, and recite poems with like-minded friends. Due to special reasons in the political economy, Chinese literati were in a very awkward situation, so they may not mention things about working for the ruler but about leisure and entertainment. They only sought for a leisure and relaxed life such as playing lyre or qin in private place. The rose chair appeared in this painting demonstrates literati and officers' love for this concise, elegant and mild rose chair. It can also be said that the basic shape foundation of rose chair is laid by the literati and officers. Their love and admiration for rose chair has great significance for the development and evolution of rose chair. The simplicity and elegance pursued by them are exactly the pursuit of rose chair.



Fig. 7. Part of "18 Bachelor's Figure Painting" drawn in Song Dynasty.

It can be said that rose chair vividly reveals the otherworldly quality and elegant aesthetic taste of literati and officers; in the other way round, it can also be said that it was precisely their love and mass use that grants the rose chair the pure and elegant cultural character and traditional Chinese cultural connotation.

VI. CONCLUSION

With unique charm, minimalist elegance, and pure beauty of "as clear as lotus, looking natural without artificial carving", rose chair has taken an important position in Chinese furniture. Due to its exquisite material selection, natural production technique, concise shape, precise structure, appropriate proportion and precise mortising, rose chair can better represent the superb craftsmanship and unique aesthetics of traditional Chinese furniture. It is worthy of making in-depth research on and learning from it. Meanwhile, it is not only needed to learn from this treasure, but more needed to think about how to make innovative design on this traditional furniture, and how to preserve its shape features, aesthetic principle and cultural connotation and make innovation again while preserving its natural and non-artificial feature, its exquisite craftsmanship, aesthetic taste and aesthetic features in combination with modern trend.

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