



# Measures for Excessive Application of Gift Packaging Design Materials

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**Abstract.** The traditional folk customs of gift and exchange have been continued since ancient times. Due to the wealth of living standards and products, the consumption of presents has steadily become a “luxury,” and the excessive use of materials in gift packaging design has become the primary source of trash in our living environment. Analyzing the misuse of materials in gift packaging design is a concrete manifestation of the value of goods, and one of the efficient techniques for implementing green packaging design is to identify ways to use gift packaging design materials in folk eco-packaging.

**Keywords:** gift packaging · packaging materials · excessiveness · application measures

## 1 Introduction

In ancient China, the occurrence of commerce and the existence of commodities packaging functioned mainly to facilitate commercial exchange. Relevant historical documents record that during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, the circulation of commodities in large and medium-sized cities in various countries was busy, and merchants advertised their goods through signboards and fronts on the one hand in order to solicit customers. On the other hand, the packaging of goods was a key factor in promoting sales. According to Han Fei - Zuoshang of Waichu Volume Talking, “In the state of Song, there was a man who sold wine, and every time he sold wine, he measured it fairly, was attentive and considerate to his customers, and made wine so fragrant and mellow that the wine flag outside the shop waved high in the wind” [1]. The idea is that the seller of wine was fair in his measurements and good in his service, and that he paid attention to the advertising role of the signboard. According to Han Fei - Zuoshang of Waichu Volume Talking, “There was a jeweler from the state of Chu who went to the state of Zheng to sell jewelry. He made a box (for the jewelry) of magnolia and decorated it with beautiful jade and feathers. A man from the State of Zheng bought the box, but returned the jewelry inside. It’s fair to say that this person is good at selling boxes, but not so good at selling beads” [2]. This story is a metaphor about lack of vision and poor choice. But it is not a bad idea to put the pearls in a very richly decorated box. Because the pearls are worth more than the box, it is more appropriate than putting two bottles of wine or half a catty of tea in a luxurious box. This mainly refers to the selection

of materials, shape and structure of the packaging to match the value of the product. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to whether the packaging material will cause pollution to the environment and whether it can be recycled. Since ancient times, the Dragon Boat Festival has been a very popular folk festival. According to legend, in order to commemorate Qu Yuan on the Dragon Boat Festival, a triangular-shaped Zongzi was created, which was wrapped in glutinous rice and tied with coloured threads, resulting in a fragrant and delicious steamed Zongzi. In a scene from *The Water Margin* where Lu Zhishen fights Zhen Guanxi, the butcher Zhen Guanxi is depicted using lotus leaves to wrap the cut meat filling. It can be seen that the use of lotus leaves to wrap meat has a long history, and to this day, in Yunnan, the use of lotus leaves to wrap meat, fish and bean products is still the main way of wrapping meat for sale in the vegetable market. There is a proverb in China that says “I don’t know what medicine is being sold in the gourd”. It can be seen that the use of gourds for medicine and wine was already common in ancient times. Gourds are protective and resistant to rot and moisture [3]. This seems to indicate that the ancients had already considered the environmental hazards of packaging. We think that appropriate packaging should be shown in the two aspects. Firstly, it is the selection of package materials and the decoration design should meet the value of products; secondly, it is the learning of folk ecological package form. The two aspects are the necessary references to avoid the excessive packaging design of gifts.

## **2 The Packaging Design Materials Should Be in Line with the Value of Commodities**

Recorded as early as the Spring and Autumn Period, “Rites of Passage - Qu Li (Shang)”: Giving people favors but not receive in return, is not etiquette; others give favors to their own, but did not repay, also not etiquette” [4]. Over thousands of years of history, the teaching of etiquette has invariably been internalized in the way people interact with each other. As a Chinese saying goes, “Clothes make the man, and gold makes the Buddha.” Likewise, packaging makes the gift. The packaging of gifts, in which people’s simple feelings and good wishes are enclosed, has gradually become the material medium of etiquette and culture. The meaning of gift packaging here is different from that of ordinary commodity packaging, which tends to focus on the formality of the packaging structure. Gift packaging not only has the practical function of protecting goods, but also needs to show the cultural value of goods to a certain extent, plus all kinds of festivals have always been a good time to visit friends and relatives, or gifts, giving rise to a variety of gift packaging design. However, there are also some packaging structures in gift packaging that are staggeringly luxurious, such as overly extravagantly decorated mooncake packaging and tea packaging, overly elaborate ginseng and deer antler packaging, overly decorated containers of white wine packaging and so on. In order to reflect the cultural value of the goods, to attract the attention of buyers and the implementation of excessive materials, containers, as well as packaging structure and auxiliary decoration, packaging is obviously several times greater than the value of the product. These excessive packaging phenomena, which are greater than the content of the product, abound and have become one of the forms of packaging used by the public to give gifts.

Excessive packaging design materials make consumers pay for flashy packaging, such as some health care products, which are often packaged in paper or wooden boxes with a layer of satin inside, with a few small boxes of iron or plastic inside, while the actual product is only one half of the box or even less. Not only that, but also such kind of packaging with no practical use will be discarded into the garbage. What's more serious is that it will cause a huge waste of resources and bring pollution to the environment, which runs counter to the main objective of building a conservation-oriented society. This also reflects the failure of designers to consider the following principles: using a minimum of materials to achieve packaging functions; reducing material types; thinking about the source of materials; using of recyclable materials; reducing package weight while ensuring safety [5]. Global environmental protection and the reduction of resource waste are also principles that need to be taken into account in the design of gift packaging, to reduce the consumption of packaging materials and, in particular, to strictly curb the phenomenon of over-packaging and promote moderate green packaging design.

China has introduced many measures and laws in recent years to tackle the phenomenon of over-packaging, for example, to avoid excessive packaging, the new national standard emphasizes and regulates that the number of layers of packaging design for food and cosmetics sold is within 3, whose interspace ratio is less than 60%. The excessively large sales packaging size would waste the materials and take up the transportation space and the space in the shopping mall to increase the cost. At the same time, it is also regulated that the sum of all packaging costs out of the original packaging should not exceed 20% of the sale price of the product. It should avoid using too many high-end materials, and it is advocated to use green, environment-friendly, renewable and recyclable materials [6]. But over-packaged products still dominate the market because these policies do not have clear restrictions on the material and structure of the packaging, as well as practical regulations on rewards and penalties, which inadvertently give some unscrupulous businesses the opportunity to take advantage of. We need to analyse the various aspects of excessive packaging, from the producer of the product, the designer of the packaging to the final consumer, so that the phenomenon of excessive packaging is disillusioned and consumers are guided to establish the correct concept of consumption, the concept of green packaging and a sense of social responsibility (Fig. 1).

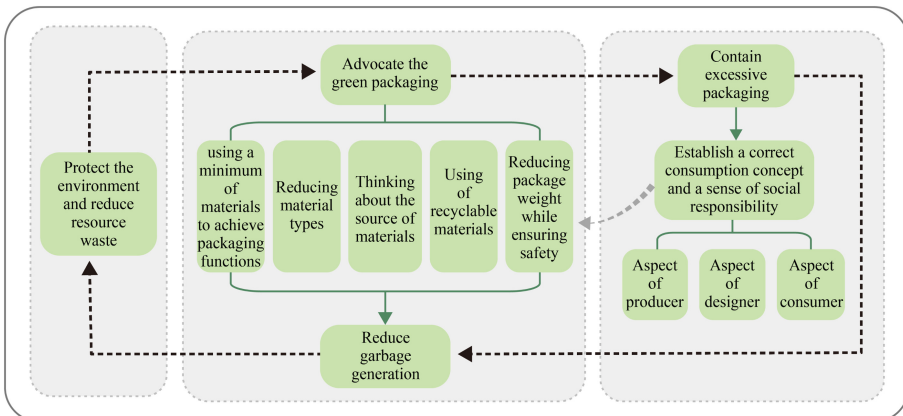


Fig. 1. Implementation workflow of green packaging design [Drawing by the author]

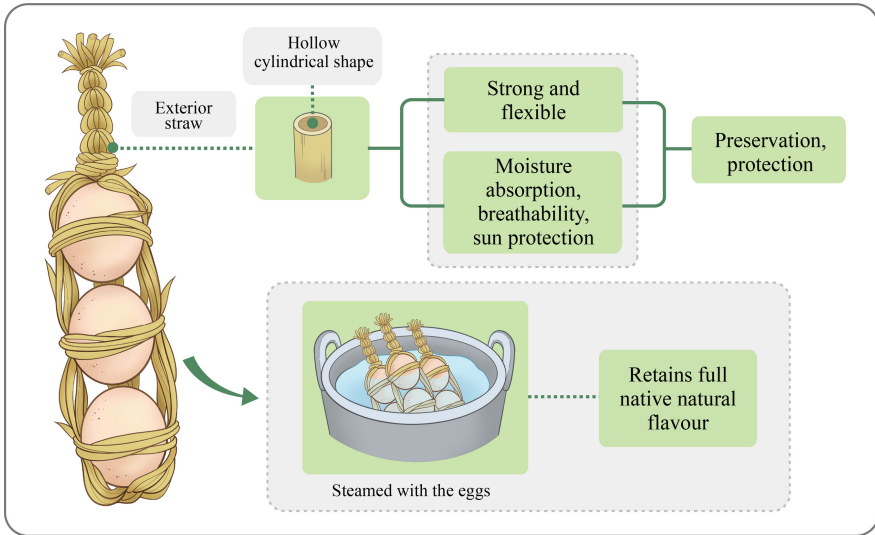


Fig. 2. Egg packaging with wheat on straw in Yunnan [Drawing by the author]

### 3 To Find Ways to Adapt Gift Packaging Design Materials in Folk Eco-Packaging

Instead of the object itself, it is the relationship with the object and the meaning and emotion it represents that we are attached to [7]. The traditional culture of etiquette should not be misunderstood, and gifts, as a material bridge between people and their emotions, should be thoughtful and practical. The concept of “Du” first appeared in ancient legalism in China, which means everything had its own measure and standard. Human beings live in symbiosis with all things and have always had an inseparable and pure relationship with nature. A modest packaging product should be in line with the value of the product itself, protect and beautify the product, take into account the structure, material and visual information of the packaging material, to seek the harmonise unity of consumer needs and nature conservation.

There are still folklore packaging full of wisdom and ingenuity, full of human feelings, in which the use of packaging materials is a good way for us to learn from [8]. In Yunnan, for example, eggs are still sold on straw in folk markets (Fig. 2). The straw is hollow and cylindrical, strong and flexible, and the dried straw is hygroscopic, breathable and sun-proof, keeping the eggs fresh, and can be steamed together with the eggs. Paper packaging, which is still used in folklore, has always been a form of folklore gift packaging, not only because it does not pollute the environment, but also because it is recycled and lightweight [9].

Traditionally, gift wrapping materials in China are usually made of paper boxes or straw paper, with a red square of paper with a design on top, and then tied with straw thread. In Henan, the traditional paper box packaging for roast chicken and the paper packaging for traditional pastries in the Jiangnan region are good examples of reduced packaging materials. Not only is the packaging material simple to use, the packaging

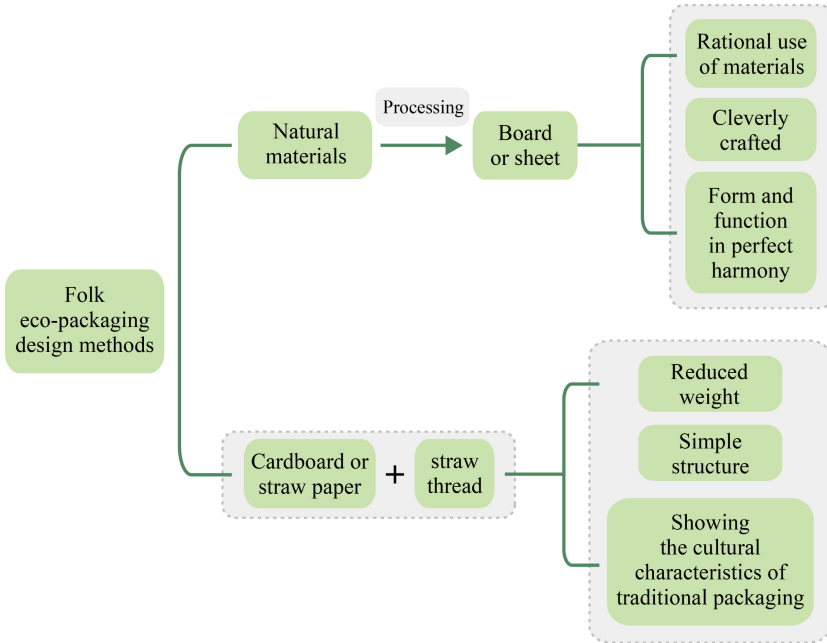


Fig. 3. Folk eco-packaging design methods [Drawing by the author]

structure is simple and has a traditional wrapping form, which also shows the cultural characteristics of the gift, reflecting the scale of the product and the packaging “Du”.

When seeking the raw ecological materials of the packaging, the recycling of folk ecological packaging embodies the scale of product and packaging “Du” of product and packaging. For example, the ancient people reasonably and scientifically applied the features of natural materials to packaging design, such as animal skins, plant leaves and fibrous shells of natural packaging. These materials were simply processed to be board or sheet for packaging items. Another example is the natural materials, such as gourd, were directly used as packaging for containing and storing liquor. There would be good tightness with the recyclable use. But in ancient times, natural wrappings were not used as gift wrappings because they were used by the people and were less favoured by the upper nobility after they entered class society. However, there are still some forms of wrapping made of natural materials, and the rationality of the materials used and the ingenuity of their production fully reflect the perfect unity of form and function in packaging design, which still serves as an inspiration and reference for our gift packaging design today [10] (Fig. 3).

#### 4 Conclusion

As a physical presence of rituals, gift packaging in China should play a role in bringing out the festive atmosphere and promoting festive culture. The excessive use of some gift

packaging design materials, however, is indeed a waste of resources and environmental pollution, which seriously distorts the social consumption culture. The treatment of excessive use of materials in packaging not only requires the joint efforts of the government, enterprises and designers, but also requires packaging designers to adhere to the principle of moderation and pragmatism from the source and raise environmental awareness. In today's new era of emotional consumption and increased global trade and consumption, the role of packaging has evolved in both depth and breadth. In the midst of this development, environmental damage from inappropriate practices abounds, continued globalised mass production has made advances in transport and logistics inevitable, and developments in consumption are changing the way trade is conducted today [11]. For example, e-commerce makes online shopping very common, but it also leads to higher flexibility and sensitivity of commodity packaging design. Packaging waste and mountains of waste can be seen everywhere, coupled with the excessive use of packaging materials in the products we face all day. These makes increasing use of packaging materials become a major cause of environmental degradation, which requires designers to raise awareness of environmental protection, minimise the use of packaging materials and increase the recycling of packaging materials. This requires us to raise awareness of environmental protection, minimise the use of packaging materials and increase the recycling of packaging materials, so that packaging can enter a green world.

**Fund Project.** Project Name: General Project “Research on the Design of Cultural and Creative Products of Jingchu Han Embroidery under the Background of Cultural and Tourism Integration” (Project No. HBCY2207).

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