

Return and Transcendency of the Tradition

Application and Exploratory of Chinese Traditional Culture of Creation in Contemporary Product Design

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Abstract—Since the prevalence of the Modernism design thought, democratization of design quickly evolved into similarity, inter-cultural heterogeneity start to be very precious. Although, with the continued deepening of people's design-consciousness, awakening of nationalization design happened in some local designers. But from the overall look of the Chinese product design, there is still not a unique design impression in the Global context. Therefore, take the forerunner as a benchmark, continue to learn good tradition, so that it can cross cultural boundaries and communicate with other civilizations' design concept. The Chinese product design exhibits unique cultural identity in the background of globalization, and finally achieves the inheritance and innovation of product design and traditional culture of creation.

Keywords—*tradition; product creation; culture; product design; innovation*

I. INTRODUCTION

It has been proposed the opinion of "Culture will move towards the world", the biggest fallacy is to build the culture thinking on the appearance of material civilization. Although the spread of technology, such as automobiles, electrical appliances, communication equipments make the pace of life from all countries seems develop toward the standardization direction and with the intensification of modern social culture integration, the cultural homogeneity phenomenon will follow. As designers, we have the responsibility to learn more about our traditional culture, during multicultural era, use their own national spirit and cultural resources as a form of expression of design is the best way to distinguish it from other cultural languages. Cultural diversity represents the rich humanity Sense and Sensibility, the difference is the inevitable condition for culture enhancement, if we want to make it grow healthy and strong and even bloom and fructify, the deep sedimentary layer of nation and culture will be the best stand point.

II. THE CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL MAKER CULTURAL ELEMENT

In China, during people's long-term exploration, a huge structure of traditional maker culture which consisted of various traditional arts and crafts has formed some traditional maker culture element symbols with specific cultural experiences, such as the Chinese traditional material symbol, Chinese traditional style symbol, Chinese traditional decorative pattern, color symbol and even Chinese philosophy

consciousness symbol, people reach mutual understanding and communication in these symbol systems. Symbol is generally regarded as a sign of something which form constructed by graph and through the interaction of visual symbols convey and acceptance to build information and generate meaning. As dignified bronze, rounded pottery, gorgeous Han Jin, elegant Song porcelain, succinct Ming-style furniture in China's traditional culture, the fine creation process in each time, the clever production, the exquisite shape, all reflect the local values at that time.

III. THE CONCEPT OF CONTEMPORARY PRODUCT

Contemporary refers to the current era we live in, the products that be used and loved by an era's people mostly embodied the value of that era, and this value reflects the local economic base, social consciousness, culture and art. It is the inevitable continuation of the tradition.

Product design is closely related with production mode. From the angle of view of production, product design can be divided into handicrafts and industrial design two types. The scope of product design is pretty big. Here we discuss the contemporary product design embodied handicrafts and industrial products with the contemporary value which are within the scope.

IV. THE INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL OF CREATION ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PRODUCT DESIGN

Since modernistic design thought appeared, our product designers tend to closely follow the western trend for a long time. With the improvement of people's living standards and product design needs deepening, finally appeared the nationalization design consciousness awakening in a number of local designers, such as Hou Zhengguang, Chen Darui, Jia Wei, Liu Chuankai, Liu Feng, Xu Ming, Wen Ji and so on, they use their own cultural resources, the form and language of national spirit as design expression, made some efforts in exploring their product designs.

A. Application of Traditional Material Symbol in Contemporary Product Design

The ancient book of "Kao Gong Ji" in Pre-Qin period said: "sky has time, earth has gas, material has beauty, and handwork has skill. Together all these four can be regarded as

good." This shows that in ancient China's creation activity, it focus on the fine tradition of material selection. In the long life, our ancestors had summed up some selection experiences, they appropriately select material in order to play its unique nature and serve for a given creation activities. China's traditional products generally use common natural materials such as stone, wood, bamboo materials, mud, etc., artificial material which is used sparingly mostly are gold, silver, copper, iron, tin. These materials selected by our ancestors will not damage the environment after they were abandoned, metal materials even could be refining recycled, they are easy recovery and recycling materials, and from the viewpoint of the economy is also very economical and practical.

Design challenges of contemporary product designers are closely related with other social crisis such as environmental damage, greatly increase of the human existence uncertainty and so on, so that environmentally oriented design which harmony with nature has become the people's desire and pursuit. Designers face the endless environmental disaster; they start to carefully examine the traditional crafts, use its advantages in design to response the era problem, and also to explore product material possibilities and uniqueness more delicately.

1) *The application of single natural material in contemporary product:* Apply the natural materials which often used in traditional arts and crafts in contemporary product design, it has been developed by a number of product design brands. Such as the home design brand "Duoshao" created by Hou Zhengguang, many products of this brand are made from natural wood, inherited our tradition of use natural materials in furniture design; Shi Dayu from Beijing Qingting design center continued use bamboo as its main creation material, highlight the high ecological benefit and expansibility advantages of bamboo material, combine the elements of traditional crafts together with contemporary design concept. For example his works "chair gentleman", which won the Germany Red Dot Award, is to illustrate its shape and personality through the characteristics of bamboo itself, showing the unique appeal of bamboo. "Chair gentleman" use simple geometric outlines to form the chair structure, seat part is tied with bamboo circle radius frames abreast, viewed from the front is like a bamboo ring tunnel, the extension of circle radius frames constitute the back structure of the chair, the set of the chair is like the Chinese character of "Kou", the back of chair is like the Chinese character of "Yin", the overall side outline is like the Chinese character of "Jun". There is gap between each frames and the bamboo curve is elegant, when you sit on it you can have the floating sense, it reasonably shows unique characteristics and beauty of bamboo and also the chair is not lack of comfort "Fig. 1"; Another example is a series of copper products designed by the independent designer brand "YANNING", such as "Xi" lamp and "Se" chair, they are all-copper texture with careful hand-polishing process which gives the product a quality sense and elegant bearing, simple and calm.



Fig. 1. "Chair gentleman" from Shi Dayu

2) *Creative combination of traditional materials:* In traditional handicraft era, the development of ancient politics, economy, technology and culture, also affect the shape, feature, style, function, and other relevant factors of traditional objects which make traditional products with a certain format and style. In China's traditional creation activity, the use of materials is also included in the conventional standard and style, but China is a multicultural intertwined era now, in order to respond with more diverse demands, many designers begin to try to regrouping tradition materials and they form a new language in product design. As "Lu" stool designed by PINWU brand which created by Zhang Lei, it mainly combines ceramics and beech together, ceramics' high hardness and easy to clean two characteristics make this material very suitable to be the furniture surface, and beech's relatively flexible texture has obvious contrast with ceramic's pure and noble, a combination of hard and soft make people have psychological resonance "Fig. 2"; Another example is the JI CH01 series chairs designed by Design MVW which created by Xu Ming and Wen Ji, the chairs mainly use creative combination of creation of solid wood and silk materials; Yichuan Jewellery created by Huang Yichuan combined the broken porcelain pieces with silver material to make the porcelain piece have a new form and a new life, which will express their own implied historical and cultural value through new design language. "Fig. 3"



Fig. 2. "Lu" stool designed by PINWU



Fig. 3. Product of Yichuan Jewellery

3) *The combination application of old and new material:* With improvement of technology, in addition to natural materials, there has seen some new artificial materials such as plastic, steel, toughened glass and so on. Their appearances enrich designer's creative language. The idea of Rongli Series designed from DOMO Nature home furniture brand is combination of solid wood and metal furniture, use the modern metal sculpture language which has a strong sense of form to be the structural support of the furniture, filled with quaint modern temperament. "Fig. 4" In the hard wood handmade crafts process, the design applies the Ming-style furniture tenon structure process, solid and stable. Metal uses welding technology to reflect the special material and processes features. The whole set of furniture is not only functional and practical, structured and durable, but also shows the noble quality of the artistic temperament; Another example is the Ming style bamboo coffee table designed by famous space and interior designer Song Tao, it uses combination of metal bamboo joint and old elm material which has both bright and smooth feeling and also natural and innocent simplicity. Combination of traditional materials with modern materials is a big sense of modernity and impact force. The creation idea of the couch series "Jian" designed by independent designer Xiao Tianyu "Fig. 5" replace the wooden backrest with transparent acrylic material, transparent material give users a sense of utterly simple and plain. The unique shape of acrylic backrest with black sofa seat not only provides a solid, heavy and unique impression and sense of being, but also it increases the comfort of the user in various ways of use.



Fig. 4. Old Elm table designed by DOMO NATURE



Fig. 5. Creative design of "Jian" series (couch) designed by Xiao Tianyu

4) *The application of traditional style symbol in contemporary product design:* During the long process of transformation and use of nature by primitive ancestors, people according to the demands life and production, slightly reform the natural objects; or modeling based on natural image, such as plants, animals and so on; or continually improve and re-create the original shape of objects, gradually create some certain modeling styles of our traditional artifacts. During the creation process the contemporary product designers begin to pay attention to the good traditional modeling styles. Simple "Ming" series chair "Fig. 6" designed by Carl Liu which created by Liu Chuankai, its creation idea is to re-design based on the round-backed armchair which is the most classic representative work of Chinese Ming Dynasty furniture, designers try to remain the line features, but to make the entire style more efficiency and bright. The pitches formed by the armrest and backrest, the radian of the chair, the height of the seat, the combination of these three numbers create a well proportioned modern chair. The end of the arc armrest, the line has been raised so it will be easier to pull oneself up by pushing the armrest, it meets the requirements of ergonomics. The raised up line at the end of the backrest can hang up bags and backpacks. Multi-player Zen chair, the representative work of Fnji Furniture design which created by Gu Qigao, the chair uses all tenon structure with soft and simple lines, roof design at edge is delicate, it is the modern version of traditional arhat bed "Fig. 7". The series of Shuang Quan Ti Liang pots designed by Shi Dayu who is the "creative godfather of Taiwan's design community", it is the typical example of re-creation design based on traditional square and round pot shapes, its main shape is still the traditional square and round, but to be different with traditional single spout, it has two spouts at both left and right sides in order to be user-friendly according to different personal handedness habits, it can pour from both spouts. The most important is the two spouts design happens to be the arm for the pot hanging in the rack. "Fig. 8"



Fig. 6. Jian"Ming" series chair from Carl Liu



Fig. 7. Multi-layer zen chair from Fnji creation design



Fig. 8. Shuang Quan Ti Laing pot series design from Shi Dayu

B. The Application of Traditional Decorative Patterns and Color Symbols in Contemporary Product Design

China has a long history of traditional creation, decorative patterns of are colorful, color symbols used on artifacts are also have some conventional styles. During contemporary product design, the designers also begin to pay attention and study these symbolic elements of traditional artifact and understand them from a deeper level and try to promote them with their efforts in innovation. As the “Se” chair “Fig. 9” designed by an independent designer YAANG brand which created by Wang Yang, its hollow backrest uses Chinese traditional line drawing peony pattern, grace and luxury; Chair legs are sketched by the neo-classical lines which also has sense of modernity, simple and stylish; a perfect combination of traditional and modern , reveal the contemporary Eastern spirit under the low profile luxury appearance; the JI CH01 series chairs designed by Design MVW which created by Xu Ming and Wen Ji, it reaches the goal of function coexistence with aesthetics, the chair with bright color, elegant proportion and wearing traditional Chinese Chi-pao like a graceful classical beauty appeared “Fig. 10”; Also like the gray and red painting table designed by DOMO NATURE design brand which created by Yu Hongquan and Lai Yanan, they apply the traditional color elements into the modem furniture design so that the entire product makes an impressive impact. “Fig. 11”



Fig. 9. “Se” chair from YAANG brand



Fig. 10. JI CH01 Chi-pao chair from Design MVW

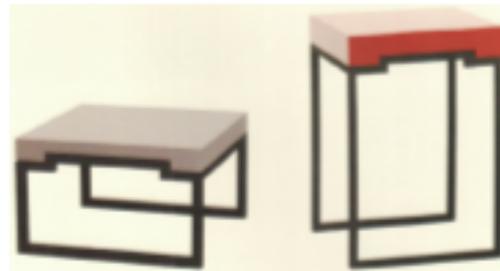


Fig. 11. Grey, red painting table from DOMO NATURE

V. MEANING PURSUIT BEYOND THE FORM

Through the above analysis, we have already seen these visionary contemporary designers incorporate a large number of Chinese Traditional Culture wisdom in their product design, after careful consideration, digestion, absorption and gradually form a doable strategy. We can also see from the above creative designer products, their designs are not simply assemble the traditional elements, no matter from the view of material selection, styling, classical patterns, color and other elements , they are not simply copy the tradition, but they focus more on the traditional culture connotation, observe the traditional culture and combined them with modern design and values organically ,in order to create a new design language, thus creating original works with extraordinary culture meanings. In continuation of the tradition, the idea is the most important, inject the real connotation into the innovation

strategy is the key to solve needs of today's market, and also is the interpretation of traditional culture language in modern design activities which beyond the trends of popularity .

VI. CONCLUSION

In short, design should no longer regard culture as the decoration to raise their social status, they can not be satisfied with only copy the traditional cultural symbols, but they can stand on a higher place to understand the former cultural creations, really feel the understanding of the creators to the world and themselves at that time from the cultural phenomena. In the context of globalization, we should fusion and create the national traditions, bring the essence of traditional arts into the modern design concept, add age elements into traditional culture, try to find a reasonable meeting point between traditional design vocabulary and modern design, we should see hope from pioneers' efforts, and constantly strive forward.

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