

# The Development Direction of The New Chinese-style Mahogany Furniture Design-Based on Market Trend Concerning the Generation of 1980s/1990s

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**Key words:** introduction of Nordic design conception, symbolization of traditional language, usage of fragmentary mahogany, combination of mahogany and other furniture materials

**Abstract:** With much more attention paid to the traditional Chinese culture, mahogany furniture is getting increasingly popular around the world. How can mahogany furniture be in line with the aesthetics taste of the generation of 1980s/1990s and be more folksy to people? This paper will explore the design orientation of the new Chinese-style mahogany furniture based on four aspects including the introduction of Nordic design conception, the symbolization of traditional language, the usage of fragmentary mahogany, and the combination of mahogany and other furniture materials.

## Introduction

With the sustained development of China's economy and the continuous enhancing of its international status, many youngsters of 1980s or 1990s have changed from the blind advocating of the Western concept in the past to the enthusiastic attention of the Chinese traditional culture. In the light of the room decoration and the choice of furniture, increasing number of people dream of adding the Chinese elements in order to embody the Chinese style. As the representative one of Chinese-style furniture in Ming and Qing dynasties, mahogany furniture is getting increasingly popular among youngsters<sup>[1]</sup>. However, due to the lack of humanity care, the repression of the form, and the high price, it is hard for those youngsters to accept and buy mahogany furniture who love the traditional Chinese-style furniture. But we still should realize that, concerning the development trend of room decoration and furniture choice, youngsters of 1980s/1990s are becoming the main force to buy furniture and even mahogany furniture.

Therefore, we need to apply the new Chinese-style design conception to reform the traditional style of mahogany furniture, making it more fashionable and more intimate for youngsters to accept and buy so that mahogany furniture can be chosen in room decoration and furniture choice in normal family.

## The design of the new Chinese-style furniture

The design of new Chinese-style furniture is a kind of conceptual design. Under the guidance and influence of the Chinese traditional aesthetic norms, it uses the modern technology and technique to make furniture present the beauty of the traditional Chinese culture.

As is shown, although the traditional Chinese-style mahogany furniture contains many elements of Chinese culture, its techniques are complicated, form depressed, and price high.

Mahogany furniture, which has adopted the new Chinese-style design concept, on the one hand has abandoned the complex form of traditional Chinese-style furniture, and on the other hand has inherited the beauty of culture contained in the traditional Chinese-style furniture.

The Chinese traditional culture is a kind of ethnic culture formed through the evolution of thousand-year Chinese civilization, reflecting the ethnic characteristics and customs, among which Confucianism and Taoism, showing the unique cultural beauty of the Chinese nation, preserve the most important influence.

Influenced by Taoism, the Chinese people love and respect nature. Used in furniture design, this concept Naturalness is manifested by the natural way of timber materials, form, and structure. The naturalness about timber material means that the main material used in furniture are natural but not artificial timber. The naturalness about form and structure means that the style of furniture is in line with the nature and the environment. Meanwhile, the Naturalness in Taoism also includes "naturalness about people", that is, furniture can improve the comfort and convenience when people use them through the humanity design[2].

In Chinese Confucian culture, the doctrine of golden mean is the highest conduct code and moral value, meaning just right and impartial. The aesthetic concept, "beauty of harmony", is the reflection of Confucius's philosophy on aesthetics which preserves the greatest and the most far-reaching influence on Chinese later generations. Under the influence of this aesthetics concept, the furniture design requires to well handle every relation between every element, among which each element should be presented no more or no less. Hence the beauty of harmony and balance can be seen in Chinese-style furniture[3].

The Chinese-style mahogany furniture once was the symbol of identity and wealth[4]. However, many mahogany furniture enterprises lack design innovation capacity and blindly follow others and even imitate others<sup>[5]</sup>, which has set mahogany furniture in a vicious circle where normal family can not afford and well-off family have no interest. That has made the sale of mahogany furniture into a consuming downturn.

### **The innovation way of the new Chinese-style mahogany furniture**

If we want to see development of mahogany furniture and make it globally, those furniture designers not only need to inherit the good points of the domestic culture but also need to absorb the outstanding design conception. While the Nordic design is one of the representatives in the field of furniture design[6], its design concept can be learned and absorbed by new Chinese-style furniture design.

The features of the Nordic design conception can be summarized as the naturalness in design, sketchiness in structure, and concern on functionality[7]. Although the Nordic furniture respect the natural sense of timber and functionality, but it also pays attention on the sense of fashion and design, which has contributed to the fast development and unbelievable prevailing in 20century.

As is shown, the Nordic-style furniture prefers to use the natural materials such as timber, vine, and leather[8]. Even if some artificial materials sometimes would be added into furniture, those two materials would also be combined organically so as to reflect the natural feature.

The sketchiness in Nordic design is shown in the limitation to form and decoration. The appearance of Nordic-style furniture has less unnecessary carving patterns or decorative pattern on woodwork, which has formed the sharp contrast compared with the Chinese traditional wood furniture.

The essential purpose of furniture in Nordic-style design is to solve problems in people's daily life. Thus the Nordic-style furniture emphasizes people-oriented care and introduces the idea of

ergonomics so the Nordic-style designed furniture has strong functionality and own comfortable structure.

The Nordic-style design concept and Chinese-style design concept both advocate naturalness and harmony so they share similarities and some concepts of them can be integrated. For youngsters of 1980s/1990s, fashion and cost performance are the important aspects when they choose and buy furniture. Thus bring the Nordic designing concept attaching importance on the feature of sketchiness, functionality, and fashion in order to manufacture mahogany furniture with features of sketchiness, functionality, and beauty will be favourable to attract young people of 1980s/1990s to buy.

The design of traditional mahogany furniture emphasize the feature of being perfect and great, and containing strong sense of Chinese traditional culture but it has serious limitation due to the stress on materials. Some low-quality mahogany timber can not be used to make furniture through the traditional designing technology and technique. Mahogany furniture manufactured through the modern technology such as mahogany furniture with the integration of Nordic designing concept lays stress on functionality which has lowered the requires concerning materials but the disadvantage of those mahogany furniture does not have enough Chinese-style sense. Therefore, we need to add some pattern element with strong Chinese characteristics.

Designing patterns is the important carrier for the ethnic history and civilization, having significant symbolization. In design, the patterns with symbolic meaning will become a kind of intuitionistic ethnic pattern element[9]. If we add this kind of pattern into the new mahogany furniture, that will significantly improve the Chinese nuances. However, the traditional furniture have complex patterns and at the same time, with the development of society, people's need and aesthetics are changing greatly. So we should sort out, summarize, and reform those patterns so as to symbolism them in order to be in line with social development and make some mahogany furniture which accords with the era trend and has Chinese characteristics.

From the aspect of content, the traditional Chinese patterns can be classified into following categories: animals patterns, well-meaning animals patterns, plant patterns, utensils patterns, geometry patterns, person patterns, well-meaning script patterns, and well-meaning combined patterns combined with several patterns[10]. Nowadays what pattern people like must be the sketchy cloud patterns, geometry patterns and so on. Consequently, those sketchy carving patterns should be used more in making mahogany furniture.

Under the influence of the idea of fashion and sketchiness, people decompose the complex traditional designing patterns so as to summarize their interior meaning and sense and then reform those patterns and even integrate some Western culture elements, making patterns after reform accord with the aesthetics of young people of 1980s/1990s.

If people can make line elegant and sketchy, form reasonable, and scale perfect, this kind of pattern being the great combination of Oriental beauty and modern feature can be said as a successful change[11].

Compared with the complete mahogany, it is hard to process the fragmentary mahogany and because the fragmentary mahogany just has relatively low aesthetic value so its price is relatively lower. But if people use the new Chinese-style designing concept to conduct the derivative design according to its natural form and vein, that can give the sense of "fragmentary beauty" which can be greatly improve its aesthetic value. Those fashionable and low-price mahogany furniture will be more likely to be loved and accepted by youngsters.

The formation of incomplete mahogany has two aspects. One is for the acquired defects caused by the mechanical processing errors, and the other for the natural defects in the process of its

growth while the natural defects include death knot off, decay, crack and so on. Among them, decay will seriously affect the mechanical properties of mahogany so it will not be proper to get processed.

In Chinese designing technology, there is a kind of technique called clever carving in jade designing and processing, which is a kind of crafting technique where jade-processing craftsman integrate jade's color into the innovation idea so it can be a crucial touch which drives home a point otherwise difficult to explain<sup>[12]</sup>. As is shown in Figure 2, the designing of fragmentary mahogany share similarity with the clever carving technique, that is, the craftsman design form and structure based on the natural form and vein of fragmentary mahogany which can lower the cost but at the same time expose new aesthetic value.

All along, the traditional Chinese mahogany furniture is formed by its own combination or combination with other timber materials<sup>[13]</sup>. This kind of furniture are expensive and can make people feel depressed so youngsters of 1980s/1990s do not like this kind of furniture.

Therefore, as is shown, the introduction of eco-designing concept and the combination of modern furniture material with mahogany including glass, steel, etc. can lower the designing and producing cost both and at the same time enhance the designing ecology, personality, and convenience.

## **Conclusion**

For those youngsters of 1980s/1990s, fashion and cost performance of furniture would be the important aspect when they try to find and buy some furniture. Therefore, in terms of mahogany furniture design for them, the designing concept, the use of material, and the processing of details should all lay stress on fashion, functionality, and low price. As for the designing concept, we could boldly apply the Nordic designing way so as to make "the Nordic-style mahogany furniture" with features of sketchiness, functionality, and fashion. In terms of the processing of details, we could highlight the Chinese elements to show "the new Chinese-style" through using some patterns with Chinese characteristics. When it comes to the use of material, we could combine cement and glass with mahogany, in other words, we are actually combining the Oriental philosophy with technology outcomes. Meanwhile, people may should not be afraid of using fragmentary mahogany because we could re-design it according to its natural vein and form which can lower cost and make it more beautiful, and all in all, we can point out the development direction of the new Chinese-style mahogany furniture design based on market trend concerning the generation of 1980s/1990s

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