

# Principle of Design to Follow Nature's Course

## Take Jewelry Design as an Example

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**Abstract**—“The divine law follows nature” is important philosophical thought of Lao Zi, the founder of Taoism. It records in chapter XXV of *Tao Teh King* that, “Man imitates earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven follows the divine law, and the divine law follows nature”. Here, the “nature” refers to the nature with “formless form”. With the rapid economic development, environmental degradation and social contradictions are increasingly prominent. Modern Chinese design turns from external expression into internal reflection, and advocates “the divine law follows nature” to follow the nature of things. Jewelry design is instanced in this paper. According to history of jewelry and social environment, the direction of contemporary jewelry design with pursuit of naturalness is proposed.

**Keywords**—*follow nature's course; jewelry design; material; concept*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Design aims at creating more reasonable life style. However, environmental problems such as water and soil loss, natural environment deterioration and resource exhaustion have restricted social development of human in today's society. When creating modern living environment and life style for human, design accelerates energy consumption and resource destruction. Therefore, we must solve problem about how to effectively improve people's life style in design, at the meantime save resources and enhance people's environmental consciousness. The philosophical concept of “the divine law follows nature” in the thought of Lao Zi coincides with the solution of above problem.

### II. INTERPRETATION OF “THE DIVINE LAW FOLLOWS NATURE”

It originates from chapter XXV of *Tao Teh King* written by Lao Zi, “Man imitates earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven follows the divine law, and the divine law follows nature”.<sup>1</sup> Lao Zi addresses, although “Tao” avails the growth of all things, it is purposeless and unconscious, “make live, but lay no claim, benefit but do not interfere, lead but do not

rule”<sup>2</sup>, namely do not appropriate all things, do not brag about its contributions, do not dominate things but let it develop naturally. The nature in “the divine law follows nature” refers to the nature with “formless form”. It advocates the operation of everything must follow natural law. Everything has natural law. People will live in harmony with the outside world if he conforms to the natural law, and will conflict with the outside world if he violates the natural law. “The divine law follows nature” contains basic epistemology and methodology of Taoists in seeing the world.

The pursuit of nature in design requires the transformation from external expression to internal reflection. It emphasizes harmony between human and nature and sustainable development of human civilization, draws materials from nature and uses more raw materials in the natural world to protect the environment and save resources. The design is natural but neither utilitarian nor deliberate. All inspirations and ideas of design originate from perception of nature and self-expression. Works with “naturalness” are friendly and warm, in order to relieve loneliness of modern people and arouse them to return to nature.

### III. CHANGE OF FUNCTIONS OF JEWELRY IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

Human have created countless jewelry in the long history of civilization development. Nature has become the foundation of all decorations since the appearance of human civilization. In jewelry design, selection of materials, imitation of modeling and abstract structure, ecological consciousness, even the state of mind in production and application reveal creation of human. The jewelry works sometimes manifest nature and sometimes hide it. With change of people's cognitive competence, works at different periods show varied features under the evolution of conception of nature.

Forms, functions and meanings of jewelry have changed with social progress and cultural development. The forms of jewelry as general utility tool are transformed into today's artistic expression. Except for the pursuit of beauty by primitive man, it has additional functions, such as symbolization of status: precious metals and jewelry

<sup>1</sup> “Can body and soul united never sever? ... Good life and make live, but lay no claim, benefit but do not interfere, lead but do not rule. Such is the mysterious virtue”. Chapter X of *Tao Teh King*

<sup>2</sup> “There was chaos before the existence of heaven and earth. ... Man imitates earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven follows the divine law, and the divine law follows nature.” Chapter XXV of *Tao Teh King*

decorated by precious stone and jade represent the rich and influential officials; value maintenance of gold and exchange of money; value maintenance, appreciation and investment functions of precious stone and jade such as diamond and jadeite. Artistic expression function of jewelry surpasses functions and values endowed by traditional concepts, becoming pure artistic expression. Modern jewelry incisively and vividly expresses it. Nowadays, jewelry design increasingly tends to formalism. Instead of expression of contents, more attentions are paid to design of forms. Designers design forms and attach no importance to connotation of design. They blindly pursue luxury or forms of modern jewelry and forget naturalness of it. How to use small diamond to express the feeling of big diamond, how to make big precious stone luxurious enough, and how to make jewelry "artistic" and elaborate can furthest arouse people's desire to purchase. These problems must be considered in today's jewelry design.

#### IV. "THE DIVINE LAW FOLLOWS NATURE" IN JEWELRY DESIGN

With social progress, people gradually realize the importance of respecting nature and living in harmony with nature. People begin to protect nature and improve ecological environment, so environmental protection design and green design prevail. In jewelry design, designers realize people wear jewelry for decoration. More importantly, it is because jewelry has unique symbolic meaning for people to express emotions. Jewelry should not only be precious prop worn by people. Blazing precious stone can neither make up for people's emptiness nor communicate with viewers. The otherworldly design fails to resonate with the general public. Designers design jewelry not to cater to consumers, let alone purely pursuing forms, but should reflect on and express society, environment and themselves.

Therefore, qualified jewelry works should be "natural". The "nature" refers to "the divine law follows nature" in Taoist thought, emphasizing maintenance of nature and return to nature. Human civilization originates from nature, so does design. Human civilization and nature jointly promote the production and development of design. Design burgeons and develops in specific social and natural environment and updates continuously with change of environment, in order to assimilate into nature. Lao Zi says, "Man imitates earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven follows the divine law, and the divine law follows nature". The nature here not only refers to the natural world but also has the meaning of "That's what it is", namely objective law in development of things. Evolution law of nature and the law that design learns from nature for development follow the natural law, because human society originates from the natural world, which exists before human society. Therefore, the development law of design will inevitably conform to the evolution law of nature. In today's society, after realizing the destruction of ecological environment will bring great calamity, people begin to protect environment and improve ecology. The green and environment-friendly design coincides with it.

#### V. WAYS TO REALIZE "THE DIVINE LAW FOLLOWS NATURE" IN JEWELRY DESIGN

In order to realize "the divine law follows nature", jewelry design must respect and advocate nature and pursue the harmony between human and nature, so that the design can be natural. Furthermore, design idea must be natural. Designers must have life apperception and feel nature, find inspiration in life, instead of blindly pursuing artistic expression and neglecting naturalness of design to deliberately pursue forms. Jewelry designed without utilitarianism and purpose is close to life and the public and can trigger affective interaction.

There are two ways to realize "the divine law follows nature" in jewelry:

##### A. Materials of Works Come from Nature



Fig. 1. Works of artist Gustav Reyes in Chicago.

It means widespread, dumped and recyclable materials are designed into new things. The selection of materials used on jewelry with naturalness breaks through the limitation of materials in people's traditional concept. Except for gold, silver, platinum, alloy and jewelry and jade, widespread materials in life such as fur, velvet, cloth, feather, cotton rope, bamboo, plastics, bone, shell and putamen that are easily abandoned by people in daily life come to life after being designed. Designers also incisively and vividly embody the beauty of them. Besides, because the materials come from life, jewelry made of them gives people cordial feeling and warmness. It is totally different from the feeling given by jewelry made of traditional gold, silver and stone. The two handmade log rings shown in "Fig. 1" are works of artist Gustav Reyes in American Chicago. It excavates natural aesthetics and takes leftover material of wood or recycled wood as raw material, respects natural texture and form of wood and uses cooling brake forming technology. With environment-friendly materials, the works show strong respect to nature and natural things.



Fig. 2. Works of Brazilian jewelry artist Marina Sheetikoff

Jewelry works should be practical, precious and everlasting and express emotions. "Fig. 2" shows works of Brazilian jewelry artist Marina Sheetikoff. It combines serene and curly leaf with metal material. The dead leaf is directly put on the ring without any treatment, naturally and vividly expressing emotions of the works. The accumulation of "universal life" consciousness of artists enables them to discover beauty in natural world whenever and wherever possible and design ecological works that cherish and respect life.

### B. Design Philosophy Comes from Nature.

Today's society advocates knowledge, science and technology. Excessive dependence on it makes people neglect and suppress primitive instinct. Jewelry designers blindly design with utilitarianism and lose themselves as well as opportunities to contact nature, finally leading to degradation of sense organs. Designers are required to follow their heart and perceive society and nature to present reflection and emotions in works.

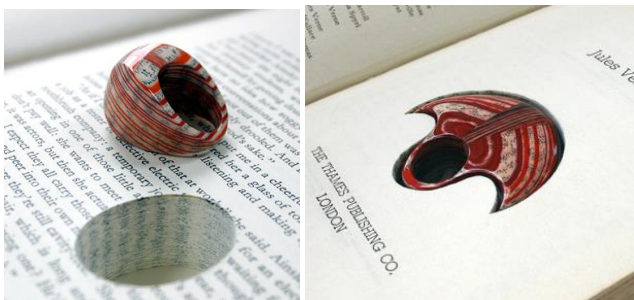


Fig. 3. Works of Jeremy May.

"Fig. 3" shows the works of Jeremy May. Jeremy May ardently loves reading, as well as forms and smell of books. In the works, the artist integrates the perception of life in design, takes book as raw material, and digs a hole in the book. Hundreds of layers of paper dug are compressed and form paper ring and paper necklace with peculiar style through grinding and polishing. The paper ornaments can be put back in the hole. The works are gorgeous and full of ambience of literature and art.

Except for natural perception, the design philosophy that advocates nature emphasizes naturalness and the neglect of external forms, "neglect forms after the meaning is

embodied"<sup>3</sup>, seizing "meaning" instead of holding on to "forms", in order to make the design return to nature.



Fig. 4. Works of master architect Frank O. Gehry

"Fig. 4" shows works of American master architect Frank O. Gehry. His works are full of sense of line and mobility. He mixes and matches silver and wood, with inspiration from "fish" but no real "fish" exists. The works are tranquil and natural with the meaning of "fish". The rings made of resin are simple and totally unrelated to luxury but express vitality and naturalness.

It is not easy to bring nature in design and embody nature in design. Design philosophy of nature comes from the understanding of human history and civilization and the pursuit of beauty and nature. Designers can create excellent jewelry works through integration of the understanding and pursuit in design.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Thousands of years ago, when thinking about the relation between human and nature, Zhuangzi proposed the philosophical thought of "the divine law follows nature" and advocated the harmony between human and nature. With increasingly degradation of ecological environment, we must abandon the idea that human dominates nature, advocate nature and pursue harmony between human and nature meanwhile develop the ecological consciousness of revering nature and cherishing life, the consciousness of living on friendly terms with nature, being grateful for nature and taking responsibility to protect nature. With harmony and unity between human and nature, the natural concept can be better brought in design. Pursuit of "naturalness" of jewelry design makes designers get rid of fickleness and utilitarianism and return to "nature", at the meantime, friendly and spiritual design without utilitarianism and forms will appear to realize exchange of thoughts between it and human. We appeal to people to return to and protect nature through designing jewelry works.

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<sup>3</sup> "Neglect forms after the meaning is embodied" originates from Zhou Yi Lue Li Ming Xiang, the method proposed by Wang Bi to explain the Book of Changes. "Images are embodiment of idea. Language manifests images. ... Therefore, language is used to present images, and we should not hold on to language after getting the images; images express meanings, and we should neglect forms after getting the meaning..."

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