

# The Application of Ancient Chinese Creation Wisdom in Contemporary Product Design

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**Abstract:** The creation activity is the product of culture. Human beings started the creation activity from the manufacture of tools and daily necessities. With the help of dexterous hands, the creator uses the surrounding materials to create exquisite daily necessities on the basis of personal life and cultural cultivation, and realizes the interaction between craft creation and real life. Chinese traditional craft and culture are inseparable, and the spirit of traditional creation has become an indispensable part of Chinese culture. These core features of traditional creative spirit are not only reflected in the technical level, but also contain rich cultural connotation and philosophical concepts. By studying and summarizing the characteristics of traditional Chinese creative wisdom, this paper understands the deep thinking of craftsmen in functional design in ancient creative culture, as well as the exquisite skills in material selection and form shaping period, and probes into the important significance and application value of traditional creative wisdom in contemporary product design, hoping to provide some reference and inspiration for today's contemporary design.

**Keywords:** Traditional Culture; Creative Wisdom; Functional Aesthetics; Applied Research.

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## 1. Introduction

"Creation" is the material production that human beings need for survival and life, and it is a materialized labor product based on artificiality. China's thousands of years of creation activities have given birth to a rich and colorful creation culture and spirit, which is the crystallization of the wisdom of the ancient Chinese working people. The way in which the creator treats materials, forms and functions reflects the unique wisdom of creation. In the selection and utilization of materials, people pay attention to the characteristics of materials, play its potential, so that the essence of the material can be shown to the greatest extent. In terms of form shaping, the creators pursue the aesthetic concept of "harmony between nature and man", and integrate the beauty of nature into the product design, making the product have natural beauty and humanistic charm. In terms of functional design, they pay attention to the combination of practicality and innovation, and pursue the unity of function and aesthetics, so that the product can not only meet the needs of people's life, but also reflect the humanistic feelings and aesthetic pursuit. The creator pays attention to ingenuity in his work and pursues the "craftsman spirit", which includes a serious attitude to work, excellence in details and the pursuit of quality. Through long-term practice and experience accumulation, they master the characteristics and treatment methods of various materials, and create exquisite and durable products with their rich process traditions and skills. And the traditional skills are passed down from generation to generation, forming a unique craft tradition and becoming an important part of the inheritance of Chinese culture. A series of books that record the creation activities of the Chinese nation, such as "Examination of work", "Tiangong Kai", "Building French" and so on, all show us the design wisdom of traditional Chinese craftsmen.

## 2. The Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Creation Wisdom

The working people of ancient China, with their wisdom and diligence, created a rich and diverse cultural heritage. They have accumulated rich experience and skills in production and life, which are not only reflected in the actual craft production, but also reflected in the deep understanding of nature, society and life. The inheritance of traditional crafts contains rich cultural connotation, but also reflects the values and aesthetic taste of ancient Chinese society. In Chinese culture, traditional crafts play an important role, not only as the expression of material culture, but also as the bearer of spiritual culture.

The traditional spirit of creation has multiple core characteristics, such as emphasizing the rationality of the function of goods, paying attention to the in-depth understanding and mastery of materials and being good at playing its characteristics, emphasizing the unity of form and function, and paying attention to the aesthetic significance and practicality of creation.

### 2.1. Focus on Functional Beauty

In Xunzi Zhengming, it is stated that we should pay attention to the function of people and objects, make things serve people, and point out that the design of creation should meet the needs of people and reflect the people-oriented design concept. The cause of creation is the creation activity carried out in order to meet certain needs of human beings, so practicality is the primary purpose of creation, and the creation aesthetics produced on the basis of practicality enhances the value of things. Take stone design as an example, from the early rough tools to the later appearance of polished, drilled and even decorated engraved vessels, this process reflects that ancestors first met the basic daily use, and then upgraded the tools, resulting in a series of aesthetic and formal requirements. Therefore, the functional beauty is the

beauty in line with the purpose that the object is suitable for human use and the beauty of the external form that the object reflects based on its own function. For example, Ming-style furniture (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3), as a model in the history of Chinese craft aesthetics, the function of Ming-style furniture is quite superior, its modeling structure is reasonable, the scale is ergonomic, and this structure also conveys the external formal beauty reflected in the function of furniture design. The composition of Ming style furniture is usually symmetrical or balanced, and the modeling line is mainly straight, supplemented by curves, reflecting the beauty of rigid and flexible. Straight and straight, beautiful curves, vivid but not stiff, giving people a kind and peaceful beauty.



Figure 1. Ming Dynasty. Chair



Figure 2. Ming Dynasty. Cabinet



Figure 3. Ming Dynasty. Drawing table

## 2.2. Emphasize the Beauty of Craftsmanship

Craft is the means of creation and has a unique cultural character. Mankind from grinding stone tools to fire gold-plated silver, all related to the craft. In addition to meeting the basic functional needs, ancient Chinese creations also pay attention to "craft beauty". Craft beauty refers to the production of excellence, smooth shape lines, harmonious and beautiful. Taking the oil paper umbrella in Fuzhou, China (Figure 4) as an example, an umbrella must be completed after more than 80 processes, the process is exquisite, the material quality is excellent, no matter the wind, sun, rain, do not break, do not fade, do not deformation, but also lightning protection, forming its own unique process character. Taking the furniture of China's Ming Dynasty as an example, the furniture of the Ming Dynasty is beautifully made, the

materials are exquisite, and the beauty of the structure is emphasized. Instead of nails and glue, different forms of tenon are used in different parts, reflecting the unique charm of wooden furniture and the ingenuity of the designer.



Figure 4. Oiled paper umbrellas, Fuzhou, China

## 2.3. Adapt to local conditions to highlight the beauty of materials

In the age of handmade, pay attention to the production skills and characteristics of the manufacturer. The creator pays attention to exploiting the characteristics of the material and developing its potential, so that the essence of the material can be revealed to the greatest extent. For example, China's Ming style furniture makes full use of the natural color and texture of wood to present the natural beauty of wood. In addition, the selection of materials according to local conditions also makes the utensils have a unique regional culture, while showing the economy and people's environmental awareness. For example, one of the "three treasures" of Fuzhou oil paper umbrella, its umbrella bones are made of local rich Qingshan old bamboo, not only toughness, elastic foot, after special treatment can also be mildew, moth, rot. It has created the characteristics of local manufacturing and local consumption of Fuzhou oiled paper umbrellas, reflecting the strong local and national characteristics.

## 2.4. The Combination of "Shape" and "Connotation"

Babanak has a unique understanding of design. He emphasizes that the purpose of design is not only for the direct function, form and purpose, but more importantly, the design itself has the factors of forming a social system. Ancient Chinese people should not only achieve the unity of form and function in bridge design, but also think about the layout from the perspective of system. The architectural design of Sui and Tang dynasties emphasizes the unity of ornamentation and construction, and the tone is simple and bright, reflecting the solemn and generous Oriental charm of Sui and Tang dynasties. In ancient Chinese creation culture, the connotation of natural things is often extended artistry under the guise of their appearance characteristics, so as to refer to a certain meaning. For example, the shape of the lock in ancient times is generally the shape of "fish", the reason is that the meaning of "fish is not closed" - the fish is always open eyes, and the role of the lock is to assume the responsibility of the guard. Another example is the Temple of Heaven building in Beijing, which is a successful model in the history of Chinese classical architecture. The north wall of the Temple of Heaven is designed as a circle, and the south wall is designed as a square, symbolizing "the round sky and the round place". The ancient Chinese thought of creation design is embodied in the relationship between man and nature, that is, the unity of heaven and man. The art of building the Temple of Heaven perfectly explains this thought.

### 3. The Application of Chinese Traditional Creative Wisdom in Contemporary Design

Many works of art were created in ancient China with brilliant achievements, which carried the spiritual connotation of traditional culture and contained unique wisdom of creation. Through the exploration of traditional crafts, we can deeply understand the rich connotation and diversified characteristics of ancient Chinese culture. Learn from the craft tradition and skills of traditional craftsmen, combine traditional creation wisdom with contemporary product design, integrate traditional elements and cultural symbols, and make the product more cultural connotation and unique charm. At the same time, the spirit of ingenuity and excellence emphasized by traditional creation wisdom can also inspire designers to create and inject more innovation and competitiveness into products.

#### 3.1. Adaptation

"Harmony between nature and man" is an important thought put forward in the development of traditional Chinese culture, which has a profound influence on the development of ancient Chinese creation art. The ancient Chinese people pay attention to "the right time, the right place, and the people", and adaptability is to conform to the right time, the right place, and the people. This idea of creation still has universal value today, thousands of years later.

##### 3.1.1. Constraints and Choices of "Times" on Creation Design

As the product of human activities, artifacts are the mark of The Times. The social background and ideology of different times profoundly affect the design of creation. Taking bronzes as an example, the decoration patterns of bronzes in the Shang Dynasty had a strong color of witchcraft, and in the Spring and Autumn Period, a large number of patterns appeared on the bronzes depicting life scenes such as women gathering mulberry trees and shooting geese with bows and arrows. Similarly, the ritual and music system was implemented in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and heavy instruments of ritual and music and symbols of royal power prospered and developed. However, with the demise of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the ritual and music system declined, and such instruments as chimes (Figure 5) and copper battle-axe (Figure 6) gradually withdrew from the historical stage. These changes are the result of the changes of The Times, and are the natural selection of the creation design made by The Times. Therefore, a successful product should keep up with the development of The Times, because only by meeting the needs of social groups can the design be widely accepted and used.



(A large percussion instrument in ancient China)

Figure 5. Chime



(Ancient Chinese weapons and sacrificial vessel)

Figure 6. Copper battle-axe

##### 3.1.2. Influence of "Geography and Humanity" on Creation Design

The objective existence of environment has a profound influence on the characteristics and evolution of the design of creation. Different environmental conditions and the use of natural resources vary in different regions, so the design goals, means and end results will also vary, thus shaping cultural diversity. From the perspective of contemporary design, this is reflected in the localization and nationalization of design. The design is influenced by local culture and national tradition, and it is impossible to completely separate from it. Delusio Meyer is very accurate in his assessment of this: "Modern artists and designers cannot be completely divorced from convention. He can't suddenly claim to be a new school of prehistory just because he decides to break with tradition." Different nations and different environments create different cultural concepts, which are directly or indirectly reflected in their own design activities and products.

##### 3.1.3. Importance of "Human Needs" in the Creation Process

All man-made objects exist with human needs as the starting point and motive force, which is the basis for the creation of the creators. Due to the diversity and diversification of human needs, the methods and means adopted in the design of creation also vary according to the different or the same needs of different groups. For example, although architecture is the same, the imperial power and nobility in ancient China focused on rank and political power, while the literati sought the artistic beauty of landscape gardens; Also in order to protect private property, aristocrats may use finely carved bronze locks, while literati officials are more inclined to use culturally rich text combination locks, and the public may use simple wooden locks or crude iron locks. Different people's social status, identity background, life experience and personality characteristics and other factors will affect their social communication behavior and material lifestyle, thus forming a variety of groups with a common basis (not only material basis) and lifestyle. Therefore, the style of the object designed by the designer for different groups will be different, which is the concept of "different people" in the design of creation. Considering the difference in market demand, it actually reflects the relationship between the product and the audience.

### 3.2. Compatibility

In creation design, the meaning of "fit" is to be able to properly deal with complex things under limited cognition, and to select the best solution among many alternatives, so that the creation can achieve the most appropriate state. Ancient Chinese creation design pays attention to "beauty and

ingenuity of materials", which requires creators to pay full attention to and make good use of materials, and have a deep understanding and mastery of structure and function. Materials are the media to realize the creation, and different materials will bring different visual effects and tactile experience, thus affecting the function and aesthetic value of the object. In creative design, process technology is a means of design whose aesthetic expression depends on material, function and form, especially on the processing and use of materials. Therefore, in the process of creation and design, only by choosing the right material can we awaken the hidden natural beauty of the material itself through technical processing, realize the practical value of the item and promote the establishment of aesthetic value. For example, wood widely used in traditional Chinese creation practices, ancient China's wood varieties, rich resources, and less restricted by natural conditions, while affected by regional soil, feng shui, climate and other factors, so that the density of wood, toughness, color is different. Advanced hardwood color is soft, fine, solid and elastic, made of furniture shows a delicate and moving texture, reflecting the light, tall, simple and has the characteristics of the beauty of wood texture, showing the natural beauty of "natural carving". China's ancient architectural system is the only one in the world that uses wood as its basic framework. The wood is light and easy to process, and the building community spreads out to form a beautiful skyline, as if all things grow on the earth, reflecting the cosmological concept of "harmony between heaven and man".

### 3.3. Brief Summary

The "Chinese wisdom" formed by the creation activities of China for thousands of years was gradually accumulated, stable and definite in the process of the ancient craftsmen's repeated practice of creation and design. This kind of wisdom does not refer to a single thinking ability or intellectual mode, but includes the overall psychological structure and spiritual strength, such as the cosmological concept of "harmony between heaven and man", simple environmental protection concept, artisan spirit and concern for human needs. These concepts are of great significance and value to contemporary design, they have experienced the baptism and precipitation of history, continuous inheritance and internalization, and become an important spiritual resource to guide modern design.

## 4. Conclusion

With the advancement of industrialization and modernization, product design on a global scale has shown a trend of convergence. This trend is mainly reflected in the similarity of product appearance, function and user experience. Product design has gradually lost its original regional characteristics, and some traditional cultural elements and values have been gradually ignored and diluted, leading to the phenomenon of cultural loss in design. This cultural loss makes product design more utilitarian and functional, lacking temperature and emotional expression, and difficult to have a deep connection with people's lives and emotions. This paper reexamines the traditional creative wisdom and explores the cultural value and creativity contained therein in order to inject new vitality and possibilities into contemporary product design. By drawing on traditional creation wisdom, designers can explore new design concepts and methods to create new products that meet

the needs of The Times. Traditional creative wisdom emphasizes the use of materials, form shaping and functional design, which can bring new ideas and possibilities to contemporary design and promote innovation and development in the field of product design. By applying the wisdom of traditional creation to contemporary product design, we can realize the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, and promote the development of product design industry to a more diversified, personalized and cultural direction. At the same time, the application of traditional creation wisdom also contributes to the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, and promotes the activation and dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. Help to improve the quality and competitiveness of products, promote industrial upgrading and economic development.

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