

The Inheritance and Development of Chinese Traditional Handicrafts -- Taking Ming-style Furniture as an example

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Abstract

As the crystallization and wealth of the wisdom of the Chinese nation, traditional handicraft occupies an important position in the history of culture, art and economy. With the transformation of social production mode, traditional handicraft have faced a series of problems, which also prompts it to usher in a new situation of comprehensive transformation after confusion. The inheritance of handicraft is not only a formal reproduction, but also a continuation of traditional culture and spirit. This study takes Ming-style furniture as an example to explore the path of inheritance and development of traditional handicraft in industrial society.

Key words: Ming-style furniture 、 Chinese traditional handicrafts、 Education inheritance, Development .

The Current Situation of Traditional Handicraft

The emergence of the Western industrial revolution has changed people's production methods, and gradually formed a dividing line between "classical" and "modern". With the sustainable economic development in China,, society has transformed from agriculture to industry, tradition to modernity. The current traditional handicrafts can't be completely integrated with modern life, which means that it is more of an ornament and lacks the use value in modern society. At one time, manual labor was the only way to promote social and economic development. Nowadays, under the economic system dominated by industrial civilization, traditional handicrafts also need to make changes and measures to conform to the social development trend of the industrial age.

At present, China is in the stage of rapid economic development. The social market economy is on the rise. With the improvement of social productive forces, people's material and spiritual needs are constantly changing, large-scale production machines bring people a rich material life, but they are always missing at the spiritual level. Traditional handicrafts faced various difficulties in such a fast, efficient and batch-oriented era, and also prompted them to ushered in a new situation of comprehensive transformation after confusion. In the history of Chinese arts and crafts, there have been many brilliant periods. Chinese arts and crafts have also been shining in the world. Take Ming-style furniture as an example. Chinese traditional furniture has entered the peak stage in the Ming Dynasty and won a worldwide reputation. This study takes Ming-style furniture as an example to explore the inheritance and development of the traditional Chinese handicraft at this stage.

The Style Characteristics of Ming Style Furniture

Ming-style furniture refers to the furniture of the special style that is exquisite in craftsmanship, excellent in material quality and elegant in simplicity from the Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty[1] . It inherits the styles and patterns since Xia, Shang, Zhou, Warring States, Han and Tang Dynasties. Its complex conforms to the cheerful and gentle social lifestyle and form since the establishment of the Ming Dynasty. The short-footed features of the Chu-style furniture have been extended to the high-foot features of Han-style furniture. Yang Yao listed the five characteristics of Ming-style furniture in the book "Research on Ming-style furniture":

- 1、 The shape is generous, the proportion is moderate, and the outline is concise and stretched.
- 2、 Structural science, mortise tenon precision, strong and solid.
- 3、 Pay attention to the natural texture and color of wood.
- 4、 Engraving, stitching properly.
- 5、 The metal fittings are exquisite, the color is soft, and it plays an auxiliary role in the decoration.[2]

Ming-style furniture focused on the art of sculpture, which mainly included five techniques: intaglio, embossment, openwork carving, combination of embossment and openwork carving and circular engraving. They also contained rich contents, such as curling grass patterns, lotus pattern, cloud pattern, lucid ganoderma, dragon design, flowers and birds, beasts, landscape, characters, auspicious words, religious patterns, bamboo joint and bark patterns were common themes of sculptures. Besides, they were also inset with jade, ivories, genuine pearls, precious stones, materials, copper and iron decorations, so that the furniture appeared beautiful, extravagant and meaningful. The common tenon and mortise methods include lattice angle tenon, open tenon, dark tenon, half tenon, long and short tenon, dovetail tenon, chuck tenon and so on.(Fig.1)

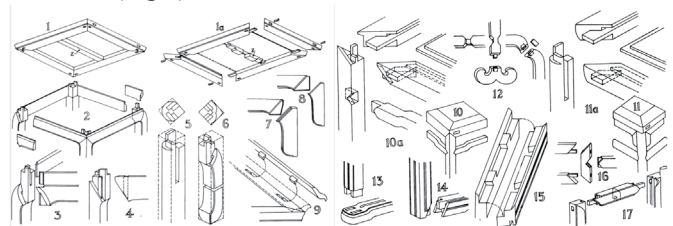


Fig. 1 Mortise and tenon structure of Ming style furniture
Note. From Research on Ming-style furniture, Yang Yao

In terms of styles, scholars and intellectuals were also involved in the handicraft industry. On the whole, Ming-style furniture demonstrated simple and unsophisticated features.

When it comes to refined scholars, the layout and display of furniture and utensils were arranged according to their hobbies, tastes and aesthetic habits. As a consequence, the furniture appeared simple and, unsophisticated and primitive. Couch and tables were in accordance with their dreams and ideals in life. Hence, Ming-style furniture indicated simplistic, elegant, refined, beautiful, delicate, comprehensive, upright and foursquare structures. In addition, it also showed fluent streamlines and proper ratios. You should left- and right-justify your columns. Use automatic hyphenation, if you have it. Don't forget to check spelling.

Ming-style Furniture at This Stage

Danish furniture designer Hans Wegner designed a series of works influenced by the round chair in Ming-style furniture. In the 1920s, Bauhaus advocated functionalism that almost influenced architects and designers around the world. Hans Wegner began to think about how to make a seat to cut down to the simplest possible elements of four legs, a seat, and combined top rail and armrest. Until after reading the books of Vilhelm Wancher, he was inspired by the painting "Danish Merchants Sitting in the Chair of the Ming Dynasty" to create a "Chinese chair" (Fig. 2). [3]



Fig. 2 Hans Wegner's Chinese chair
Note.From

https://fritzhansen.com/en/products/Chairs/4283_chinachair_cherry
(2018/11/22)

More recently, in 2016, German designer Konstantin Grcic launched the Mingx chair (Fig.3) collection with the Italian producer Driade. 'What I find so compelling about ancient Chinese furniture is the combination of structural logic and formal beauty,' says Grcic. 'The Mingx collection of chairs is inspired by the Ming style, but the transition from wood to tubular steel has opened up a contemporary, industrial and, admittedly, European interpretation of the classical theme.'



Fig. 3 Mingx chair

Note.From <http://www.driade.com/en/sedie-mingx> (2018/11/22)

Taiwan designers have also created new creations for Ming furniture. Taipei-based architect and designer Shi-Chieh Lu

design a 'Ming's Heart' chair (Fig.4) for the Italian producer Poltrona Frau. Western elements are added to traditional Ming furniture, he said "The aim is to illustrate Ming style as well as the Chinese culture in a way that the world can understand", but in his design, the traditional structure and techniques of Ming furniture could not be seen at all.



Fig. 4 Ming's Heart' chair
Note.From

https://www.archiproducts.com/en/products/poltrona-frau/tanned-leather-easy-chair-with-armrests-ming-s-heart_244268 (2018/11/22)

Although these designs have partially realized the development of Ming-style furniture, they only inherit the beauty of form, which does not contain the meaning of traditional culture, and the situation of "likeness in appearance but separation in spirit" appears. Ming-style fuses the Chinese ideologies of Confucianism and Taoism followed by the literati, and the millennia-old expertise of craftsmen, it has become a classic because of its precipitation of traditional culture. The profound cultural connotation and superb craftsmanship are indispensable factors for Ming style furniture. Without in-depth understanding of its connotation and mastery of its technique, then all inheritance is only superficial. Therefore, for the traditional handicrafts such as Ming-style furniture, understanding its cultural connotation and inheriting its handicraft skills have become the main way of the development of traditional handicrafts.

The Inheritance and Development of Traditional Handicraft

The background of the times is an irresistible factor for the slow development of traditional handicraft. The background of the times is an irresistible factor for the slow development of traditional handicraft. Just as most children who do not understand the traditional culture and handicraft methods today, they do not have the ability to appreciate calligraphy and painting, because they are born in an age of mechanical and screen. The environment of the time forces people to keep away from traditional culture and crafts from generation to generation. Therefore, in the current social background, there is an urgent need for a "revival" of handicraft to inspire people how to avoid the shortcomings brought about by the industrial era to the social and cultural environment.

With the development of society, people's aesthetics are constantly changing, while traditional handicrafts have always stayed in a single variety and the same traditional themes, unable to cater to the aesthetic characteristics of modern people, it is difficult to resonate with people. Although it is important to inherit tradition, it still needs to be innovated in combination

with the modern society. Traditional handicraft inherits the essence of traditional culture through artistic creation and is the witness of the history of the Chinese nation. With the development of productivity, the connotation should be highlighted rather than superficially.

As we all know, the inheritance mode of ancient Chinese handicraft is not to teach classes like other schools, but to learn from teachers or pass on the family heritage. In the early Ming Dynasty, the craftsmen adopted the hereditary system, "inheritance his fathers" was a tradition in ancient China. Traditional handicraft emphasizes the transmission mode of oral transmission, which not only inherits the handicraft skills, but also inherits the traditional culture and craftsman spirit. It is a long process from handicraft transmission to comprehension, it is a test of the talent, patience and comprehension of young people.

The inheritance mechanism of traditional crafts mainly includes three forms: family inheritance, industry inheritance and social inheritance. As the name suggests, family inheritance takes family as the unit and people with blood ties as the target to pass down handicrafts from generation to generation. This way is mostly to protect the interests of the family and monopolize the handicraft technology, so that it is not known to outsiders. Therefore, it is easy to "lose the handicraft after death"; Industry inheritance is based on the mentoring relationship. The master imparts all the skills to one or more apprentices, and the apprentices can continue to receive apprentices after they have completed their studies. The requirements on apprentices are not limited to the blood relationship, and compared with the family inheritance, the method of passing on the skills is relatively effective; Social inheritance refers to the establishment of specialized schools or training institutions, for the widespread enrollment of students for the society, and the establishment of systematic courses to impart relevant technical skills. In terms of the current social environment, the system of social inheritance is a relatively positive and effective way.

In order to ensure the activeness of production factors, traditional handicraft industry must constantly absorb fresh blood and actively develop inheritance education. The industry can jointly carry out hand-made courses with local primary and secondary schools, and cultivate children's understanding of traditional handicrafts, especially those with regional characteristics, and instill ideas for protecting traditional culture and crafts. For universities or vocational skills colleges, they can establish a traditional handicraft inheritance base centered on the school. The college should attach great importance to the cultivation of inheritors, and place the traditional crafts in the primary position in the relevant professions. Students can freely choose the category of study and open the systematic teaching course is taught regularly by the industry's outstanding craftsmen.

In addition, the government and the school can jointly organize scholars to conduct a comprehensive and detailed study of the traditional handicraft industry, including not only the production technology, but also the traditional culture and craftsman spirit by them. Improve handicraft materials, so that research, protection and inheritance can be carried out at the same time. In this way, even if some handicraft techniques are

lost in the process, they can be integrated and re-learned according to the research data to ensure that the lost skills can be rediscovered as far as possible.

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