Modern Chinese Wooden Chair Design Under Ming Style Furniture Neo-Confucianism

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Abstract. Ming dynasty furniture was the most brilliant and splendid ones in the splendid period. And it could not be ignored in the design of furniture in ancient China. What it manifested is not only the mature style and perfect structure, but also profound philosophical thought. This paper summered the relationship between Neo Confucianism and Ming dynasty furniture design concept in the prospective of Ming dynasty furniture design concept. What it demonstrate is Neo Confucianism has applied to Chinese wooden research.

Keywords: Ming furniture; Neo - Confucianism; Chinese wooden chairs; The style of simple.

Among traditional furniture, Ming dynasty furniture has attracted more and more attention in recent years, the brief but elegant style of design of Ming dynasty furniture gives people a different kind of cultural beauty. In modern times, scholars began to evaluate Ming dynasty furniture in the view of modern western art design, but all what they discussed about the art value of Ming dynasty furniture is not deep enough for sorting source and significance of Ming dynasty furniture art. Viewing the history of Chinese furniture from the prospective of design culture, we can know that the design art of Ming dynasty furniture has a close relationship with the development of Neo Confucianism. Thus,there’s a lot of scholars under the influence of Confucian school began to participate in the furniture design,With the value orientation of the neo-confucianism culture, the value of the cultural and artistic value of the bright type furniture is extremely high.This paper discusses the form of Neo Confucianism in Ming dynasty furniture from the point of view of cultural design. And what Enlightenment of the Neo Confucian do to the modern design is also described as follow. That’s what the design culture connotation miss in the contemporary Chinese furniture products.
Outline to the concept of Neo Confucianism in Ming dynasty furniture.

Neo-Confucianism was one of the most influential theories in Song Dynasty, and formed a relatively complete system of philosophy. The neo-Confucianism integrates the independent consciousness in ethics from original status. The symbol furniture figure of Neo Confucian values are also can be detected. However, song dynasty furniture is the product of philosophy. Neo-Confucianism promoted the formation and development of song dynasty furniture design style. Song dynasty furniture design reflects the idea of Neo-Confucianism. Song dynasty government advocated for the arts and neo-Confucianism them first, in the influence of the concept of the song dynasty style furniture system design began to form the rigorous rules of order, song type furniture is given priority to with use function without too much decoration, adopts Liang Zhushi structure, make the song type furniture has simple and elegant, delicate and implicit artistic conception beauty. Song Dynasty furniture design system began to form strict rules of order, it was usage function oriented, not too much decoration, and the beam column structure made the song dynasty furniture have the beauty of simplicity, elegance, delicacy and implication. The song dynasty furniture had a symbol significance in the history of Chinese furniture. And the core spirit of Neo Confucianism in Song Dynasty has its own peculiarity: subtitle, refined and elegance. For example, the rose chair (Fig. 1) had the advantages of fine material, smart and portable shape, the backrest and armrest were vertically connected with the chair seat, structure based, no further decoration. At the same time, it also reflected the superb artistic level of the furniture production in the Song Dynasty and the simplicity and elegance style, the cultural-orientated song dynasty furniture directly influenced the design concept of future Ming dynasty furniture, it was the source of Ming dynasty furniture design philosophy.

![Figure 1. Rose chair in Song.](image)

Enlightenment of the concept of Neo Confucianism on the design of modern Chinese wooden chairs

The influence of Neo Confucianism on the style of modern Chinese wooden chairs. Style mainly means the representative feature presented on all
kinds of art works comprehensively. Chinese furniture was evolving from low to high level, the Song Dynasty made splendid lash in Chinese ancient furniture. People kneel in front of all the furniture before Song Dynasty, for example profile bed, mat based furniture, seat with simple and vigorous magnificent and gorgeous spirits, especially Ming dynasty furniture. When Neo Confucian trend of thought and architecture stuck on the scholars at that time, the furniture design began to be influenced by the rapid philosophy. The Neo Confucian hopes to enhance inner spiritual cultivation, make the heart not seduced by outside things, and understand the true meaning of life from inner peace by external things. Ming-dynasty hardwood furniture was made of Fine and small materials, the primary design language has ever-changed as served, it was a nice way to shape up profile and convey artistic interest.

**Enlightenment of Neo Confucianism to the structure of modern Chinese wooden chairs.** The overall structure had maintained the original right and left symmetry structure of Ming dynasty furniture. At the same time, to make integrity furniture, unnecessary decorative accessory shall be removed, so as to facilitate for disassembling, assembly and maintenance. On the connection of necessary structure, we should use simple design idea to simplify the structure of mortise and tendon joint, and make a thorough simplification to simplify the structure to the most basic components, each structure should be made in fully "perfectness". There are two main directions: one is mortise and tendon structure changing wood into nails, for example, the novel tendon and mortise structure—wedge dowel (Fig. 2) designed by IKEA designers, the new tendon and mortise structure greatly simplifies the difficulty of furniture installation, and does not need any tools. As long as it is inserted, pushed and buckled, it can be completely assembled by hand. The other one is the mortise and tendon structure of wedge dowel changing mortise into lock (Fig. 3).

![Figure 2. Novel tenon and mortise structure—wedge dowell.](image2)

![Figure 3. Wedge dowel.](image3)
Cultural expression of Neo Confucianism in modern Chinese wooden chairs. The concept of Neo Confucianism endowed the Ming Dynasty furniture with profound cultural charm, and let the Ming Dynasty furniture maintain a high degree of unity with appreciation of traditional culture in exquisite, elegant style, that is, the perfect combination of literature and quality, to the artistic sublimation of elegance and beauty. Therefore, according to the form of Neo Confucianism in the Ming Dynasty furniture, we shall have modern people's aesthetic taste to study the literati feelings under the influence of traditional Neo Confucianism culture, and the life style with distinct nature, only this, can we not be lost in the material desires of the world in the rapidly developing economic society, concise but not simple, finding spiritual sustenance in waterinss life, so as to improve one's moral character. We shall combine Chinese traditional Neo Confucianism culture to design modern Chinese wooden chairs, thus, we can raise the national cultural connotation of furniture products continuously to make them have higher cultural and artistic value, for example, the “HJX” sofa (Fig. 4) designed by Chen Darui, the founder of MAXMARKO, the sofa was designed into a semi closed space, which represented a sense of leisure and freedom. And the “cloud rocking chair” (Fig. 5) designed by Chan Yanfei, founder of Shanghai “PUSU” original design brand, it reflected the cultural connotation of leisure and traditional essence.

Figure 4. “HJC” sofa.                     Figure 5. Cloud rocking chair.

Application of Neo Confucianism in modern Chinese wooden chairs—a case study on “Orchid chair”

Design philosophy of Orchid chair. Orchid chair takes orchid as intention element, for orchid has an elegant manner, and its unique and profound culture. Orchid has long blue leaves, white flowers, born in the wilderness, and aromatic distant, it is willing to be quiet, take white clouds as partners, stay with flowers together, and the Chinese people have deep national feelings on orchid. Orchid has become an elegant representative, known as a gentleman in flowers, the ancients believed that the quality of orchid embodied the quality of existence, desire removal and retention, so literati liked to edify sentiment, and achieve self-cultivation by admiring, drawing, and chanting orchid, so as to reach the spiritual realm of ”harmony between man and nature”. However, the
quality of orchid is consistent with Neo Confucianism and the pursuit of noble moral character, from this, it was known that the inner quality of orchid was the symbol of Neo Confucianism, therefore, orchid is used as a design concept source for modern Chinese wooden chairs.

Ming dynasty furniture paid attention to the beauty of lines in shape, according to different systems, the length and variety of linear components were used to show elegant curves, for example, the "S" shaped back and arc armrests in Ming dynasty round-backed armchair with integration of straight lines, arcs, curves (Fig. 6), it was both ergonomic and unique. Meanwhile, the slender, graceful curve of the orchid leaves were represented in the side chair legs and the armrests connections of orchid chair (Fig. 7), the chair back and the armrest were twisted and folded together, which was the display of the natural gestures of orchid leaves. Looking from the top view, the armrests on both sides were smooth and evasive, and the tail contraction was connected with the backrest, which was like orchid, and implied the meaning of staying longer with the elegance of orchid in a room full of orchid.

![Figure 6. Ming dynasty round-backed armchair.](image1)
![Figure 7. Chair legs and armrests connections.](image2)

**Artful structure of “orchid chair”**. Armrest and backrest design of Vagner’s “the design” is taken into account into the design of “orchid chair”, it retains the integrity of the armrest and the back of the chair, but changes the original way of armrest connecting to the chair leg, the right angle is changed into sleek acute angle, and the widened armrests are convenient to lay the hands and stabilize the upper body during sitting posture. The arc shape at the front of the armrest could make people feel comfortable grip, the wider back and chair surface naturally suspend behind without any link, which greatly improves the support of the spine in the sitting posture, effectively reduces the strain of the lumbar muscles and improves the comfort degree. On the whole, the armrest and the inside of the backrest are a sleek U type, which keeps the body from scratching when rotating, the soft leather cushion is comfortable to carry the weight of the human body, the “入” structure reduces the barrier between the legs of the chair and the lower body, it can make the human thigh move freely to both sides, enlarge the movable space of the human body, and give people a comfortable
and safe support and free activity space. It not only reflects the traditional furniture modeling dynasty features, but also meets the requirements of ergonomics.

**Cultural Implication of “orchid” chair.** The orchid chair is designed on the philosophy of orchid, orchid culture has a long history in China since ancient time. Since two thousand years ago, Qu Yuan took orchid as ornament, Confucius praised the virtues of a gentleman by orchid, then, after a thousand years advocating by literati, the unique orchid culture was formed, at the same time, it had become a symbol of ancient Chinese literati and officialdom.

“Although the road is endless and faraway, I still want to pursue the truth in the world” was the ambition of Qu Yuan, in Records of the Grand History of China by Sima Qian, Qu Yuan was praised as “He has a noble character, pure ambition, he is like lotus, grown from sludge but unstained, posing elegantly without being flirtatious, he can win glory with the sun and moon”. As known, Lisao created new generation of literary dynasty, but at the same time laid the cornerstone of the orchid culture. In this work, Qu Yuan praised the great elegance and moral trait of orchid. Therefore, orchid not only gives us fragrant smell and elegant gesture, but also, the character of integrity, loyalty, high ambition, quiet and distant fragrance in the orchid culture deeply nurtures our soul.

However, time is fleeting, in today's rapid development of economy, people need to be more nurtured by orchid culture, pay attention to self-cultivation, and always hold the mind not to be disturbed by the temptation of external things, so as to advance steadily in the tide of the times.

**Summary**

In a word, we can find that the vicissitude of Neo Confucianism had greatly influenced the design concept of Ming dynasty furniture, Ming dynasty furniture had continuously improved on the basis of the former people's attention to function. The practical, scientific spirit of innovation advocated by Neo Confucianism had created exquisite workmanship and complete mortise and tendon structure system of Ming dynasty furniture, which made the parts have both reinforcing structures, and have decorative function. The organic combination of all parts of the furniture conformed to the principle of mechanics, and paid attention to practical and beautiful, and realized the perfect unification of structure and function. At the same time, the literati participated in the furniture making under the guidance of Neo Confucianism, and greatly enhanced the cultural connotations of Ming dynasty furniture, and promoted the unique dynasty of Ming dynasty furniture. Therefore, in the design of modern Chinese furniture, we should first consider the function orientation, the solid and reasonable matrix structure, then, on the basis of external stability, we should use the means of cognition of “investigation of things” of ancient people to give a certain cultural quality to things, so that the modern Chinese furniture will have both the profound cultural connotation and outer beauty.
This shows that a good product should not only pay attention to the external aesthetic, but should pay more attention to the connotation to achieve the perfect unity of enriching the traditional culture connotation and the actual use function of products.

References


