

The Embodiment of Artistic Conception within Design

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Abstract: Originates from the rich soil of Chinese ancient literature, the artistic conception theory is a unique aesthetics concept in China. The thought of artistic conception can be embodied in modern product design through skillfully deployment of product elements such as configuration, material and color. The rebirthing and re-expressing of traditional artistic conception can evoke audiences' emotional resonance and trigger their relevant or divergent thinking. In this process, the special atmosphere of product is created.

With Confucian culture as the main body, Chinese culture has unique national customs and life ideology, as well as a complete set of aesthetic values. The artistic conception is the most vital topic in ancient Chinese literary theory and aesthetics. It is also widely used in various fields of design

1. The Meaning of Artistic Conception

As its name implies, “artistic conception”, or “yi jing” in Chinese, is composed of “yi” and “jing”. According to Shuo Wen Jie Zi, “yi” represents “meaning and ambition. The character is composed of xin, which means heart, and yin, which means sound. The character means that we need to observe and then can get the meaning.” The sentence means that, “yi” in Chinese is a symbol composed of “sound” and “heart”; its original meaning is “voice in mind”. By using modern language, yi can be interpreted as human's psychological activities. “Jing” can be interpreted as “realm”, “space”, “world” or “material image”. Therefore, the early meaning of “yi jing”, or “artistic conception”, refers to the fusion of feelings with scenery in artistic activities.

The term “artistic conception” first appeared in poetry. For example, in Chapter Xiong Zhi of The Book of Songs, there's the description: “Looking at that sun and moon, I am thinking in a leisurely way”. In the sentence, the mental state of the poet (i.e. feelings) and the image of the sun and the moon (i.e. the scenery) have realized the aesthetic unity and formed a beautiful artistic conception. Of course, the fusion is not only limited to “scenery and artistic conception”; it can also be extended to “objects and artistic conception” as well as “things and artistic conception”. As Zhi-yuan Ma described in his poem Sunny Sand Autumn Thoughts, there were “over old trees wreathed with rotten vines fly crows; under a small beside a cot a stream”. Through these images, the figure of a sad, adrift traveler is vividly described. This kind of technique expressing the author's emotion and feelings through describing things and objects; it is more moving than simply expressing feeling. In The Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry, Guo-wei Wang expressed, “To sum up, the most obvious feature of good articles is the artistic conception. Excellent works must be read; beautiful articles must be read in detail. After reading the Sunny Sand Autumn Thoughts, I am full of sadness and tears.”

Since modern times, with the introduction of Western Aesthetics and the construction of Chinese aesthetics, the concept of artistic conception has become an indispensable important factor in painting, music, dance and some garden arts, and has gradually become an important aesthetic category. In the design field of today, the fast-food consumption culture promotes people's materialized worship of technicism and industrial design, leads to people's increasingly materialized behaviors and mental pursuit. Now our high-quality thinking and personality characteristics are facing a fatal threat. Under that situation, the concept of design should no longer be limited in practical purposes; it should also be the result of cultural creation and accumulation. Therefore, the creation of products with artistic conception becomes an effective way in creating spiritual contents.

The so-called “artistic conception in product design” is the extension of the traditional artistic conception theory. It refers to the artistic realm formed by the integration of the essence of design works and the subjective feelings of designers through the high degree artistic processing. “Objects” and “the scenery” are intermingled and formed a special atmosphere, which stimulates audiences’ infinite imagination and evokes their complex and far-reaching psychological feelings and interests. The ancients once said, “The unformed abstract is called Tao, which means the natural rules; the formed concrete is called Qi, which means the object.” Good design should contain the spirit of Tao, which means designers need to pay attention to spiritual enjoyment and spiritual consumption.

Thus, the process of product design is actually the process of rebuilding artistic conception in material life; the formation of artistic conception requires designers to focus their sincere thoughts and emotions on the image of product, thus forming the artistic realm which combines objects with emotional feelings. Then the design can arouse consumers’ emotional resonance and pursuit for the good life. Fundamentally speaking, the beauty of artistic conception conveyed by the product is often the creative point of the design.

2. Design Principles of Artistic Conception

Artistic conception is often a kind of artistic realm that can’t be reached and pondered. It has the special function of “beyond representation” and cannot be explained by words; it can describe and express realms and ideas that can’t be conveyed by specific languages, colors or forms. Therefore, the artistic conception pays attention not only to the “form”, but also to the “image outside the form”. Kong-tu Si called it as “interest outside the rhyme, intention outside the taste, and meaning outside the image”. The sentence means we can feel infinite subjective feelings (interest, intention and meaning) through limited objective images (rhyme, taste and image). The real artistic conception is not only “inside the image” but also “outside the image”. It consists of two levels of meaning.

In fact, “inside the image” refers to real objects created by designers. They are visible and limited. For the product design, it refers to the shapes, colors and qualities of the product. As common modeling languages used in industrial design, they do not only bring visual feeling, but also serve as the media in the interaction between products and users. They are an important channel for products to convey their ideas to the outside world. The second “image” is generated on the basis of the first “image”. It is the imagination of viewers based on designers’ careful creation. It is a special artistic realm composed of objective things and subjective emotions in the design; it is the so called the artistic conception of the design. In contrast, “inside the image” is the basis for the existence of products and the most basic carrier of functions. The state of “outside the image” puts higher requirement on design, and bears the unlimited spiritual connotation of products. The two factors complement each other and construct the internal and external structures of the product. Therefore, in order to accurately convey the connotation of the product, the most fundamental design principle is how to achieve the unity of “inside the image” and “outside the image”, and how to use the most refined design methods to provide viewers with the endless charm of the product.

3. The Creation of Artistic Conception

Industrial design, as a product of machine mass production, was first guided by western aesthetic theory. Formal logic and geometric form are the popular trends of modern design. However, this kind of design neglects the richness of human nature and also causes the spread of monotonous and stereotyped designs. Of course, it is not so easy to embody the so-called core ideas of “artistic conception” such as “the fusion of feelings with the scenery”, “the combination of matter and characters” and “the unity of the subject and the object”, since there are essential difference between the industrial nature of products and the theory of artistic conception. Therefore, how to use modern design language to express the empty and illusory beauty of this concept is the most critical issue which determines whether products can accurately convey the “artistic conception” of design.

China's highest artistic realm cannot be separated from the image, but it should reach the state outside the image. Designers cannot simply attach cultural elements to the surface of products. The artificially stacked artistic conception is only the formalized product design. The creation of artistic conception in products is by no means such a simple formula of $1+1=2$. Only by using appropriate design languages can the artistic conception of the product be naturally revealed, which requires the designer to make in-depth observation and understanding of selected elements. It can be said that the creation of product artistic conception is actually based on the design product and led by the designer. It is a new life formed by the choice, cultivation and concentration of contradictions among all things in the world under the function of "yi".

In the true sense, "artistic conception" should be a kind of elegance and style naturally revealed by the product through its images. It is the unity of intrinsic and external characteristics of objects, and a comprehensive manifestation of cultural symbols. Products do not need any "intermediary" such as plots or scenes, but rely on the integration of human culture and science and technology of the times. Through the composition of elements such as shapes, colors, qualities, lights, pictures and texts, and the proper arrangement of materials and production processes, special concepts, spirit and atmosphere can be embodied in solid products. Then the artistic conception of products can be realized. According to Guo-wei Wang, this is the highest artistic realm with "limited words but unlimited meanings".

In order to create artistic conception in the product design, we must first have deep psychological experience of design products, as well as various forms of elements in culture and nature. The purpose of experience is to discover the close relationship between the design and various forms, and to artistically use the real form in order to express the beauty of the form of design elements more effectively. Of course, the "form" here refers not only to various natural forms, but also contains the rich traditional cultural forms in our country. They are the endless source of creative design, the texts that create the forms of style and language in design, and the most important medium to convey the artistic conception of design. Only by fully understanding the generation principles, functional structures and morphological expressions of various natural and cultural elements, can we design products with unique artistic charm. These design elements are just like words, expressions and vocabularies in an article. They are the basis of article. Only through these elements can we utter sentences and write the article.

Of course, in order to create a new artistic conception, good design elements are not enough. With good characters, words and grammar, we also need good composition "patterns". The composition "patterns" in design means the proportion and rhythm of each form of language. The creation of artistic conception can be ultimately realized through the creation and composition of specific images. Thus, the combination method is the traceable form of artistic conception creation. Without abundant and deft creative skills serving as the concrete support of artistic conception creation, it will be difficult for designers to convey the unique aesthetic feeling of form connotation. Sometimes counterproductive efforts may happen because of designers' poor skills, which make it trickier to achieve the perfect state of artistic conception.

In fact, various natural and humanistic elements already contain a large number of visual form elements. Elements like composition, modeling, symmetry, proportion, balance and coordination can all be applied in the product design. All forms present the diversity which differs from the unity. Several principles cannot generalize the rich connotation of elements. So in the design process, we should try to avoid using simple form composition principles. Only by appreciating the irregularity and essence of form elements, can we realize the perfect artificial design.

After rigorous modeling analysis, the product design is not only the simple repetition of traditional cultural elements. The connotation of product is not attached to its surface, but implied in the deepest part of the design. Users need to concentrate on the design, and then they can taste and appreciate the connotation. Therefore, the design can surpass the beauty of shape and function, and show the beauty of artistic conception. The use of these products is also a spiritual journey, a process of emotional resonance between users and the traditional culture. While feeling the unique "cultural beauty" brought by artistic conception design, users can also appreciate the realm of

“implied meaning beyond words”.

It can be said that the promotion of product design to the level of artistic conception is the inheritance of oriental's pursuit of the inner spiritual world. Creating objects is the most basic living behavior of human beings. After years' development, now people concern more about the spirituality of products than their functions; the spiritual content of material products becomes a symbol of social culture and civilization. Therefore, addition to expressing specific material functions, good product design also needs to reflect certain social spirit and personality ideals, and express some cultural connotations through the blending of visual elements. Combining design with artistic conception can help designers to show the spirit hidden behind the material appearance of products.

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