

The Feature and Future Development of Sino-lacquer Furniture

Shasha Song, Benhua Fei

(International Centre for Bamboo and Rattan, Beijing, 100102, China)

Abstract

This thesis aimed to make innovation in the features of modern lacquer furniture based on the preservation of the essence of traditional lacquerware, thus contributing to richer language of lacquer furniture, which made it easier for people with different cultural backgrounds to know more about lacquerware. Therefore, it provided ways for lacquer furniture to penetrate into people's daily life, during which the lacquer furniture would become more artistically appealing. Through the comparative analysis and studying of the features, decoration and patterns of traditional and modern lacquer furniture, with the reference of the design theory, the production techniques and craftsmanship of modern furniture, the thesis made deep exploration into the development of modern lacquer furniture with a special flavour of traditional cultural craftsmanship as well as the infusion of modern artistic style and scientific techniques. Lacquer furniture was basically made of woody material, with the surface painted with Chinese lacquer most of the time, which made it both natural and environmentally-friendly. In patterns, lacquer furniture tried to achieve excellence in form, appeal in taste, and validity in application; in colors, red and black were the most representative and symbolic colors, which were the reflection of national spirit and individuality. Besides, the processes in which the methods and techniques grew integrated and comprehensive, the decorated pattern evolved from simple natural design to diversified artificial permutation both embodied the development of the artistic expression of our nation with the help of the special rhythm and artistic device in modern life. Instead of being traditional or modern, the style and pattern of the lacquer furniture would rather be of more cultural deposits, flavour of the nation as well as the aesthetic sentiment of the time. On basis of this, modern lacquer furniture should encourage more innovation and re-exploration of lacquerware's value, thus promoting the transformation of lacquerware and the recreation of the promising market.

Key words: lacquer furniture; features; decoration; development

Introduction

1. Lacquer art and furniture

1.1 lacquerware art

Lacquer art use the natural lacquer as main coating, and the manufacture foundation is the traditional lacquer decoration techniques and craft (Qiao, 2004). Lacquer art is Chinese traditional arts and crafts, after thousands years of development, it has progressed from the initial functional to later decorative. Until today, it becomes an independent art language, no longer exists alone with the traditional craft in material technology field. Because of the impact of western art and development and utilization of new paint material, modern lacquer art is creating new vitality based on the traditional, and becoming an indispensable form of decoration and means. So lacquer craft appears ever more richly and vividly in the shock between the new and the old, the traditional and the modern.

Lacquerware has good characteristics comparing to other artifacts. One is the compatibility, namely lacquer decoration can be used in different objects, such as wood, bamboo, leather, ceramics, metal, jade, glass, and cloth. The second is the practicability, paint finishing the surface of the artifacts which the features is very hard after dry solid film, not afraid of acid or corrosive erosion, and have moisture-proof, mothproof, moth-proofing, anticorrosion and protect function. The third is decorativeness, it can be personalized adornment for all kinds of objects combined with the needs of modern life.

Therefore, modern lacquer art is not only the concept of lacquerware and lacquer craft in the traditional sense, but also contains the meaning of lacquer art. It includes lacquerware, lacquer painting and painted sculpture in fields of decorative arts and pure art, and has become a very broad, inclusive and comprehensive art form.

1.2 Lacquer furniture

Furniture, as a social part of the material culture of a state or a nation, is a product of economic and cultural development of an era, and it reflects historical features and cultural tradition of the time, the state or nation. Lacquer art have a long history of used in furniture, and lacquer furniture has been represents the highest level of the crafting in the genealogies of Chinese classical furniture that are the pricey specialty items and collections for grandees. The fundamental reason of Chinese ancient lacquer furniture developing so fast is getting official support and arousing the attention of the whole society.

As early as in the Warring States period, productions of lacquer furniture have been managed by special official, and have begun to be taken charge of special management agencies in Han dynasty. And in the Tang dynasty, lacquerware has been listed as one of the taxes objects. From the Tang dynasty to Qing dynasty, the production of folk lacquer furniture develop quickly because of official more emphasis on the design and manufacture of lacquer. They competed in skill, and made the development of the Chinese lacquer furniture reaching the unprecedented level no matter in crafting or the style design. Ming and Qing Dynasties were splendid time and representative of the Chinese classic furniture (Figure 1 and 2). These periods of lacquer furniture focused more on function and formal sense in styling, and take a combination of circle line, arc line and curve line. It abandoned cumbersome and gorgeous in form, also supplemented by lacquer art craft such as lacquer decoration, sculpture, painting and enchase, and formed the Ming and Qing lacquer furniture characteristics finally. From the Ming and Qing dynasty furniture, it can be seen retained lacquer furniture that there was wide variety of products, such as beds and desks, chairs and stools, cabinets, benches and screens, etc. The means of artistic expression are rich and varied, such as jade inlay, gold lacquer painted, carved fill in gold lacquer, carved ash and embellish color, which shown the skills of wonderful artificial excelling nature with lacquer technology, and manifests the intelligence of the working people of ancient China.



*Fig.1 Lacquer furniture of Ming Dynasty
(<http://www.aigunet.com>)*



*Fig.2 Lacquer furniture of Qing Dynasty
(<http://www.aigunet.com>)*

Lacquer furniture indicates the development of science and technology and the evolution of the spiritual culture, provides important reference value for design concept and art style of national furniture with modern Chinese characteristics.

2. Features of modern lacquer furniture

Lacquer art is grafted onto modern furniture, combined with decorative drafting, modern modeling, and modern use function. And then constitute effect on the overall aesthetic and form

Chinese modern lacquer furniture, which make it unique feature and colorful sacred in the modern furniture. It embodies the fashionable features and prominent humanization at the same time, and adapts to the modern human body need, the room pattern and aesthetic concept. Lacquer furniture is not only an important part of the indoor environment but also has the function of organize and adorn space (Zhang, 2000). It is not only the physical products but also works of art. It makes the space full of spirituality by ingenious display and arrangement, but the absence of ornamental display will be vapid. It will have artistic effect of surprise, full of vitality, and revitalizing brightness by adorning a few of lacquer furniture in the room.

2.1 Environmental protection of materials

Woody material and natural lacquer were becoming the material of first selection for lacquer furniture. In the environmental friendliness, wood has “4R” characteristics (reduce, reuse, recycle, renew), which is considered with material of humanity characteristics. Woody materials have been used for making furniture that has excellent regulating action for interior microclimate environment and improves the quality of human life. Raw lacquer is a natural paint and natural organic compound, has a reputation as king of all paints (Figure 3 and 4). Raw lacquer is human treasure endowed by nature, and has so many excellent properties that general synthetic paint can't match. The ancients found raw lacquer, and used it to decorate bamboo and wood wares, which were widely used in all aspects of life as the important technologic coating.



Fig.3 Lacquer tree



Fig.4 Raw lacquer

2.2 Artistry

Lacquer furniture with good properties, can be decorated on wood, bamboo, metal, glass and cloth, etc. It decorated all kinds of commodity to meet personalized need, which have not only the beautiful appearance but also many beautiful potential. These beautiful potential integrates natural beauty of materials and technological beauty of artificial art, both also contains spiritual beauty of lacquer art. Through the artisan digging, fashionable element will be injected onto lacquer art constantly, got colorful reflection, and there will be more market space that can be further excavated and utilized. In addition, lacquer art can be used in combination with other

materials, which may make unexpected outcomes (Figure 5).



Fig.5 Lacquerware art

Decorative patterns of lacquer furniture are complete composition, well-proportioned, extensive subjects, content rich and beautiful patterns, and pursue artistic beauty of rhythm and rhyme. It endows combination of rich color and modern life, forming new life constantly to make the decorative patterns get modeling of rhythm harmony, structure of novel and rich, color of bright and beautiful, style of flexible and varied, which makes them richer in artistic of times.

2.3 Decorative

Throughout development history of the lacquer furniture, we can clearly see the lacquerware art form the elegant style and formal beauty after several thousand years of accumulation and exploration. As craftsmanship gradually mature, lacquer furniture not only pursues practical function, but also gradually strengthens exploration of lacquer art decoration.

Modern lacquer furniture have new breakthrough in creating design based on inherit the traditional and innovation combining with times feature of reacted national culture on lacquer furniture decorative design. Modern lacquer furniture decorative has beauty of form with intensive artistic effect to impress appreciator. According to simple or complicated demand, the composition form of lacquer furniture surface is decorative. It embodies decorative characteristics of “vivid” and “charm” by overall modeling and local decorative in relation to each other. The images of the structure achieve the ideal artistic combining with the change of time and space. Color design harmonizes and unified whole furniture, which produces different effects, such as luxuriant effects, simply effects, elegant effects, beautiful effects, bright effects.

2.4 National character

In the traditional design of creation, lacquer furniture is the art symbol of our country and national traditional culture, which has accumulated the culture, aesthetic and value concepts at a certain point in time (Kumanotani, 1995; Cooper, 1985).

Natural raw lacquer was called “magic liquid”, which gives us Oriental nation brilliant lacquer culture. Red and black not only the most representative and symbolic color for lacquerware art but also the typical color of our nation. Actually, it is the embodiment of our national views of color, and also reflects our national spirit and characteristic. In ancient times, ancestors loved red and black because the red symbolizes auspicious, festive and health, and the black symbolizes extensive and profound, steady symbol, all of which were our national character (Shen, 1991). So, we can develop our national unique artistic expression using the decoration patterns of modern lacquer furniture with the unique rhythm and artistic techniques of modern life.

2.5 Practicality

Lacquer furniture is both environmental protective and convenient when used in the life. Designers fully consider the practical function, cognitive function and aesthetic function of the traditional lacquer furniture, which makes the external form be consistent with function, and really reflects the design ideas of both form and spirit, manufacturing for use. And the modern lacquer furniture gradually deviates from practical track to pure visual aesthetic, so that appears pure spiritual modern lacquerware. It should be the perfect unity of art and technology, harmoniously and uniformly for practical and aesthetic for lacquer furniture. So, modern lacquer furniture emphasize on the high fusion of art works and practical functions in daily life (Figure 6 and 7).



Fig.6 Modern lacquer furniture



Fig.7 Modern lacquer furniture

3. Development of modern lacquer furniture

Our contemporary lacquer art has appeared out of touch with people's daily life. Lacquer is scarcely used in daily life and lacquer art is gradually going away from people, which result in downturn and atrophy for industry of lacquerware. Therefore, we should not stay in direct economic value for understanding of lacquer art, but ought to focus on cultural value and industrial value. At the same time, with the rapid development of China's economy and the improvement of consumption capacity, and the increasing need for high-grade furniture, so there is a very significance for the development of modern lacquer furniture in the information age.

Furniture is closely related to human life, and has a never retreating market. Bamboo, wood and metal are the main material for furniture, and lacquer craftwork combines with bamboo technology, woodworking and metal process in historical tradition. So it is a new approach to develop a new form of lacquer technology combining with bamboo, wood and metal. The comprehensive and fringe new form, which can be a few painted or local painted using various techniques, not only can change the inherent pattern of lacquer, but also can reduce the costs. It increases the varieties and culture grade of furniture, and is also the innovation of traditional lacquer art for adapt to the modern mass market.

To explore and utilize greater market potential, lacquer furniture can be infused elements of popularity and fashion. In addition, lacquer furniture combined with other materials to use, also will produce the unexpected results. Most of the modern industrial products are stereotyped. In fact, it will cause the unlimited business opportunities if a little changes are made on some details. Therefore, for developing lacquer furniture, there are many opportunities which are not taken into action or even still not known.

Seek a road of modern lacquer furniture industrial design by using developed mechanized, semi-mechanized, spraying and batches of lacquer furniture with keep the traditional manual work at the same time. It will be beneficially to develop on manufacture lacquerware (including synthetic coatings), mold-making (including plastic mold and the bottom formwork process), finishing (including spraying) and grinding push light (including grinding and pushing light), etc. There is a good beginning for striding forward gradually to the road of the industrial design, but it should be further practiced to sum up experience, accept modern design concept, and walk. So, it should develop and produce assorted furniture based on traditional lacquer art charm in combination with modern design concept and mechanization production methods. To meet different consumer groups' needs, and let more people understand lacquer furniture, it is necessary to combine lacquer furniture artistry and technology with manufacturability and practicability.

In a word, lacquerware art is an ancient artistic class, which still occupied the position of leading

role in many of the traditional art field. But today it is associated with the antique and collection. To make the traditional lacquer art steady progress and keep up with the times, it must walk on the road of development of variety. Because most of the traditional lacquer furniture were ancient dignified and elegance sedate, both tone or shape of which were shown slightly thick and conservative in the modern family. It is necessary to convert old lacquer art to modern furniture design, which must be combined the tradition with modern to express the international design concept (Song, 2008). Therefore, the design concepts are much more popular than the furniture and the vessel themselves in the home-design at present. So according to the modern development of Chinese furniture, the modern lacquer furniture design and development are connected to the international design concept and classical oriental styles, which makes lacquer furniture become a popular trend by combining with classic, environmental protection and fashion.

Conclusions

Lacquer furniture, reflecting a traditional culture of our Chinese nation, has the strong cohesion and is also the carrier of national thought, and has created aesthetic value with oriental characteristic. So, lacquer furniture was the pure traditional things that has several thousand years of history. To make it has the characteristics of modern lacquer art, it is better try to integrate lacquer art furniture into phases of all ages with the change of times. The media, languages, means and skills of lacquer furniture are developing in the constant changes. It absorbs, discards, inherits and innovate in the interaction among different times, different areas and different art. Furthermore, it not only keeps the fine tradition but also absorbs essence of cultures and arts with the times standards, and occupies its proper market position.

To sum up, it must be found potential from traditional lacquer furniture to seek the opportunity to develop modern lacquer furniture. With exploring and innovation of modern lacquerware art at home and abroad, the design of lacquer furniture will be integrated with the new design concept and the technique. It should be broken through ways of feeling and thinking to create the lacquer furniture as a “wisdom living” which should be collision with hearts. It not only walk more close to fashion taste of the modern residence design, but also still make the traditional culture and technology of lacquer art continue to carry forward. Hopefully, it has certain reference significance to the development of lacquer furniture. As a result, we also can realize that their influence just can’t be understated from seeking development opportunities of modern lacquer furniture. We should study it and love it with an attitude of reverence for precious cultural heritage. And the lacquerware art has beautified our life and inherited our culture all the time which should be hand down from one generation to another.

References

- Qiao, S.G. 2004. Chinese traditional craftwork—lacquer art. Zhengzhou: Daxiang Press.
- Zhang, Y. 2000. Lacquer art and environmental art. Journal of Chinese Lacquer.1(19):14-17.
- Kumanotani, J. 1995. Urushi (oriental lacquer)—a natural aesthetic durable and future-promising coating. Progress in Organic Coatings.26 (2-4):163-195.
- Cooper, E. 1985. The culture of craft production in the People's Republic of China
Anthropology of Work Review.6(1):12-15.
- Shen, F.W. 1991. The history of the traditional Chinese lacquer art. Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Song, S.S. 2008. Comparative study on lacquerware art of modern and Han Dynasty. Master Dissertation of Northeast forestry university,