

Innovative Design of Oil-Paper Umbrellas under the Background of Cultural Inheritance

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Abstract: The making of oil-paper umbrella is a kind of folk craft that once prosperous. With the rise of modern industrial technology, however, the skill gradually fades out of people's vision. Fenshui oil-paper umbrella is a living fossil of folk umbrella art in China; it should be inherited and developed. Through analyzing the shape of Fenshui umbrella, finding out its cultural implication and combining it with panda elements in Sichuan, we innovatively designed the Panda Bamboo Umbrella with different sizes, in order inherit and develop excellent traditional crafts in our country and create umbrellas with Sichuan characteristics as well as Chinese features. The innovation lies in the retaining of traditional handicraft and the linkage with distinctive cultural elements of the city. The design tries to find out a unique way of development under the background of inheriting, protecting and continuing traditional folk crafts in our country.

1. Introduction

Traditional handicraft not only reflects people's social life at that time, but also condenses the history and passes the civilization. It is the embodiment of people's aesthetic interests and emotional value.^[1] As a kind of traditional culture, the development of traditional Chinese handicraft is influenced by social changes. Because of the impact of industrial production, the invasion of foreign cultures and the drastic changes of people's living environment, the material and cultural bases on which traditional Chinese handicraft grows has been seriously impacted; the living environment has been seriously damaged. Many folk artists and crafts are disappearing; the traditional crafts are gradually declining.^[2] However, now China enters a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The national economic level and people's life quality has been significantly improved. Industrial products made on the assembly lines of large factories can no longer meet people's spiritual needs. They begin to pay attention to traditional handicrafts with historical, humanistic and artistic charm. The making of oil-paper umbrella is a traditional handicraft in China. Influenced by the development and changes of the society, it is facing challenges and opportunities in the new social environment.

2. Introduction of Fenshui Oil Paper Umbrella

2.1 The development situation

Fenshui Town of Jiangyang District, Luzhou, Sichuan Province has a history of making oil-paper umbrellas for more than 400 years. Umbrellas here enjoy profound cultural backgrounds. Now it is the only oil-paper umbrella which enjoys the title of "national intangible cultural heritage", and is praised by experts as "the living fossil of folk umbrella making craft in China". With the support of the government, in this area, the making of paper umbrellas still follows ancient skills. Because of the imitated functions of umbrella, the time-consuming and labor-consuming craft and the lack of inheritors, oil-paper umbrellas have gradually withdrawn from the mainstream market. The traditional craft is facing a severe test of being on the verge of disappearance. Therefore, in order to better inherit and develop the Fenshui oil-paper umbrella, innovative design is essential.

2.2 Introduction of the craft

Fenshui oil-paper umbrella can enter the national intangible cultural heritage list mainly because craftsmen who adhere to and completely maintain the unique traditional umbrella-making skills.^[3] The making of a Fenshui oil-paper umbrella goes through 108 processes, requires hundreds of tools and costs nearly half a month from the beginning to the end. The main processes include selecting bamboo, cutting bamboo, preparing materials, making the long rib, making the short rib, cutting paper, plate making, lithography, taping edges, mounting umbrella cover, drying, boiling oil, oiling, making umbrella pole, threading, assembling and so on.

The ribs of an oil-paper umbrella should be made of Nanzhu bamboos which have grown in deep mountains of southern Sichuan for more than three years. Various parts are connected through the traditional mortise and tenon joint method. The umbrella cover is made of two layers of specially processed leather paper and Chinese art paper, each of which is made of eight pieces with fine joints, with consideration of the heat expansion and cold contraction phenomenon. Some umbrellas have a layer of yarn inside to form three layers of umbrella cover. Hand-painted and stone-printed patterns are used. Modern innovative color printing, plant collage and tie-dyeing can also be applied. The threading process is divided into half-threading and full-threading. For an umbrella with 84 cm long, the full-threading interior crossing process requires 2800 stitches; 100 cm long umbrellas require 3800 stitches. It takes several hours to finish the full-threading process. The tung oil painted on the cover of umbrella is made from natural materials, which is friendly to the environment. After the special treatment the umbrella can prevent ultraviolet rays... Thanks to all kinds of craftsmanship and the rigorous procedures, a well-made paper umbrella can be held up 3000 times repeatedly without damage, and can be soaked in water for 24 hours but still intact. The top of the umbrella will not deform even if the user walks outside in force 5 wind. Fenshui oil-paper umbrella is the representative of the ancient Chinese oil-paper umbrella production; it is also the treasure of traditional Chinese handicraft. It is our traditional culture that cannot be forgotten or discarded.

2.3 Cultural connotation

The oil-paper umbrella of Fenshui conveys sincere wish and spiritual sustenance of people, and has profound spiritual connotation. The round umbrella has the meaning of happiness, reunion and peace. The oil-paper umbrella is made of bamboo, which has the meaning of getting better or long life. The traditional Chinese character “San (umbrella)” contains five “ren (person)”; the pronunciation of “You Zi “ can be understood as “oil paper” or “offspring”. The umbrella also implies the good wishes of “the more sons, the more happiness.” and “passing civil examinations“. Big, red umbrella popular in the ancient time also has the function of town house, ward off evil spirits and protect family members. Therefore, oil-paper umbrella is not only the daily necessities, but also the necessary dowry for marriage and a popular gift of relocation. It even became the symbol of love between the Madam White Snake and Xu Xian. The functional structure of the oil-paper umbrella embodies the wisdom of the ancients; the implication of oil-paper umbrellas is the spiritual sustenance and beautiful yearning of the ancients. To some extent, oil-paper umbrella is a perfect interpretation of traditional craft and its unique artistic spirit.

3. Innovative Design of Umbrella

3.1 Source of design ideas

As a non-material cultural heritage, Fenshui oil-paper umbrella only has a humble sales volume and less influence than Hangzhou West Lake oil-paper umbrella. In 2013, the “Zhuyu Umbrella” (Figure 1) was designed by teachers of the Industrial Design Department, Zhejiang University City College. It won the iF Design Award and the Red Dot International Industrial Design Award. Now the design has been purchased by the Paradise Umbrella Company. Many umbrella brands have also launched Chinese style umbrellas. The continuous introduction of Chinese style umbrellas shows the market trend. However, the design of these umbrellas is much the same; most of them focus on patterns. We want innovation and different Chinese characteristics. Moreover, how can we

expand the influence of Fenshui oil-paper umbrella and distinguish it from other Chinese style umbrellas? The answer is to seize local culture and innovatively design an umbrella with Sichuan characteristics.



Figure 1. The Zhuyu Umbrella

In recent years, with the increasing attention paid to giant pandas, the animal has become the cultural key of attracting network flow. Taking the data of Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in the Golden Week of National Day as an example, 443,100 visitors were received in 2018. For Chengdu, giant pandas, as a network hot spot, have gradually formed a specific symbol and become the local cultural image. ^[4] The innovative design of oil-paper umbrella is to imprint Sichuan symbols on the oil-paper umbrella. Such linkage is not simple combinations. Pandas and bamboo are reasonably matched, and have the auspicious meaning of ascension. Thus, the idea of panda bamboo umbrella was put forward.

3.2 Design description

3.2.1 Introduction of the Panda Bamboo Umbrella

The innovation and creation of traditional handicraft should be carried out from three aspects. First, we need to activate traditional handicraft and innovate materials on the basis of tradition, so that they can be applied in modern life. Second is technological innovation while maintaining core skills. Third is morphological innovation. It requires us to completely understand the essence of traditional forms. After digestion, we can absorb the quintessence and remove the dross. ^[5] The Panda Bamboo Umbrellas we designed are divided into big umbrellas and small ones (Figure 2), which can be used by adults and children. The umbrella has 16 bamboo bones with metal connectors and plastic handles. The panda is a plastic model, embracing the umbrella support (Figure 3) or the umbrella tail (Figure 4), as if climbing a tree or sitting on a branch. Most of the umbrella covers are in pure color; the process name is printed on the umbrella as a pattern. The umbrella buckles are designed according to the shape of bamboo leaves; magnets are used at both ends to hold the umbrella. The colors of umbrellas are black and white with light yellow (the color of bamboo) as well as red and green embellish.

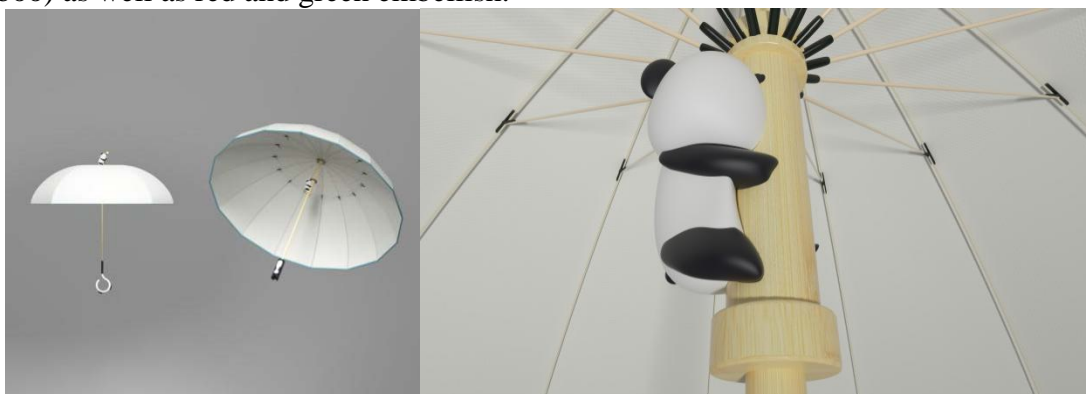


Figure 2. The Big and Small Umbrellas

Figure 3. Panda on the Umbrella Support



Figure 4. Panda on the Umbrella Tail

3.2.2 Preservation of traditional oil-paper umbrellas

Fenshui oil-paper umbrella has two characteristic crafts: lithography and threading. But it is difficult for them to integrate into modern design and production. Therefore, we extracted the overall shape of oil-paper umbrellas, using multiple umbrella bones to reproduce the feeling of oil-paper umbrella, and selecting bamboo as the main material. “Bamboo is the symbol of noble character.” Bamboo bears traditional aesthetic meaning in China. It has already surpassed the meaning of the object itself, and becomes a carrier of ideas and a symbol of culture. [6] The bamboo is also a representative material of China. At the same time, we chose the names of some umbrella making craft, such as Fusan, thread, lithograph and edge taping. After deconstruction and reorganization of the font and size, the characters became small, red seal patterns and were printed on the umbrella cover (Figure 5). The skill of Fenshui oil paper umbrella is directly transmitted. The panda bamboo umbrellas have big ones and small ones. They can be used as the family umbrella for adults and children. It contains the meaning of family reunion, as well as the wish of “the more sons, the more happiness.”



Figure 5. Patterns on Umbrella Cover

3.2.3 Innovation of oil-paper umbrellas

The innovative design of oil-paper umbrella aims to integrate traditional crafts with modern ones. So we use bamboo, metal, plastic and other modern materials. Metal and plastic are used as local embellishments to add a sense of modernity, while not destroying the ancient style of the umbrella. They also make the umbrella more durable.

The greatest innovation is the combination of the Panda image and the umbrella. Pandas hold the umbrella support or umbrella tail like climbing trees, which makes the product more interesting. Two umbrella handles are designed. One is a cylindrical handle with elements of panda's body (Figure 6); it can be used by adults. The other one is a circular handle designed according to the figure of panda head (Figure 7); it can be used by children. The Abstract.umbrella handles meet the

aesthetic needs of consumers. The shapes of umbrella handles are designed according to ergonomics. They are suitable for adults and children since they hold the umbrella in different ways. Pandas are lovely and rare. The link between oil-paper umbrella and panda is the collision of two hotspots. Panda IP stimulates the new vitality of oil-paper umbrellas on the spiritual and cultural level. Bamboo umbrellas with pandas can be used as city gifts with Sichuan characteristics and become famous regional brands.



Figure 6. Umbrella Handle for Adults Figure 7. Umbrella Handle for Kids

3.3 Design concept

The idea we want to convey is to “design products with emotions, thoughtfulness and regional characteristics”. The application of traditional handicraft products in our daily life can eliminate the indifference brought by industrial products and arouse people's emotional sustenance for the handicraft quality of daily necessities.^[7] Umbrellas are life necessities. They can not only meet the functional and aesthetic needs of consumers, but also serve as a carrier of cultural and emotional transmission. They can bring people a sense of cultural belonging. When you see bamboo umbrellas with pandas in many industrial umbrellas, will you have a kind of cordial feeling? Every nation has its own special symbols to display its own culture. The products made in China should have Chinese symbols or Chinese elements.^[8] The Panda Bamboo Umbrella shows the characteristic culture in Sichuan as well as the characteristic quality of China. It can go abroad and represent Chinese products.

4. Conclusion

Chinese traditional handicraft is the inexhaustible source of our design. During the inheritance and development, we should take the essence and discard the dross, and actively integrate excellent traditional elements into the modern life of the public. The Panda Bamboo Umbrella retains the main functions and forms of traditional umbrellas. At the same time, the designers actively search for featured regional culture symbols, and gather multiple network hotspots. It is not only an innovative design of Fenshui oil-paper umbrella, and also an idea of inheriting excellent traditional cultures.

With the development of economic globalization, Chinese traditional culture has been greatly impacted. It is very important to take effective measures to inherit and develop excellent traditional handicrafts. How to convey the connotation and qualities of local culture through contemporary design methods is a question worthy of contemporary designers' consideration.^[9]

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