Seeking Modern National Design from Traditional National Art

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Abstract. By comparing the advantages between traditional culture and national art, this thesis analyzes the status of national art in modern design. It then points out that as the essence of Chinese civilization, national art has been created after a long time, and that traditional culture and national art, as long as endowed modern design ideas, can reproduce and show their national feature, becoming world-famous Chinese designs with Chinese feature.

National art is the art created by the forefathers in the production and living. Every national artwork contains our ancestors’ understanding and reorganization on lives, nature and eternity, reflecting their realization on beauty. Because of the difference of their living environment of geography, nature and humanity, national art also presents different manifestations and creations. The forefathers, who sought water and grass to live, created splendid ceramic culture and farming civilization, while those who lived on the center of grassland created wonderful nomadic civilization. Created in the process of production, living and laboring, these art forms have been enriched, inherited and innovated, becoming the root of Chinese civilization and the ultimate source sought by designers in their work.

1. National Art is the Object Sublimation Rooted in Chinese Hearts

As the object sublimation of people’s fighting against the nature, national art reflects Chinese understanding and recognition of the nature. It both has plain conception of nature and contains deep moral philosophy. In the broad and rich Chinese land, the formation of every nationality has identity.

The national artworks and designs, which were originated from Chinese traditional culture, have the impression of eras. A primitive society, restricted by people’s recognition of the nature, human’s totem worship can be reflected on the vessel shape or on their patterns. In the Shang and Zhong Dynasties, people could recognize life and death to a limited degree, so they were keen on the use of sacrificial vessels and their decorations. During the period of Jin, Wei and Southern & Northern Dynasties, the spreading of Buddhism into China led to the development of the worshiping statues, making Honeysuckle patterns start to be used in decoration. The prosperous Tang Dynasty incorporated varieties of culture from various parts of the world, presenting all-embracing cultural feature.

No matter in which dynasty, traditional Chinese culture had their own unique methods and techniques to interpret, forming well-known manifestations of art. Take traditional national colored paper-cut as an example, it seeks the formal beauty of Chinese national decoration in design; it emphasizes symmetry, balance and stabilization in composition of picture; and it colors exaggeratedly and shows strong emotions. Take Chinese oil painting as another example; it mainly uses scattered points to compose the picture, the painters pay great attention to the techniques such as well-designed between-lines, illusory accompanying with material objects, density and spacing utilized properly. These manifestations of traditional national art embodied the five-thousand-year cultural context.
2. Cultural Confidence is the Fundamental of National Art

Art, like a big tree, has its root, taking root in its own cultural root and growing up healthily. The deeper the foundation, the more nutrition it can absorb from the nature. In this way can it grow into a big tree with luxuriant foliage. Despite different means of presentation, techniques of expression and methods of thinking existing between modern designs and national art, they have the same feeling expression, dissemination purpose and aesthetic guidelines, which not only provides the integrating point for the modern designs learning from national art but also found the breakthroughs for the modernization of national art.

With the increasingly deepen marketization, some modern design practitioners regard national art as rotten and declining social productions. They neglect it and cut thoroughly the linking between national art and modern art. However, they fully accept Western thoughts and design thinking, blindly submitting to Western design ideas. This is a national disaster. Experiencing countless national integration, the Chinese civilization with a history of five thousand years has continuously developed and grew and becomes the main role of Chinese civilization. A lot of Western artists marvel at it. Should we Chinese discharge and disregard it?

While we highly praise and follow the example of Western art, some Western artists and designers seek their creating inspiration in Chinese culture. From the history of art, the main art and culture in and abroad have learned from traditional Chinese national art. For example, Gustav Klimt, an Austrian artist, not only used Chinese lunar New Year paintings, ceramics, designs and ornamentations of embroidery to ornament his works, but boldly utilized the techniques of manifestation, whose feathers are exaggerated coloring and patterning designs. Picasso, a world-famous master of Cubism and Modern Art, was deeply influenced by the three-point perspective technique of traditional Chinese painting, and the characters in his work named Guernica appears in one picture from different angles of perspectives, which breaks temporal and spatial limits and creates works with third dimensions.

In fact, the development of national art needs to cultivate the people’s national consciousness and national aesthetics. As a saying puts it, life is the best teacher. The psychological symbols originating from life and national character are doomed to be accepted by its people, which is also an interpretation and real description of the national feather. According to The Book of Changes, national art is looking up upon the astronomical phenomena in the sky, overlooking the nature law on the ground, watching the stripes on the bodies of birds and beasts, and inspecting the landscape. Do what you are able to understand by yourself and follow suit what you can’t understand. (2015) The creations originating from life but beyond life are people’s conclusion and distillation of the recognition of the nature. The stripes including auspicious clouds and winding sausage widely used by Mongolian people originated from Mongolian ancestors’ observation in their nomadic life, inherited by concluding and developing, and finally engraved on the utensil and painted on the yurt.

Many people owed the Chinese national humiliation and disaster experienced in modern history to traditional Chinese culture, therefore, there have been a blindly obedient psychology to Western culture. Historically, some enlightened Chinese have proposed that Chinese culture is the principle and Western culture is the application, as well as the movement of Western culture dissemination to China, which was a nation-salvation movement of Chinese by attempting to utilize Western advanced techniques. The remolding of national culture ignored the clearing and reservation of the culture itself, and removed some active factors of traditional culture to a large degree, therefore, a lot of traditional culture have been given up. (Zhao Nong, 2005) In fact, such blind following also appeared in Japan. However, when they sought to accept Western culture, they also felt the great threat to their Yamato culture, which can be witnessed by the proposal of Yamato Soul with Western Shadows. Nowadays, Japanese design has already got rid of the Western influence. They have taken Yamato culture as their culture essence and created new modern Japanese designs.
3. Recreate National Art with Modern Design Ideas

Art should develop together with culture. (Zong Baihua, 2017) Traditional Chinese national art, which have been inherited till nowadays, shows its eternal vitality while developing with culture. If we want to find the integration point of modern graphic design and traditional national art, we are needed to respect and explore it, inheriting and developing it. Inheriting traditional national art is not simple bringism. We should remove the coarse and false, and keep the fine and true in the light of scientific and pragmatic attitude. What we should do is not simply copying and depicting, but studying it in order to apply it. Better integrating modern designing methods with traditional national art can make national art better serve modern designs. We can deconstruct traditional national art by means of modern designs, and recompose the spiritual elements of traditional national art with modern design language. By making use of advanced techniques, we can sublimate traditional Chinese national art consciously and embody it with new era feature.

It is a disaster to attend to the trifles and neglect the essentials, which is a question the designer must think about. With the help of modern designing idea, the designer should learn to differentiate and reproduce, take example by modern design methods, and create new designs, which conform to era feature and national psychology, with new-era Chinese characteristics. Designers are the designing body. By combining material production with spiritual production consciously, they become a social product expert with more additional value. (Zhou Xiaoou, 2005). Seeking the source in creating a work can make it widespread and accept by the public.

4. Boost the Popularization and Development of National Art in with the Aid of Design Education

Design education is the process of practicing and boosting national art education. Nowadays, design education has been emphasized in most countries. America is a distinct example, which, although doesn’t possess such cultural tradition as the four countries with an ancient civilization, highly treasure their Indian and colonized culture. In 1994, America formulated The National Criteria of Design Education, which incorporates sketch, painting, sculpture, design, architecture, movie, TV, folk art, visual art, etc. into modern art. The fundamental purpose of this criteria is to build up a comprehensive knowledge and technique system and seek to fulfill whole education. Modern design education is a discipline developed upon arts and crafts according to the needs of era. With the development of science and technology, digital technology including multi-media involves in teaching, whose verisimilitude, dynamic state, subtly auditory and tactile effects and virtual reality provide unlimited possibility for our vision. All these seem to indicate that design becomes simple and easy to do because of the intervention of computers, which also accounts for why design specialty generally neglect the education of professional basic course, further accounting for why some design practitioners attach importance to modern foreign elements and abandoning their seeking and researching of national customs.

Different areas and nationalities have their own art features. It is students’ creating inspiration to command these features. What we should do is to cultivate students’ regression, transformation, fusion and assimilation of excellent national art, merging modern manifestations in order to create design works conforming to era spirit. What belong to a nation also belongs to the world. To become a good modern designer, one should learn from the national culture. Commanding the quintessence is the only way to make a favorable designing work.

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