

On the Value Guidance of Confucius' Aesthetic Thought for Design Studies

Dan Xiao¹

Faculty of Art, Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics, Lanzhou
730101, Gansu, China

ABSTRACT: Confucius' aesthetic thoughts, with "perfection in all aspects" as the ultimate pursuit, emphasize the harmonious unity of "cultured and refined appearance". This provides profound philosophical guidance and aesthetic inspiration for the field of design. This article elaborates on the connotations of the two concepts of "perfection in all aspects" and "cultured and refined appearance", and analyzes their influence on the development of design from aspects such as the aesthetic pursuit of design, the relationship between function and form, the shaping of cultural connotations, and the construction of design ethics. Furthermore, it reveals the value leadership role of the concepts of "perfection in all aspects" and "cultured and refined appearance" in Confucius' aesthetic thoughts on design.

KEYWORDS - Confucian aesthetics; design studies; perfection; well-cultivated and decent; value leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, there emerged a situation where various schools of thought rose one after another and engaged in fierce debates. This was a prosperous era for ancient Chinese culture. Confucius was a renowned statesman and educator during this period, and he was also the first thinker in Chinese history to advocate aesthetic education (Youwei, 1993). In "The Analects", he not only expounded his philosophical and political ideas, but also presented his aesthetic thoughts and viewpoints.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CONNOTATIONS OF CONFUCIUS' "PERFECTION IN EVERY ASPECT" AND "GRACEFUL AND WELL-BRED"

(1) The connotation of "excellent in every aspect"

"The perfect and flawless" comes from the "Analects of Confucius - Odes": "The Master said, 'The Odes of Shao are perfect in beauty and also perfect in propriety' (Confucius, 2019). The "beauty" in artistic form is something that Confucius valued. He emphasized the aesthetic qualities of artistic forms, such as the harmony and beauty of the melody, rhythm, and tone color in music. When appreciating music, he had a keen perception and high requirements for the formal elements like the performance skills and expressiveness of the music. He believed that a good artistic work must first have a beautiful form, which can provide an auditory or visual enjoyment for the audience. The "goodness" in moral content is mainly reflected in moral values and ethical norms in Confucius' thought. It requires that the thoughts, emotions, and values conveyed by artistic works must conform to the social moral standards and ethical principles, and should have positive educational significance and positive guiding role.

The concept of "perfection" in Confucian aesthetics represents the highest pursuit of beauty, which is the unity of beauty and goodness(Qi,2024).In the field of design, this means that design should not only strive for aesthetic appearance but also focus on the moral and functional completeness within. "Goodness" represents the social value, moral concepts and humanistic concern inherent in artistic works, and is the inner soul of the works. "Beauty" focuses on the harmony, elegance and uniqueness of the artistic form, and is the external manifestation of the works. This concept requires artistic creation to not only pursue the aesthetic beauty of the form, but also to pay attention to the moral elevation of the content. Confucius' "perfection in both form and content" also embodies an aesthetic and moral realm that transcends utilitarianism. It is not for the pursuit of material benefits or external fame and fortune, but for achieving inner satisfaction and spiritual elevation. In this realm, people can appreciate and create beauty with pure aesthetic eyes and moral conscience, and practice goodness, thereby obtaining a higher level of spiritual pleasure and spiritual sustenance.

(2) The meaning of "cultured and well-mannered"

The balance between form and substance. Confucius advocated "wen qi binbin", which means emphasizing that personal cultivation should achieve a perfect combination and balance between external manifestation and internal essence, avoiding excessive emphasis on either aspect(Olberding,2016).The pursuit of all-round development. A person with good upbringing should not only possess excellent qualities such as sincerity, kindness, and integrity internally, but also be able to showcase their own style and charm through external behaviors, clothing, and cultural literacy, achieving consistency between appearance and inner self, and comprehensive development both inside and outside. This enables the inner beauty and outer beauty to complement each other and enhance each other's charm.

"Zhi" refers to the core and foundation of a thing, and in design studies, it can be compared to the functional, structural, and material elements of a product. "Wen" refers to the external embellishment, decoration, and presentation form, such as the appearance design, color matching, and pattern decorations of the product. Confucius believed that only when "wen" and "zhi" are mutually compatible and complement each other can an ideal state be achieved. Overemphasizing "zhi" while neglecting "wen" will make the thing appear crude and simple. While overly pursuing "wen" while ignoring "zhi" will result in being overly superficial and insincere. Only when the two are unified is it the ideal of a Confucian gentleman. Thus, Confucius' idea of "wen and zhi being harmonious" is inseparable from the essence and ideals of human beings and their all-round development(Wenzhong& Enping,2010).

III."PERFECTION IN EVERY ASPECT", THE GUIDING ROLE OF CONFUCIAN AESTHETICS IN THE AESTHETIC AND VALUE PURSUIT OF DESIGN STUDIES

(1)The improvement of aesthetic standards

Confucius' concept of "complete perfection" is not merely about superficial form refinement; rather, it is combined with the concept of "complete excellence". In the field of design, this requires designers to not only pay attention to the aesthetic aspects such as appearance and color coordination, but also to ensure that the design works contain rich and positive cultural, emotional, and functional elements. The harmonious unity of "beauty" and "goodness" means that the external form and the inner artistic conception should be able to be unified, which is the true "beauty" and sets a higher aesthetic standard for design studies(Guo,2015).In the field of design, this means that design works should not only focus on the external aesthetic appeal, but also embody the internal moral values and social responsibility(Verbeek,2008).

Take the Horizon series posters designed by Naoyoshi Hara for MUJI as an example. The overall visual effect is simple and pure. However, behind this lies profound ideas, namely returning to nature and pursuing authenticity, guiding people to re-examine the essence of life and discarding excessive complexity and luxury. This design conveys rich spiritual connotations through a simple form, evoking emotional resonance and reflection from the audience, and enhancing the aesthetic value and social influence of the design. It prompts designers to continuously improve their aesthetic literacy and cultural background, striving to create design works with profound connotations and artistic appeal. "Perfection" encompasses both the requirements for the creator's

skills and character. In the field of design, this means that designers should not merely focus on the mastery of techniques, but also pay attention to the improvement of their moral character (Findeli, 1994). From the perspective of the design process, honesty in design and the prevention of plagiarism are basic moral requirements. As for the design outcome, the work should demonstrate concern for users, society, and the environment.

(2) Guidance of value pursuit

The internalization of ethics and morality, the concept of "goodness" in Confucian aesthetics prompts design studies to focus on the well-being of humanity and the sustainable development of society, making design a behavior with a sense of social responsibility. Design works should not only have an aesthetically pleasing appearance but also embody moral values (Zande, 2011). In terms of packaging design, we should reduce excessive packaging and adopt environmentally friendly and biodegradable materials. This not only aligns with the concept of "goodness", but also helps guide consumers to form a correct consumption view, making the design a carrier for spreading positive energy and moral values. For example, Dyson's bladeless fan design, from a functional perspective, employs a unique air multiplier technology to provide smooth and powerful airflow, while avoiding the safety hazards caused by traditional fan blades.

In terms of design, the simple and smooth lines, exquisite craftsmanship, and the color combination with a strong technological feel give this product a high aesthetic value. This product not only meets consumers' pursuit of high-quality life, but also reflects attention to users' safety and health, embodying the value pursuit of "perfection". This shift in value pursuit has led design to gradually move from a purely commercial behavior towards a direction that pays more attention to humanistic care and social responsibility, making positive contributions to the progress and development of society. It ensures that design is no longer merely an act to satisfy the interests of individuals or a few people, but also takes into account the impact on the entire society (Batista & Alvarez, 2022).

IV. "GRACEFUL AND WELL-BEHAVED", THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONFUCIAN AESTHETICS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNCTION AND FORM IN DESIGN STUDIES

(1) Balance between function and form

"Renaissance grace and propriety" emphasizes the moderation and harmony of both aspects, indicating that function and form mutually restrict and influence each other, jointly driving the design towards a higher quality direction. This concept provides beneficial inspiration for design studies in handling the relationship between function and form. In design, function is the core and foundation, like the intrinsic essence of "quality", while form is the external manifestation, similar to the auxiliary role of "artistic expression". Renaissance grace and propriety, the path of balance. Good design should pursue the perfect combination of function and form, that is, "renaissance grace and propriety". The two are interdependent and mutually promoting, and neither can be neglected.

Overemphasizing functionality while neglecting form will make the design appear monotonous and crude. On the other hand, overly pursuing form while ignoring functionality will result in a design that is flashy but impractical. The modern furniture design of Denmark is a perfect example of grace and propriety. It not only focuses on the functionality and practicality of the furniture, but also emphasizes the simplicity, naturalness, and elegance of the form aesthetics. Through exquisite craftsmanship and high-quality materials, it perfectly integrates function and form, creating numerous classic furniture works that are deeply loved by people. Function and form should be considered as an organic whole, complementing each other. Starting from the overall perspective, ensure that the form and function can be perfectly integrated at every detail, forming a unified style and image.

(2) The elevation of form to function

The elevation of form over function in the phrase "wen qi binbin" represents a design concept that integrates function and form organically and promotes each other. Its core lies in through meticulous design of the form, while meeting the basic functions, further enhancing and expanding the connotation and value of the function, thereby creating more attractive design works. The optimization of form based on function means that function is the "wen" (the formality), which is the core and foundation, while form is the "qi" (the quality).

A chair must first meet the functional requirement of "sitting". On this basis, through elegant lines, appropriate color combinations, and high-quality material texture, the form is shaped to make the chair not only practical but also have aesthetic value, enhancing the user's experience and achieving the transformation from merely meeting functional needs to enjoying a pleasant and fulfilling experience. There is a mutual dependence and mutual restraint relationship between form and function. "Renesant quality and grace" precisely emphasizes this harmonious unity. In design, one cannot ignore the function and pursue the ostentatiousness of the form alone, nor can one only focus on the function and neglect the aesthetic appeal of the form. Only when the form and function achieve a perfect balance and coordination can the function be elevated, creating a design work that is both practical and beautiful (Hekkert,2006).

V. CONFUCIAN AESTHETICS' SHAPING OF THE CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS AND DESIGN ETHICS OF DESIGN STUDIES

(1) The inheritance and innovation of cultural connotations

Confucius emphasized "benevolence" and "propriety", which can be translated into respect for social morality and norms in design. Confucian aesthetic thoughts, as an important part of Chinese traditional culture, provide rich cultural resources and inspiration for design studies. Public facility design takes into account the needs of different groups of people, embodying "benevolence". The design of traditional ceremonial items follows specific forms, inheriting the cultural connotation of "propriety", while also innovating in materials and craftsmanship, integrating ancient culture with modern life, and allowing moral culture to be continued and developed through design. Chinese designer Zhang Yonghe designed the "Yifeng Residence", combining the traditional quadrangle courtyard layout with modern building materials and technologies. The exterior of the building adopts traditional architectural elements such as blue bricks and white tiles, reflecting the restraint and subtlety of Chinese traditional culture, while the interior design fully considers the lifestyle and needs of modern people, using open layouts and large-span structures, etc., modern design techniques, making the building not only have the cultural charm of tradition but also meet the living needs of contemporary people.

The inheritance of the "cultivating both virtue and elegance" concept is reflected in the book binding design. The text content is of high quality and rigorous, and the cover design incorporates traditional calligraphy and painting elements to showcase the theme style of the book. It also combines modern printing techniques to present a novel form, enabling the book to attract readers in the process of cultural inheritance and promoting the innovation of cultural dissemination and design. The inheritance of the "exquisite perfection" moral value, where "goodness" is the core of Confucius' aesthetics, embodies profound moral concepts. In traditional handicraft design, embroidery and patterns often select stories or symbols with auspicious meanings, moral teachings, or punishments, conveying values such as family ethics and moral cultivation. These have endured through the ages and are still present today, allowing traditional moral culture to be passed down in the design medium, maintaining the spiritual thread of social culture. The continuation of aesthetic traditions: the symmetrical, harmonious, and simple aesthetic paradigms formed during Confucius' era are inherited in design. The layout of Chinese architecture emphasizes symmetry and balance, and garden design pursues the beauty of natural harmony. These traditional aesthetic concepts are still reflected in modern architectural and landscape design, interpreted with modern techniques while retaining the unique aesthetic genes of the national culture.

(2) The construction of design ethics

The concepts of "perfection" and "cultured and well-behaved" also contribute to the establishment of the ethical framework of design studies. In today's era of growing environmental awareness, many furniture designers pay attention to the structural rationality and service life of furniture during the design process, avoiding excessive

design and resource waste. This design approach takes into account both the practicality and aesthetic appeal of the product, while also adhering to the principles of environmental protection and sustainable development, embodying the moral concepts and responsibility consciousness in Confucian aesthetics.

Confucius' "Tao of Moderation" advocates for balance and appropriateness (Wang, 2025). In the design process, this means balancing the relationships between functionality and form, economy and aesthetics, innovation and tradition, and avoiding the excessive pursuit of one aspect while neglecting others, to achieve harmony and sustainable development in the design. For example, in architectural design, both the practicality of space and the aesthetics of the appearance as well as the coordination with the surrounding environment should be considered. Confucian aesthetics emphasizes "benevolence", which is reflected in design ethics as the concern for people. Design should be based on the perspective of the users, considering their needs, safety and comfort. For instance, in the design of medical products, the convenience of use by patients and their psychological feelings should be fully considered to alleviate their pain and stress, embodying the benevolent spirit of the design. "Ritual" and the concept of regulating order, the order and normative ideas contained in "ritual" are helpful in establishing industry norms and standards for design. Adhering to certain moral principles, avoiding bad behaviors such as plagiarism and shoddy workmanship, ensuring the quality and originality of design works, and maintaining the healthy development of the design industry.

VI. CONCLUSION

Confucius' aesthetic thoughts provide rich value guidance for design studies. Through the pursuit of "perfection" and the practical path of "cultivating both virtue and elegance", design studies can better achieve their pursuit of beauty in moral, form, and social aspects, promote the comprehensive development of design works, and provide valuable value guidance for the development of design studies. By analyzing design works, it can be seen that aiming for "perfection" enables design studies to continuously improve in aesthetic and value pursuits, focusing on human well-being and sustainable social development. Following the path of "cultivating both virtue and elegance", it helps designers grasp the relationship between function and form in design practice, achieve the perfect integration of function and form, and shape the cultural connotation of design works and construct design ethics. In the future, we should deeply explore the connotation and value of Confucius' aesthetic thoughts, combine them with modern design concepts and methods, and promote the continuous innovation and development of design studies in the integration of tradition and modernity.

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