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# Research on the Integration of Chinese Aesthetic Thought into Contemporary University Design Courses

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**Abstract:** Under the background of the collision and integration of tradition and modernity, Chinese aesthetic thought has a subtle relationship with contemporary design. The integration of Chinese aesthetic thought and contemporary design has become a key path to enhancing cultural confidence and innovative competitiveness. This paper analyzes the important ideas of Chinese aesthetics and their significance, combines design theory and educational theory, and proposes relevant ideas and practical methods for curriculum system reconstruction and teaching method innovation. It explores the transformation strategies of the importance of traditional cultural genes of Chinese aesthetic thought in modern design teaching, and ultimately constructs a design education system that combines cultural depth and contemporary adaptability.

**Keywords:** Chinese aesthetic thought; Design education; Interdisciplinary practice; Sustainable design

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The majority of design programs in Chinese design institutions have long adhered to the Western design teaching system. When students first engage in design, they mainly refer to the Western design thinking model and apply Western design methods and theories. Under the dominance of the Western design paradigm, Chinese designers serve Chinese consumers using Western design models, leading to a predicament of cultural subjectivity loss in Chinese design education. The “14th Five-Year Plan” for cultural development in China emphasizes “promoting the creative transformation of outstanding traditional Chinese culture”, providing a strategic orientation for design education. This prompts us to consider the need to reconstruct the foundation of Chinese aesthetics in contemporary design programs.

### 1.2 Research Significance

Integrating Chinese aesthetic thought into contemporary university design courses has two significant meanings: on one hand, it is about the significance of cultural inheritance. Contemporary design programs in universities mainly teach Western design theories and design aesthetic principles, neglecting traditional Chinese aesthetic thought. Our valuable cultural resources have not been passed down. By integrating Chinese aesthetic thought into design education, it can be widely disseminated and applied; on the other hand, it is about design innovation empowerment. It aims to break the traditional aesthetic system's confinement to museums and books, revitalize its modern vitality, respond to the development of modern globalization design with Eastern wisdom, and apply the profound Chinese aesthetic thought to modern design.

## 2. A Brief Analysis of the Integration of Chinese Aesthetic Thought and Modern Design

### 2.1 Philosophical Foundation

The core of “Harmony between Man and Nature” emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, opposing the

dichotomy of subject and object. Its implications for contemporary design are that design innovation requires sustainable design, ecological design, and biomimetic design. The core of “Following the Way of Nature” is to take natural laws as the highest criterion and pursue “non-action yet nothing is left undone”. In design, one should respect natural laws, retain natural forms, and preserve non-symmetrical aesthetics, irregular layouts, and the original texture of materials. “The Middle Way” refers to “excess is as bad as deficiency”, pursuing balance and moderation. In design, one needs to consider the following: the unity of function and form, the harmony of colors, and comfort.

## 2.2 Core Aesthetic Categories

Chinese aesthetic thought places great emphasis on “Yi Jing” (artistic conception), whose core is the transcendent aesthetic realm of the integration of scene and emotion, such as “words have an end but meaning is endless”. The Song Dynasty landscape paintings and the spatial narrative of Suzhou gardens all illustrate the beauty of artistic conception, while Western aesthetic design rarely embodies artistic conception. However, it can be reflected in works of graphic design, digital media design, and modern immersive digital art. At the same time, “the interplay of the real and the virtual” is also an important way of expressing Chinese aesthetics, whose core is that the blank space of the virtual and the void gives the real entity an imaginative space. The application of negative space in modern UI interface design and the interaction of light and shadow in modern buildings such as the Suzhou Museum are all manifestations of the interplay of the real and the virtual.

The “Six Principles of Painting” proposed by Xie He is the earliest systematic painting theory in China, establishing the evaluation system and creation criteria for traditional painting. They include: 1. Vitality and Rhythm, which means that the work should have an inner vitality and spiritual rhythm, and the picture should convey a transcendent charm and artistic conception beyond the form, which is the highest pursuit of art; 2. Bone Method of Brushwork, emphasizing the strength and technique of brushwork, like calligraphy, it pays attention to the bone strength, rhythm, and expressiveness of lines, reflecting the painter’s skill and personality; 3. Correspondence to the Object, requiring accurate depiction of the object’s form and characteristics, emphasizing the foundation of realism, but not mechanical replication, but rather capturing the essential features; 4. Application of Color According to Categories, giving colors based on the category and characteristics of the object, pursuing natural truthfulness while allowing subjective refinement to form harmonious color combinations; 5. Composition and Arrangement, referring to the composition and layout of the picture, which should be clear in hierarchy, with the interplay of the real and the virtual, achieving overall balance and rhythm through ingenious arrangement; 6. Copying and Transferring, which not only refers to copying the classics of predecessors to learn techniques but also observing nature to “transfer” the spirit of the object, emphasizing the importance of inheritance and sketching. These aesthetic thoughts are often reflected in modern design and guide the design ideas and concepts of Chinese designers.

## 2.3 Art Practice Theory

“Learn from Nature and Express from the Heart” emphasizes that artistic creation requires observing nature while integrating subjective perception. “Garden Theory” (The Craft of Gardens by Ji Cheng) emphasizes “ingenious borrowing and appropriate placement”, highlighting the design wisdom of adapting to local conditions. Many modern landscape designs and product designs based on objects embody this concept. “Beautiful Materials and Skillful Workmanship” (The Book of Workmanship) states that “Heaven has its time, Earth has its energy, materials have their beauty, and workmanship has its skill”, emphasizing the unity of materials, craftsmanship, and time and space. Some traditional lacquerware combined with modern composite materials and the innovative application of regional materials are examples of this.

# 3. The Path of Integrating Chinese Aesthetics into Design Curriculum Education Practice

## 3.1 Course Module Design

### 3.1.1 Theoretical courses:

By interpreting Chinese aesthetic thought, students should understand its connotation and importance, and then compare and contrast it with Western design aesthetics and principles, guiding students to have a critical acceptance and understanding. The difference in design philosophy between Bauhaus’s “form follows function” and “Yuan Ye”’s “although created by humans, it seems like it originated from heaven”.

### 3.1.2 Practical courses:

Chinese aesthetics has a large number of excellent works, which can be analyzed and explained as practical cases. Some aesthetic ideas can be taught through experiments to translate traditional and modern ideas. Intangible cultural heritage digitization transforms Paper Cuttings “Yin Yang engraving” techniques into negative space training for graphic design. Cross media creation can take the

“24 solar terms” as a clue to complete the whole process project from solar term color extraction to dynamic poster design, so as to achieve innovative practical education.

### 3.2 Course Practice Cases

Mr. Lin Hongyu, a jewelry designer, is skilled in applying Chinese aesthetic elements and ideas to jewelry design. As shown in Figure 1, the jewelry piece is designed using Chinese aesthetics, integrating European style hidden inlay craftsmanship with Chinese landscape color matching. The interplay between reality and virtuality is reflected in the seamless brushwork, and the combination of Chinese and Western elements is reflected in the landscape. The balance between poetry and painting is concrete and abstract, conveying the beauty of imagery and imagination. The main design of Figure 2 is based on wooden materials, designed according to the shape, drawing inspiration from the “Garden Theory” (calculated in “Yuanye”), which emphasizes “ingenuity in borrowing and refinement in the body”, reflecting the design wisdom of adapting to local conditions.

### 3.3 Suggestions for constructing an educational ecosystem

The teacher training program offers an “Aesthetics Mentor Workshop” and invites philosophical scholars and designers to give joint lectures. Enhance the teaching of Chinese aesthetic literacy and establish a “Chinese Aesthetics Digital Library” to open source and share traditional color spectra, architectural modules, and other data, promoting the integration of Chinese aesthetics with new designs.

## 4. Summary

The deep integration of Chinese aesthetics and design education needs to go beyond the level of “formal reference” and delve into the philosophical and methodological perspectives. By building a complete system of series, we aim to cultivate a new generation of designers who can not only engage in dialogue with the international design context and move towards a culturally conscious design education future, but also demonstrate Eastern wisdom. Ultimately, we aim to achieve the cultural vision of “each beauty is its own beauty, beauty is its beauty, beauty is shared, and the world is harmonious”.

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Jiachen Yang , female, member of the Communist Party of China, graduate student, lecturer, graduated from Northwest University, currently working at the Jewelry School of Shaanxi International Business and Trade College, mainly teaching professional courses such as product design investigation and research methods, product design performance, etc.