

Research on Theoretical Innovation of Chinese Design Based on the Perspective of Life History Theory

Yao Wang^{1*}

¹ Zhengzhou Business University, Gongyi, Zhengzhou, China

Email Address

meiliamy00@qq.com (Yao Wang)

*Correspondence: meiliamy00@qq.com

Received: 15 December 2023; **Accepted:** 17 January 2024; **Published:** 31 January 2024

Abstract:

China's design journey has been a difficult and rocky one over the past hundred years, and it has evolved to a point where it can be described as flourishing. Although great achievements have been made, the biggest problem in exploring the subjectivity discourse of Chinese design studies is that China has not formed an independent design language. Chinese culture is vast and profound, and Chinese traits will not change; it is ultimately a matter of genes, which can support the basic construction and performance of Chinese design. Only with an independent design language can Chinese designers have a voice and be able to engage in a dialogue with Western designers on an equal footing. Life history provides new theoretical innovations in design history, and different cultures form different design languages. Therefore, this paper explores the theoretical innovations in Chinese design from the perspective of life history theory, providing new ideas and methods for theoretical research in Chinese design, and promoting the construction of a culturally-based Chinese design subjectivity discourse system.

Keywords:

Life History, Design Studies, Design Theory, Innovation

1. Introduction

Chinese academics have had their own traditions since the pre-Qin period, because different civilisations have different academic traditions because of their different origins. It can be said that the history of Chinese design is the most complete and successful model in the history of the art of making things in the world before the industrial revolution, and Chinese design science established on this basis has a long historical tradition. And in the face of the current global integration of the times, Chinese design ignores the local history and culture, turning to western design to recognise the ancestor, prompting the lack of systematic theoretical support for Chinese design, and of course, can not design excellent regional design works, so find the gene of Chinese design is the fundamental way to solve the problem of Chinese design. Design is closely related to human life, and the designs of different countries

have their regional characteristics, reflecting the diversity of human beings and cultures. Exploring China's historical lineage from the perspective of life history research, the historical design wisdom can provide a brand new perspective for design, thus promoting the innovation of Chinese design theory research. [1]

2. The Formulation and Content of Life History Theory

Life history theory is proposed by evolutionary psychology, first put forward by Mac Arthur and Wilson, which suggests that how to efficiently allocate time, resources and energy in various life activities concerning survival and reproduction is the most basic challenge that every organism on earth must face. Organisms make fundamental trade-offs between somatic and reproductive efforts in allocating time, resources, and energy that are adapted to the environment. Life-history strategies are proposed within the framework of life-history theory, and are shaped by the fact that each individual's life experiences and experiences vary, resulting in different patterns of behaviour. Ellis et al. Categorised life-history strategies as fast life-history strategies (r-selected) and slow life-history strategies (k-selected) with respect to the allocative propensities of different individuals. The fast life-history strategy refers to individuals' reproductive inputs under uncertain and unstable survival conditions, with a greater focus on boosting the number of offspring. The slow life-history strategy, on the other hand, involves selecting for relatively stable conditions and focusing more on future survival and development, with an emphasis on improving the quality of offspring. Different life history strategies applied to different survival situations are more historically relevant. [2]

Humans grow out of different life environments and family backgrounds with different character attributes and therefore develop different life history strategies. Rushton et al. have suggested that by applying life history theory to humans, their family constructions, personalities, sexual behaviour, and IQs will be interlinked to produce an overarching life history strategy. Rushton et al. have suggested that if a fast life history strategy is applied to humans, their family constructions, personalities, sexual behaviour, and IQs will be interlinked to produce an overarching life history strategy. For example, people with a fast life-history strategy have a faster rate of physiological development and earlier maturation, exhibit earlier sexual debut, have an earlier age at childbearing, and have more offspring but not as much investment in them. On the other hand, people with a slow life history strategy develop more slowly and mature later, have later sexual debut, have a later age at childbearing, have fewer offspring but are more committed to them, are less impulsive, and are more risk-averse. Factors affected by life history strategies are mainly environmental factors, childhood experiences, biological factors, etc. The world is diversified, and different peoples in each region have their own individual life history strategies, while design first originated from human activities, and is closely related to human life, with different cultures, the design genes of each region are different, which contain the materiality and culture of the region, therefore, from the perspective of life history theory to interpret the Chinese design science, it is important to understand the Chinese design science. Therefore, interpreting the origin of Chinese design from the theoretical perspective of life history can broaden the research perspective, excavate new historical veins, and realise the theoretical innovation of Chinese design history. [3]

3. Research Overview of Chinese Design History

The Industrial Revolution changed the social structure and people's way of life, shifted the handicraft form of mankind that had lasted for hundreds of years to mechanised production, and a large number of crude mechanised works appeared, so the Arts and Crafts Movement was opened in the UK, and the subsequent Art Nouveau Movement, Art Deco Movement, Modernist Design Movement, Post-Modernist Design Movement developed in Europe, America and the rest of the world. In the international design arena, only China's voice is indeed, from the perspective of Chinese design, this series of design movements did not involve the development of local Chinese culture, and its integration of Chinese elements is not much. Chinese design in the Republic of China, Huang Zuoshen, Lu Xun and others experienced the new design motives of the West's attempts to introduce the Bauhaus design education to the Chinese design academy theoretical system. During the hundred years of design transformation, the Chinese design value system was impacted by the strong western design culture, which led to the disintegration of the traditional Chinese design value system and did not form an independent design value system to guide design. In the early years, a group of artists such as Chen Zhifo and Eileen Pang studied in the West. Although they were deeply influenced by Western modernist design, they still emphasised Chinese design genes, absorbing the essence of Western design on the one hand, and on the other hand, they also advocated the promotion of Chinese design values, transforming foreign advantages into a part of Chinese design, which reflects the efforts and contributions made by our country's artistic forefathers in shaping the language of Chinese design. This also reflects the efforts and contributions made by our national art forefathers to shape the Chinese design language. However, from an objective point of view, despite the fact that some progress has been made in the study of Chinese design history in the past 100 years, there is still room for improvement, specifically in the following three aspects. [4]

3.1. *The lack of emphasis on design culture in China*

Culture is diversified, different cultures produce different designs, any culture has its own history, and creatures are diversified, so are the man-made objects produced. The fundamental way to look for Chinese design is to look for Chinese design genes. The problem of design is ultimately a human problem, so how did the early Chinese solve their own survival problems through design in the long river of history, and it is very crucial to use a historical perspective to interpret Chinese design. Looking at Western modernist design, its main design concepts are mainly concerned with the functionality and technology of design, and instead, they have neglected the traditional culture, and the design concepts that are formed without the traditional culture also have the same limitations. In today's era, the development of global economic integration is getting closer and closer, the Chinese design concept to the Western design to recognise the ancestor, ignoring the traditional Chinese culture. As one of the world's four ancient civilisations, China has a history of more than 5,000 years, and its cultural heritage is very rich, but contemporary Chinese design is manifested in the use of modern Western design concepts and the neglect of traditional Chinese culture, which is a very urgent issue, the role of China's history for design practice and research can not be ignored, so we need to find their own culture, laying the foundation for the development of Chinese design. [5]

3.2. The lack of an original design theory system in China.

On the stage of international design, Chinese design as an independent entity comes into international design late, and one of the biggest problems is that China does not have an independent design language. Most of the literature is published in English, which is from the western point of view to examine the history of Chinese design, and lack of communication with local Chinese scholars. This phenomenon is partly due to the fierce development of modern design in the west, which has a wide range of influence, and on the other hand, China's industrial level in the past was relatively backward, which led to stagnation of the design development, and at the same time, the influence of western theories is more reluctant to take the initiative to review our history and culture. On the other hand, China's industrial backwardness in the past has led to stagnation in design development, and at the same time, the influence of Western theories has made it more reluctant to review our history and culture. Of course, a few Chinese scholars have begun to participate in the discussion and research of Chinese design history and international design, showing the efforts of Chinese scholars to integrate into the mainstream system of international discourse, but China has not yet established an adequate design theoretical system, and therefore the contribution of China's modern design theoretical system is insignificant in terms of the history of design in the world, reflecting the absence of the main discourse of Chinese design, and the fact that Chinese design has not yet established its own subjective structure. Chinese design has not yet fully established its own subjective structure, and is still in a passive state. [6]

3.3. Independent design value system not yet established in China

In reflecting on the series of problems that exist in Chinese design, the first thing to focus on is design value, which is also the key to solving the problem of China's lack of design language. The West has often neglected the discussion of design value, and there is also a conflict of design value. Although global integration is getting closer now, the integrated world pattern does not promote the consistency of design values, as different countries are located in different regions, with different ideologies, different histories and cultures, their design values are also presented in different ways. China is also experiencing social, economic and cultural transformation, in the final analysis, it is the transformation of value, in the process of social transformation, social values are also changing, the establishment of new social values also marks the success of the transformation, but at present China's design value system has not been established, it is still under the domination of the Western modern design value system, and the construction of China's design value system requires the joint efforts of our generation. The construction of China's design value system requires the joint efforts of our generation.

4. Suggestions for Chinese Design Theory Innovation from the Perspective of Life History

4.1. Accumulation of historical materials: expanding the collection of basic historical materials and laying the foundation for theoretical innovation.

Conceptualising a phenomenon is inherently vague, and at the same time it is constantly generating changes as times change. Historical materials are the basis for studying historiography, and without solid and reliable historical materials, it is impossible to profoundly study historiography from multiple perspectives. Chinese

design has a long cultural history and a more complex internal structure, which cannot be interpreted too singularly. The design of each historical period is a part of Chinese design history, which involves multiple fields and disciplines and lays the foundation for the development of design in the future.

In the process of researching the history of Chinese design, we should collect information from multiple disciplines and fields, open up our horizons, and study from different perspectives. We can combine the theories of life history to study how early Chinese human beings, in the current environment and under the influence of the life events of that time, allocated and selected effective resources, and formed what kind of individual life history strategies, and thus conveyed their ideologies. This theoretical framework also provides a series of theoretical support for the study of early Chinese design history. Understanding the similarities and differences of artefacts created by human beings out of biological instincts, for example, the earliest Paleolithic creations of human beings were stone axes, which were produced by early human beings out of their instincts for life and the need for survival, and were eventually transformed into a sense of value. The study of design history can be understood as a continuous answer to the questions of different historical periods, and each answer is innovative and rich in the study of design history. [7]

4.2. Perspective development: switching from “macro” to “micro”

Chinese design is a multi-dimensional open system. Throughout the history of Chinese design development, it firstly draws sustenance from the thoughts of ancient sages to lay the foundation of design history, then evolves from the Western learning of the modern times, gradually progresses in the controversy of reform and opening up, and is constantly polished in the practice of modern design. Chinese design has a strong sense of inclusiveness, and is constantly learning from and applying advanced Western design experiences. China has a long history of design, the predecessor of the history of design is the history of Chinese craft and beauty, the early design is done by craftsmen individually or organised individually, its degree of specialisation, production process and audience are strictly programmed, but the development of design from different periods of time is also a complex social reality, and the field of its design is also more extensive.

In recent years, the research on Chinese design history has shown a tendency to shift to the “micro”, such as Mr. Li Lixin’s study on the new perspective of design history and material culture life of the Six Dynasties, which analyses the new pattern formed by the Six Dynasties’ artifacts design in the genetics and innovations that is different from that of the Han Dynasty’s material culture traditions, which reflects the research of “vision downward”. The research perspective of “vision downward” is reflected in this study. It is difficult to realise the theoretical innovation of Chinese design history in general only by the viewpoint innovation and practical breakthroughs made by individual scholars of colleges and universities. Therefore, on the basis of the current foundation of Chinese design history, we should encourage the innovation of viewpoints such as the “individual life history view”, and broaden the research field to further incorporate the material and cultural life of the people in different historical periods into the scope of research design history, so as to promote the three-dimensionality and richness of the research and perfect it.

4.3. Innovative research methods and diversification of research methods.

Fang Sumei points out that the trend of interdisciplinary integration has emerged rapidly in Chinese historiography and has become a major historical research trend since 1990. Multidisciplinary research refers to a way of applying theories and methods of different disciplines to expand the researchers' research perspectives and fields, which focuses not only on the innovation of research methods, but more importantly on the fact that applying multidisciplinary research results and methods to conduct research can promote the development of the integrity of the object of study, thus laying a foundation for the essence of the object of study. essence of the research object.

In recent years, the research on the history of Chinese design has been dominated by the vertical mode, while the horizontal mode is the key to strengthen the innovation of design theory. The research results and methods of life history theory can be used to conduct horizontal research in the study of design history, combining the design of different periods with the social atmosphere, ideology, economic consumption, culture and other factors at that time, digging out the historical vein of design, searching for the design concepts rooted in the practice of design in China, and understanding the environment of different material cultures from the point of view of life history, so that the researcher is forced to resort to economics, Sociology, psychology and other disciplines, which determines the inextricable link between design and other disciplines, as a way to promote the progress of realising the theoretical innovation of Chinese design. Therefore, the research on the theoretical innovation of Chinese design should integrate the strengths of multiple disciplines and promote the construction of the subjective discourse of Chinese design.

5. Conclusions

To construct the discourse system of Chinese design, it is necessary to construct the Chinese design language first. To innovate Chinese design theory, it is necessary to start from enriching the research of design history and theories, opening up the research perspectives, and integrating the strengths of multi-disciplines, so as to push forward the construction of the main discourse system of Chinese design with Chinese culture as the base.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Li, L.X. A defence of the source and flow of Chinese design studies. *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute(Art and Design)*, 2016, 02, 1-4.
- [2] Lin, Z.C.; Wang, Y. Life history theory:An evolutionary perspective on life development. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 2015, 23(04), 721-728.
- [3] Fang, S.M. Research on Chinese ethnic history in the last decade or so. *Research on Ethnic History*, 2005, 2, 95-105.

- [4] Lv, P.T. Reconceptualising the Chinese experience: A working basis for constructing a discourse system of subjectivity in Chinese design studies. *Fashion Designer*, 2023, Z1, 27-28.
- [5] Gong, Y.J.; Wu, S. From “localisation” to “subjectivity”-Resources and prospects for the construction of a discourse system of Chinese design subjectivity. *Creativity and Design*, 2022, 06, 24-32.
- [6] Shi, C.X. The Construction of Discourse System of Subjectivity in Chinese Design--Theoretical Value and Realistic Reference of Zhu Shuai's “A Hundred Years of Chinese Design Research”. *Fashion Designer*, 2023, 01, 23-28.
- [7] Zhou, B. The Context and Path of Research on the History of Modern Chinese Design. *Art Research*, 2020, 05.



© 2024 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)