

Modern Tea Room Furniture Design Based on the “Unity of Heaven and Humanity” Philosophy in the *I Ching*: A Design Translation Approach

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Received: 5 June 2026; **Accepted:** 25 June 2026; **Published:** 16 July 2026

Abstract:

Traditional Chinese culture has gained increasing attention in recent years. Eastern lifestyles have also become more popular. As a result, contemporary tea rooms are no longer only places for drinking tea. They have gradually developed into spaces for cultural activities, social communication, leisure, and emotional relaxation. Furniture is an important part of these spaces. It provides practical support for daily use. It also helps create the atmosphere of the tea room and express cultural meanings. Many tea room furniture products still have some limitations. Traditional cultural elements are often used only as visual symbols. Similar design styles can be seen across different products. Ecological concerns are sometimes overlooked. These issues make it difficult to meet users' growing expectations for cultural identity and richer experiences. This research takes the philosophy of Unity of Heaven and Humanity (Tian-Ren-He-Yi) in the *I Ching* (Book of Changes) as its theoretical basis. A literature review and design translation approach are adopted to examine current problems in tea room furniture design. A design translation framework is developed from four aspects: materials, form, function, and spatial context. The framework explores ways of bringing traditional philosophical ideas into contemporary design practice. The philosophy of Unity of Heaven and Humanity contains rich ideas related to ecology, aesthetics, and holistic thinking. These ideas may provide useful insights for contemporary tea room furniture design. In this study, attention is given to how traditional philosophical concepts can be connected with design principles and applied in actual design practice. Through this process, cultural value, ecological sustainability, and functional performance are considered as parts of a larger whole rather than as separate design goals. The findings suggest that traditional Chinese philosophical wisdom still has relevance in today's design context. It can also offer fresh inspiration for the development and innovation of tea room furniture.

Keywords:

I Ching, Unity of Heaven and Humanity, Tea Room Furniture, Design Translation, Traditional Culture Innovation

1. Introduction

In recent years, tea culture has received increasing attention through the revival of traditional Chinese culture and the growing interest in Eastern lifestyles. Tearooms are no longer just places to drink tea. They also serve cultural activities, social gatherings, aesthetic experiences and relaxation. Furniture is a central part of these spaces: they meet practical usage requirements, shape the entire room atmosphere, convey cultural values and give the tea room environment a depth of content. The popularity of the Neo-Chinese Style has also driven the rapid growth of the tea room furniture market. Although many products incorporate traditional elements, their cultural design often remains superficial. Numerous tea room furniture relies on decorative motifs, mortise-and-tenon joints and other recognizable traditional symbols. However, they neglect the basic philosophical ideas of traditional Chinese culture. Similar design approaches are repeated in the market, resulting in many products being aligned in terms of shape, material and functional arrangement. As a result, the cultural depth and experiential value of tea room furniture are partially lost. The Unity of Heaven and Humanity from the I Ching (Book of Changes) is a central idea of traditional Chinese philosophy. It deals with the interactions between man, nature, objects and their environment and seeks harmony and balance between these components. It also includes environmental awareness content and a holistic mindset that is also relevant in the present and can provide suggestions for sustainable design, human-centered design and user-oriented experience concepts. This research is based on the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity as a theoretical basis. It analyzes existing challenges in the design of tea room furniture, explores possibilities for the transfer of traditional philosophical ideas into contemporary design language and aims to provide a theoretical basis for the innovative further development of modern tearoom furniture supplies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Studies on the Philosophy of Unity of Heaven and Humanity in the I Ching*

The Unity of Heaven and Humanity (Tian-Ren-He-Yi) is a famous concept in traditional Chinese philosophy, which has attracted the interest of many scholars for many years. Previous studies have analyzed this concept from different angles, including its ecological scope, philosophical foundations and contemporary value.

Many studies highlight the ecological dimension of this concept. Li and Wei argue that the I Ching (Book of Changes) proposes a holistic ecological view that Heaven, Earth, Yin-Yang, and humanity are interdependent [1]. Their research highlights the ecological awareness embodied in this book and underlines the importance of preserving harmony between humanity and nature. Xu, for his part, deepened the role of human beings in this theoretical framework, stating that humanity should be considered as an active actor guaranteeing cosmic equilibrium, rather than a mere passive subject subject to natural forces [2].

Other researchers have focused on its philosophical significance. Wang considers the Unity of Heaven and Humanity to be one of the central ideas of the I Ching, and stresses that it illustrates the evolution of traditional Chinese thought and worldviews [3]. Research has also examined its relevance to current society. Zhang points out that this philosophy encourages respect for natural laws, environmental responsibility and harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature [4]. In the face of current

ecological challenges, these reflections are always a useful reference for sustainable development and the construction of ecological civilization.

While the existing work provides relevant insights into the ecological, philosophical and practical dimensions of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity, most analyses remain confined to the fields of philosophy and cultural studies. Its application to contemporary furniture design generates relatively little interest, leaving considerable room for future research.

2.2. Studies on Contemporary Tea Room Furniture Design

Interest in contemporary tea room furniture has increased in recent years. Researchers have approached this issue from various angles. Most of the existing work focuses on furniture classification, traditional forms of furniture, regional cultures, material innovation and contemporary design methods. Several studies have focused on the classification of tea rooms and associated furniture. Qiu divided tea rooms into traditional, garden-style, courtyard-style, modern, and folk-custom types, and proposed a classification framework based on the function, style, and material characteristics of the furniture [5]. Research on furniture forms essentially explores the link between contemporary tea room furniture and traditional Chinese furniture. Miao found that many tea room furniture pieces perpetuate the aesthetic and structural characteristics of traditional Chinese furniture [6]. Chen analyzed Ming-style tea furniture in more detail and expounded its design principles as well as its cultural value [7]. Regional culture is another topic frequently addressed in scientific literature. Gu believes that regional cultural differences influence both furniture styles and consumer preferences [8]. Tang studied the evolution of furniture styles under the influence of social context, architectural forms and ideological factors [9]. In a later publication, Tang stressed that contemporary Chinese furniture design must reinterpret traditional culture rather than simply reproduce historical forms [10]. Materials and design methods are also subject to considerable attention. Xu explored the use of fiber-art materials in tea furniture design and studied the application of plant and synthetic fibers in contemporary furniture products [11]. Zhang, Xu, and Wang highlighted the integration of technology, aesthetics, and artistic expression into modern furniture design [12]. Jing addressed how the design principles of traditional Chinese furniture can be inherited and adapted into contemporary design practice [13]. While existing studies have enriched the understanding of tea room furniture design, most focus on cultural symbols, stylistic transformations, or spatial atmosphere. Research linking traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts to contemporary tea room furniture design remains relatively limited.

2.3. Research Gap

In recent years, several researchers have studied the application of the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity in the fields of furniture-related design. Xue, Wang, and Gu claim that the natural, minimalist, and harmonious features of Ming-style furniture are a valuable source of inspiration for contemporary interior design [14]. Jiao analyzed the influence of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity on the design of tea utensils and highlighted its effects on materials, colors, forms, and decorative elements [15]. Zhong, for his part, deepened the study of modern design of tea utensils according to human-object, object-object and object-environment relationships, bringing insights into the integration of traditional philosophy into contemporary design practices [16].

Despite these contributions, current work remains focused on tea utensils, Ming-style furniture and interior spaces. Systematic research that applies the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity to contemporary design of tea room furniture remains rare. In particular, comprehensive studies capable of translating traditional philosophical principles into practical design strategies concerning material selection, form generation, functional organization and spatial experience construction are lacking.

That is why this research proposes a design translation framework based on the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity. By establishing a pathway from philosophical concepts to design strategies, the study aims to bridge the gap between traditional Chinese cultural wisdom and the practice of contemporary tea room furniture design..

3. Challenges in Contemporary Tea Room Furniture Design

The design of contemporary tea room furniture has developed rapidly in parallel with the growing popularity of tea culture and the revival of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Designers are increasingly trying to integrate traditional cultural elements into modern lifestyles, giving rise to a diverse range of tea room furniture. Despite these results, several challenges remain and hinder the sustainable and innovative development of contemporary tea room furniture. The classification of commonly used materials for tea room furniture is shown in Figure 1:

Tea Room Furniture Materials	Material Characteristics and Application Scenarios	Visual Translation Process
Solid Wood	The predominant material used in traditional tea room furniture, characterized by a warm texture and natural grain. It is adaptable to various Chinese tea room styles and commonly applied to tea tables, tea cabinets, and chairs as core furniture elements.	
Bamboo	A natural and environmentally friendly material with lightweight properties and strong breathability, creating a fresh and natural atmosphere. It is suitable for Japanese and neo-Chinese minimalist tea rooms, commonly used in tea tables, stools, and storage racks.	
Stone	Characterized by its heavy texture and distinctive natural stone patterns, making it suitable for Zen-inspired and Chinese-style tea rooms. Common applications include tea tables, tea platforms, seating piers, and moisture-resistant furnishings.	
Metal	A modern material featuring structural stability and minimalist lines, suitable for industrial-style and minimalist tea rooms. Frequently combined with other materials for tea table frames, storage shelves, and seating.	
Hybrid Style	Combines the advantages of two or more materials, balancing aesthetics and functionality. It accommodates diversified tea room styles, with common combinations including wood-stone, wood-metal, and bamboo-wood.	

Figure 1. Classification of materials commonly used in contemporary tea room furniture.

3.1. Superficial Cultural Representation

Superficial cultural representation has become a common problem in contemporary tea room furniture design. Many products make abundant use of recognizable traditional elements, including mortise-and-tenon structures, Chinese decorative motifs and classic furniture forms, to express a cultural identity. These characteristics undoubtedly contribute to the visual appearance of traditional aesthetics. However, in many cases, they act more as decorative references than as a reflection of the philosophical ideas that underpin traditional Chinese culture. In practice, cultural

expression is often simplified to the use of symbolic ornaments, while the values and ways of thinking embodied by traditional philosophy receive relatively little attention. Therefore, the cultural significance conveyed by furniture design can be quite limited. This not only reduces the depth of cultural expression, but also weakens the bond that users can forge with traditional cultural heritage.

3.2. Insufficient Ecological Consideration

Wood, bamboo and other natural materials are frequently used in the design of tea room furniture. However, ecological sustainability is not always considered holistically. In many projects, the focus is mainly on the choice of materials. Dimensions related to manufacturing processes, resource efficiency and product lifecycle management are often neglected.

It is also observed that some products still use environmentally harmful processing techniques or non-sustainable materials. This creates a gap between the stated ecological objectives and the actual design practices. Under these conditions, it is difficult to fully meet the criteria of contemporary sustainable design. This approach also departs from the ecological vision carried by the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity, which places harmony between humanity and nature at the heart of its reflection.

3.3. Mismatch Between Furniture Functions and Contemporary Lifestyles

The functional requirements of tea rooms have changed a lot over the years. More than just a simple tea tasting, these modern spaces now host more and more readings, social exchanges, teleworking sessions, meditation and cultural events. In this context, users naturally expect furniture that is more flexible, comfortable and able to adapt to their varied usage scenarios. Still, much of today's tea room furniture retains conventional functional models, designed primarily for tea-related activities. Ergonomics, user experience and multifunctional use scenarios are often overlooked. This mismatch between the functions of furniture and modern lifestyles limits the practical value of tea room furniture and ultimately diminishes the overall quality of the user experience.

3.4. Increasing Design Homogenization

The design of contemporary tea room furniture faces another major challenge: a gradual homogenization of its creations. Subject to market competition and commercial considerations, many manufacturers adopt very similar design languages, material combinations and aesthetic styles. These repetitions translate into products with repetitive visual characteristics, which struggle to develop a distinctive cultural identity. The widespread replication of established design models hampers innovation and limits the prospects of exploring new design directions. Above all, excessive reliance on conventional stylistic formulas prevents tea room furniture from effectively responding to evolving user needs and contemporary cultural contexts.

3.5. Implications for Design Transformation

The limitations discussed above reveal a structural problem in contemporary tea room furniture design. At its core, this problem lies in the fragmentation of relationships among humans, artifacts, nature, and spatial environments. Cultural expression is often separated from its philosophical meaning. Ecological concerns are also separated from actual design practice. In addition, functional requirements are frequently detached from modern lifestyles.

These findings indicate the need for a new design translation framework. Such a framework can help reconnect these fragmented relationships. The philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity offers a strong theoretical foundation for this purpose. Designers can translate its principles into contemporary design strategies. In this way, they can build a more integrated approach to tea room furniture design. This approach can better balance cultural authenticity, ecological responsibility, functional performance, and spatial experience.

4. Design Translation Strategies Based on the Philosophy of Unity of Heaven and Humanity

The philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity emphasizes a harmonious relationship among humans, nature, artifacts, and spatial environments. This philosophy does not merely advocate a return to nature. Rather, it seeks a dynamic balance between interconnected systems. In contemporary tea room furniture design, this philosophy can guide practical design strategies. These strategies address the current challenges of cultural representation, ecological sustainability, functional adaptability and spatial experience.

This research proposes a framework that bridges traditional philosophical wisdom with contemporary design practice. This framework transforms the abstract principles of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity into practical design strategies. As Figure 2 illustrates, it converts the philosophical values of harmony, naturalness and coexistence into four design dimensions: material translation, form translation, functional translation and contextual translation. Together, these four dimensions form a systematic pathway that integrates traditional Chinese philosophy into contemporary tea room furniture design.

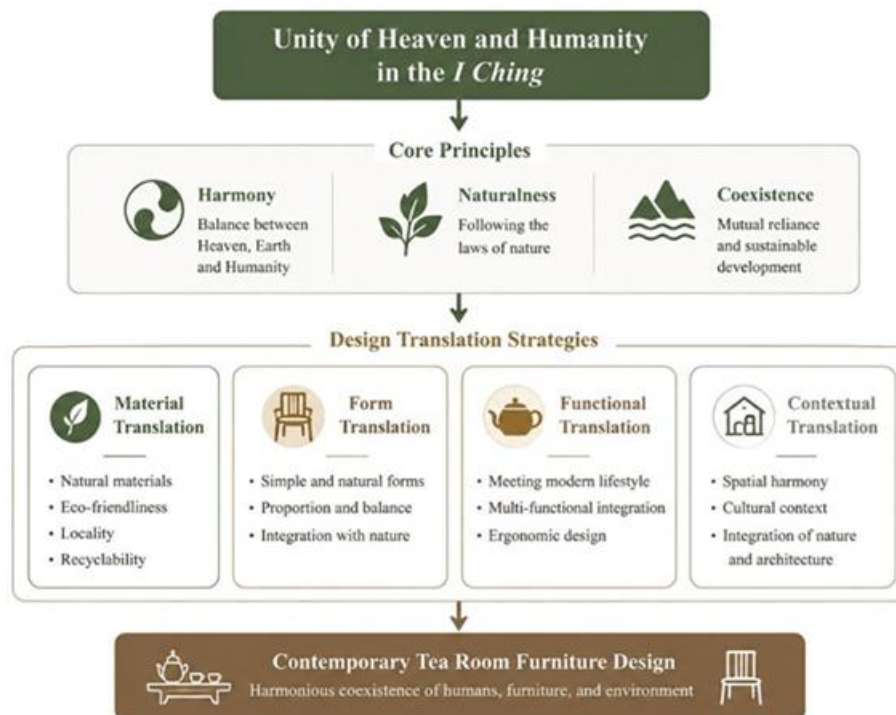


Figure 2. Design a translation framework based on the philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity.

4.1. Material and Form Translation

Materials are the most immediate medium through which furniture connects to nature. Taking into account the principle of harmonious coexistence, contemporary tea room furniture must prefer renewable and ecological materials. These include bamboo, solid wood and rattan.

Furniture must retain the natural textures, hues and haptic properties of these materials. This conveys the authenticity of the material and at the same time enhances the sensory interaction between the user and nature.

Beyond the mere choice of materials, designers should incorporate ecological fabrication processes. These reduce the ecological footprint throughout the product lifecycle. The use of eco-friendly finishes, low-emission manufacturing technologies and recyclable material systems supports the objectives of ecological sustainable design.

Form translation aims to transform traditional aesthetic tenets into a contemporary design language. Designers should avoid reproducing classic furniture styles without modification. Rather, they must reinterpret the intrinsic design logic of traditional Chinese furniture.

For example, Ming style furniture is distinguished by its expressive sobriety, readable structural organization, balanced proportions and sober ornamentation. These characteristics can be transposed into the contemporary design of tea room furniture, thanks to refined geometric configurations, lightweight structure systems, smooth and rounded transitions and a thoughtful use of empty spaces.

By combining natural materials with a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional spatial and structural configurations, furniture can both manifest cultural continuity and embody modern aesthetic connotations.

4.2. Functional and Contextual Translation

As tea rooms today increasingly support activities beyond pure tea drinking, furniture design needs to change. It should get rid of rigid single-use solutions. Instead, it should follow flexible and adaptable systems.

The functional transmission aims to adapt furniture to modern lifestyles. It uses modularity, multifunctionality and user-centric design.

Modular furniture systems allow users to flexibly redesign the space. Users can rearrange the furniture for various activities. These include drinking tea, reading, social interaction and informal work.

Hidden storage solutions improve the use of space. Adjustable elements increase the adaptability of the furniture. Ergonomic considerations also increase comfort. These properties increase the surface efficiency.

The contextual transmission extends the view beyond the individual piece of furniture. It examines the relationship between furniture and its environment. In traditional Chinese space culture, objects and space form a unit.

Therefore, furniture should be adapted to light, plants, decoration and room structure. Natural color palettes support a calm atmosphere. Open space concepts promote visual clarity. Daylight and plants also enhance the sense of space.

In this approach, the furniture is not understood as an isolated object. It is considered a link between man and space. By combining material, form, function and

context, tea room furniture can embody the idea of the unity of heaven and man while meeting modern requirements.

4.3. Proposed Design Translation Framework

Based on previous analyses, this research proposes a framework for conceptual design transposition. This framework is based on three interdependent levels. The first level concerns the philosophical foundations, particularly the unity of Heaven and Man. The second level defines design principles, such as harmony, naturalness and coexistence. The third level presents design strategies, which include material, formal, functional and contextual transposition.

This framework offers a systematic approach to integrating Chinese philosophical thinking into contemporary tea room furniture design. It supports the preservation and reinterpretation of cultural heritage. It also provides practical guidance for sustainable design. It also encourages user-centric innovation and more meaningful space experiences.

5. Discussion

The philosophy of the Unity of Heaven and Humanity provides a valuable theoretical perspective for tackling challenges in contemporary tea room furniture design and bridges traditional ideological thought with modern design practices. Existing research mostly concentrates on the replication of classical furniture silhouettes, cultural symbolic elements and the construction of spatial ambiance. Yet limited scholarship has examined the systematic integration of traditional Chinese philosophical doctrines into furniture design methodologies.

This study puts forward a design translation framework to fill this research gap. The framework converts abstract philosophical notions into tangible design dimensions: material translation, form translation, functional translation and contextual translation. It thereby builds an organic connection between traditional cultural wisdom and contemporary design, enabling tea room furniture to break away from shallow stylistic imitation and realize profound, well-structured cultural representation.

The framework also responds to core contemporary design priorities, covering ecological sustainability, user-centered design and holistic spatial experience. The adoption of natural materials embodies tangible ecological accountability, while emphasis on harmonious interplay among users, furniture and spatial environments elevates experiential quality. Such characteristics prove the sustained practical value of traditional Chinese philosophy in resolving modern design dilemmas.

Nevertheless, the present research remains largely theoretical. Follow-up investigations ought to validate the framework through practical application, incorporating design case studies, user experience evaluation and interdisciplinary research methodologies. Such explorations will deepen comprehension of how traditional philosophical principles drive innovation within contemporary furniture design.

6. Conclusions

This study examines the application of the philosophy of the unity of Heaven and Man from The I Ching to contemporary tea room furniture design. It is based on a review of existing literature and an analysis of current design issues. The study

highlights several limitations of contemporary furniture. Furniture often presents a superficial cultural representation. It also shows insufficient environmental consideration. It reveals a functional shift with current lifestyles. It also has a tendency to homogenize creations.

To address these problems, this research proposes a framework for conceptual design transposition. This framework transforms traditional philosophical notions into operational design strategies. It translates the values of the unity of Heaven and Man into four axes of design. These axes are material, formal, functional and contextual transposition. The framework establishes a clear link between philosophical thinking and design implementation. It helps to integrate traditional culture into contemporary design practices.

Validation results show that this framework effectively guides the creation of tea room furniture. It supports ecological sustainability. It strengthens cultural continuity. It improves functional adaptability. It also promotes a more comprehensive space experience. The framework encourages designers to go beyond simple visual symbols. It invites them to reinterpret the profound philosophical principles of Chinese culture.

However, this study remains primarily theoretical. Future research will need to include user-centric assessments. They will be able to use interviews, observations and tests of experience. They will also be able to integrate emerging technologies and digital design tools. These approaches will expand opportunities for innovation.

In conclusion, the philosophy of the unity of Heaven and Man remains relevant today. It offers a vision based on harmony and coexistence. It provides a useful basis for designing more sustainable, cultural and human furniture.

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 grants from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the School of Digital Technology and Creative Design, Zhengzhou University of Light Industry for its academic support throughout this research. Special thanks are extended to the supervisors and faculty members who provided valuable guidance and suggestions during the development of this study. The author also appreciates the contributions of previous scholars whose research on the *I Ching*, tea culture, and furniture design provided important theoretical foundations for this study.

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