

Human-Centered Qualities of Unconscious Design in Daily-Use Ceramics

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Abstract:

Contemporary design has continuously evolved alongside broader social and technological developments, giving rise to a wide diversity of design approaches and styles. This study examines the application of unconscious design in daily-use ceramics and the human-centered qualities it embodies. By outlining the theoretical foundations of unconscious design and analyzing representative cases of daily-use ceramic products, the paper demonstrates how unconscious design responds to users' implicit needs. It further argues that such an approach enables the creation of ceramic products that not only fulfill functional requirements but also foster emotional resonance. In doing so, unconscious design enhances user experience and contributes to improved quality of life. The findings offer new perspectives and directions for designers working in the field of daily-use ceramics.

Keywords:

Unconscious Design, Daily-use Ceramics, Human-centered Design

1. Introduction

The development of society has continually driven the evolution of design. Unlike earlier periods characterized by dominant and unified stylistic trends, contemporary design is marked by the coexistence and competition of diverse design approaches. In this context, design is expected to fulfill several fundamental principles. First, design should be oriented toward people, with its primary purpose centered on meeting the needs of the public. Second, products should not only satisfy functional requirements but also embody aesthetic value, with functionality and aesthetics integrated into a coherent whole. Third, product development should be grounded in contemporary industrial technologies, enabling standardization and mass production while reducing costs and improving economic efficiency.

Within this framework, human-centered design has become a key guiding principle in contemporary practice. It emphasizes a people-oriented approach that takes into account users' practical needs, behavioral habits, and psychological experiences, ensuring that products are not only functional but also comfortable and enjoyable to use.

The concept of "unconscious design", proposed by the Japanese industrial designer Naoto Fukasawa, refers to a design approach that transforms unconscious human behaviors into tangible forms [1]. Rooted in careful observation of human behavior

and psychology, this concept seeks to enhance usability and comfort through subtle and refined design details. More specifically, unconscious design focuses on identifying patterns of everyday behavior, psychological preferences, and emotional needs that operate below the level of conscious awareness, and embedding these elements into product design as essential components.

Unconscious design is closely related to the notion of human-centered design. While human-centered design emphasizes respect for human needs, experiences, and values, and reflects a broader humanistic concern, unconscious design can be understood as a more advanced extension of this approach. It goes beyond explicit user needs to explore latent, subconscious demands, and seeks to address these implicit needs through design. Ultimately, it aims to allow users to experience convenience and pleasure in an intuitive and effortless manner [2].

As an essential and ubiquitous category of everyday objects, daily-use ceramics occupy an important position in people's lives. Their design must not only adhere to principles of formal harmony and aesthetic unity but also respond to the needs of a broad user base. The design of daily-use ceramics requires the integration of function and aesthetics, with aesthetic expression developed on the basis of functional performance. Functionality, as the most fundamental attribute of any product, is the primary principle of daily-use ceramic design, as it directly corresponds to the fulfillment of human needs [3,4].

In this context, the application of unconscious design holds significant value for daily-use ceramics. It is reflected not only in aspects such as form, material, and function, but also in users' emotional experiences and cultural identification. In other words, unconscious design manifests as a form of human-centered quality within daily-use ceramics.

Designers should therefore integrate the concept of unconscious design into the practice of daily-use ceramic design, paying close attention to users themselves and emphasizing the human-centered qualities of products. Only in this way can design, imbued with a humanistic spirit, resonate with users on a deeper level. This paper examines specific cases of daily-use ceramic products to explore how unconscious design is embodied in the human-centered design of such objects.

2. Elements of Unconscious Design in Daily-Use Ceramics

Within the field of daily-use ceramic design, unconscious design can be embodied in multiple dimensions, including form, color, and material. Through these elements, designers are able to create human-centered ceramic products that go beyond conventional design approaches.

2.1. Form

In terms of form, unconscious design can be understood in two primary ways. The first involves the appropriation of natural forms. Many daily-use ceramic designs draw inspiration from nature, with motifs such as flowers and birds being among the most common. Such designs are not only aesthetically pleasing but also evoke associations with the natural environment, thereby generating positive emotional responses. They reflect a deep-seated human affinity for nature and an intrinsic desire for connection with the natural world [5].

The second aspect relates to the application of ergonomic principles. For instance, the handle of a cup must conform to ergonomic requirements while also ensuring comfort during use. In the design process, subtle variations in form—often not consciously emphasized by the designer—can significantly influence user experience. A slightly inclined handle, for example, may allow users to hold and drink more naturally and comfortably. These seemingly unconscious design elements, in fact, represent a nuanced understanding of user needs and their embodied interactions with objects.

2.2. Color

Color in daily-use ceramics is often the result of designers' intuitive or subconscious choices. Different colors can evoke distinct emotional responses. Soft and warm tones, such as pale pink or light yellow, tend to create a sense of warmth and comfort, whereas cooler hues, such as sky blue or light green, convey calmness and relaxation.

When selecting ceramic products, consumers are frequently influenced by these color cues at an unconscious level, which in turn affects both their purchasing decisions and user experience. In this sense, designers' intuitive use of color can be understood as an implicit application of color psychology [6].

2.3. Material and Texture

The material and surface texture of ceramics influence not only their visual appearance but also users' tactile experiences. While designers often consider both aesthetics and functionality when selecting materials, many such decisions are shaped by implicit aesthetic standards rather than fully conscious reasoning.

For example, a smooth ceramic surface may convey a sense of modernity and refinement, whereas a rougher texture may evoke associations with nature or craftsmanship. These unconscious material choices can generate different forms of emotional resonance during use, thereby enhancing the overall appeal of the product.

2.4. Summary

Incorporating principles of unconscious design into daily-use ceramic design enables a more comprehensive response to both the material and psychological needs of users. It reflects a human-centered and humanistic approach to design. Even the most ordinary ceramic objects can, through such design strategies, exhibit distinctive qualities and provide users with a heightened aesthetic and experiential value.

3. Human-Centered Applications of Unconscious Design in Daily-Use Ceramics

3.1. Minimalist Ceramic Tableware by MUJI

The ceramic tableware series developed by MUJI has gained widespread popularity for its minimalist aesthetic and refined craftsmanship. Beyond its visual simplicity, the series demonstrates a thoughtful integration of unconscious design principles, resulting in products that are both functional and experientially engaging in everyday use.

In terms of form, the tableware features smooth, natural lines with minimal ornamentation, adhering to ergonomic principles. For example, plates finished with a deep blue kiln-transmutation glaze are designed with slightly upturned rims, which prevent food from slipping while also facilitating ease of handling. Similarly, the rims of cups are carefully smoothed to ensure comfort when in contact with the lips. These subtle design features respond to users' habitual and often unconscious behaviors during use, enhancing the overall usability of the products (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Deep Blue Kiln-Transmutation Glaze Tableware Set by MUJI.*

In terms of color, the series adopts a restrained palette of solid tones, avoiding decorative patterns and emphasizing visual clarity and simplicity. This approach creates a sense of cleanliness, order, and comfort that aligns well with contemporary domestic environments and users' preference for minimalist lifestyles. For instance, a light yellow variation introduces a warm and inviting atmosphere to the dining setting while simultaneously enhancing the visual prominence of the food itself, thereby stimulating appetite (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Light Yellow Stoneware Tableware Set by MUJI.*

Regarding material and texture, the tableware is produced using high-quality ceramic materials that are environmentally friendly, tactilely pleasing, and visually refined. The surfaces exhibit a gentle, warm texture, while high-temperature firing ensures durability, wear resistance, and corrosion resistance. These material choices not only highlight the intrinsic qualities of ceramics but also reflect a broader sense of responsibility toward both natural resources and social sustainability.

At the level of product configuration, the series departs from conventional ceramic tableware sets by consistently including ceramic cups, accommodating users who may not prefer soup during meals. This detail exemplifies how unconscious design can respond to diverse and often unarticulated user preferences. Additionally, the products within the series are designed with coordinated dimensions and forms, allowing users to freely combine different pieces according to personal preferences. Such flexibility supports multifunctional use and personalized table arrangements, while the relatively

accessible pricing enhances the overall value of the series, making it suitable for both everyday dining and social occasions.

Through the integration of these unconscious design elements, MUJI's ceramic tableware not only fulfills functional requirements but also establishes emotional and aesthetic connections with users. Rather than being merely utilitarian objects, these products embody a design philosophy grounded in human-centered thinking and sustainability. By carefully synthesizing seemingly simple design decisions, the series achieves a balance between contemporary lifestyles and a deeper sense of humanistic care.

3.2. Ceramics by Lusheng Ceramics

In contrast to the rational and restrained design approach exemplified by MUJI, the ceramic works of Lusheng Ceramics embody a more expressive and emotionally driven design language. Rather than adhering strictly to minimalist principles, the brand emphasizes innovation alongside the integration of traditional cultural elements.

Within this context, unconscious design is incorporated through users' accumulated experiences with objects and established habits of everyday use. The products are designed to allow users to act according to intuitive, first impressions-completing actions without deliberate judgment or conscious effort. In doing so, the design not only achieves functional efficiency but also enhances user experience and conveys a form of emotional, human-centered care.

At the level of detail, Lusheng Ceramics demonstrates a strong emphasis on craftsmanship and symbolic meaning. Each piece typically features a coin-sized mark at the center of its base, inscribed with the brand name as well as four Arabic numerals indicating the year and month of production. In addition, the brand consciously avoids the use of animal bone ash in its materials, reflecting sensitivity to religious and cultural considerations. This approach highlights the role of unconscious design in addressing cultural values and implicit ethical expectations. The durability of the products is also notable, with the brand being colloquially described as producing ceramics "strong enough to withstand the weight of an off-road vehicle", further reinforcing its reputation for quality.

A representative example is the "Lancaster" series of ceramic tea and coffee ware. This collection presents a lively and playful aesthetic, introducing a sense of freshness and dynamism to the traditionally formal setting of an English tea table. Drawing inspiration from textile and ceramic traditions across different cultures, the series creates a distinctive visual identity characterized by soft white tones and gentle hues of pink, gray, and blue. These elements evoke a light, almost animated quality, as if the ceramics were "dressed" in flowing garments, subtly influencing the user's emotional state.

From a functional perspective, the proportions between the teapot handle and body are carefully calibrated to conform to the natural curvature of the hand, enabling a more fluid and effortless pouring motion. Even during prolonged use, the design minimizes physical strain. The teapot is also equipped with an internal anti-drip structure, preventing liquid from spilling onto surfaces and reducing the need for cleaning, thereby improving the smoothness of the overall user experience.

In terms of material, the series employs finely glazed surfaces with a smooth and delicate texture, providing both tactile comfort and ease of maintenance. Furthermore,

the manufacturing process incorporates more efficient production techniques and environmentally conscious materials, aligning with a broader commitment to sustainability and circular reuse. By reducing pollution and dependence on energy-intensive processes, the design reflects an awareness of environmental responsibility (Figure 3).



Figure 3. “Lancaster” Ceramic Tea and Coffee Set by Lusheng Ceramics.

Through the “Lancaster” series, it becomes evident that the application of unconscious design in Lusheng Ceramics extends beyond the creation of visually appealing and functional products. More importantly, it lies in the ability to engage users emotionally through subtle and carefully considered design details.

The human-centered application of unconscious design in this series not only enhances user experience but also communicates the brand’s values and cultural significance. As a result, Lusheng Ceramics has established itself as a trusted choice among consumers. Whether in everyday domestic settings or more formal occasions, the products offer a distinctive and meaningful experience, reflecting the brand’s sophisticated approach to unconscious design.

4. Conclusions

The rapid development of contemporary society has accelerated the integration of daily-use ceramic design with diverse design approaches, fostering continuous innovation. Within this context, the application of unconscious design has become increasingly significant in everyday life.

Designers, when making design decisions, should set aside purely individual preferences and instead align their practice with principles that are broadly applicable and ethically grounded. In other words, design behavior and orientation should be guided by the needs and interests of the public, while remaining consistent with the designer’s own intentions and choices. Such alignment ensures that personal creative expression resonates with collective user needs.

At the same time, designers must remain attentive to the subjects of design—the users themselves—balancing rational design considerations with a sensitivity to emotional and experiential dimensions. Unconscious design offers a new perspective and methodology for daily-use ceramic design by encouraging designers to observe subtle user behaviors and psychological changes, identify latent needs, and move beyond conventional design paradigms. By embedding human-centered thinking throughout the entire design process, designers can create products that are more

innovative, distinctive, and better aligned with users' habits and psychological expectations.

Furthermore, unconscious design contributes to the sustainable development of the daily-use ceramics industry by supporting more thoughtful and user-oriented design practices. The case studies discussed in this paper-ranging from the expressive elegance of Lusheng tea ware to the functional clarity of MUJI tableware-demonstrate how unconscious design can effectively realize human-centered design objectives within this field.

Looking ahead, as societal progress continues and expectations for quality of life increase, unconscious design is likely to play an even more prominent role in daily-use ceramics, offering users experiences that are more natural, comfortable, and emotionally satisfying.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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