

Research on the Application of “Simple Aesthetics” Design Concept in Contemporary Interior Design under the Background of Eastern and Western Culture

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Abstract: By analyzing the philosophical thoughts of “great truths are all simple” of eastern Taoism and the design philosophy of “less is more” born of western modernism, the design concept of “simple aesthetics” was proposed. And from the five aspects of form, color, material, detail, attitude, and combing the application of the “simple aesthetics” design concept in the interior design under the fusion of eastern and western cultural backgrounds, it is concluded that the “simple aesthetics” design concept meets the needs of the times and artistic aesthetics, and shows the positive meaning of the human spirit.

Key Words: great truths are all simple; less is more; simple aesthetics; interior design

1. Introduction

During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, Lao Tzu once said in *Tao Te Ching*, “at the beginning of everything, great truths are all simple, then become complicated after derivation”. “Great truths are all simple” has become the core of Chinese ancient Taoist philosophy, standing for “ultimate truth”. In the early 20th century, the design concept of “less is more” had been put forward by western modernist architect master Mies van der Rohe for many times, which became the core idea of modernist design and then influenced the whole world. Whether it is the “great truths are all simple” in the east or the “less is more” in the west, they both advocate the use of simple design techniques to express its connotation and to convey the value of beauty to the public. Therefore, the design concept of “simple aesthetics” is proposed through combining the essence of cultural philosophy of the east and the west.

2. “Simple Aesthetics” under the Background of Oriental Culture

The philosophical idea of “great truths are all simple” proposed by Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching* has deeply influenced China's spiritual connotation for thousands of years. This kind of thought contains a quiet, simple aesthetic, and there are many points of agreement with the thought of “great music has the faintest notes”, “great form is without shape” in Chinese traditional culture. “Less is more, more is confused”, it means that less can be obtained, but more will be confused. Taoist emphasis on the philosophical ideas of “natural”, “simple”, “inaction” imperceptibly affects all aspects of life, influences contemporary interior design, and deeply carries the Chinese aesthetic culture.

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There are many products developed under the guidance of the philosophical idea of “great truths are all simple”, such as Chinese freehand ink and wash painting, porcelain in the Song Dynasty, furniture in the Song and Ming Dynasties, etc., which integrate Lao Tzu’s aesthetic thought and philosophy idea organically. Taking “blank-leaving” in Chinese freehand ink painting as an example, “everything comes from being and being comes from not-being”, “blank-leaving” is a manifestation of fictitious and realistic comparison, “still we heard hidden grief and vague regret concealed; music expressed then far less than silence revealed” in *Song of a Pipa Player* written by famous poet Bai Juyi is the perfect interpretation for the beauty of the “blank-leaving”. It can be seen a way of expression from the two paintings named *Fishing Alone on the Cold River* (Figure 1) drawn by Ma Yuan and *Xi Shan Qing Yuan Tu* (Figure 2) drawn by Xia Gui that painters can control the simplicity and complexity flexibly and know the full view just by a glance. Ma Yuan was called “Corner Ma” and Xia Gui was called “Half Xia” by reviewers in later generations, this was not only a reflection of the atmosphere at that time, but also a pioneering form of artistic expression. The artistic charm of painting was enhanced by the way of “simplification”, which had made a profound impact on later generations.



Figure 1. *Fishing Alone on the Cold River* by Ma Yuan



Figure 2. Part of *Xi Shan Qing Yuan Tu* by Xia Gui

For another example, porcelain in the Song Dynasty is the most perfect description of the “simplification” and “connotation” among all ancient porcelain. It is not only because of the maturity of porcelain technology; the more important point is the philosophy contained in porcelain. In terms of color, porcelain in the Song Dynasty pursues the aesthetic trend of “being clean and pure for beauty”, focusing on the shape and glaze of porcelain itself. While in implication, it pursues the Taoist concept of innocence and nothingness.



Figure 3. Vase named “Yu Hu Chun”, Ding Kiln in Northern Song Dynasty



Figure 4. Celadon dish, Ru kiln in Northern Song Dynasty

The proposal of “simple aesthetics” cannot be separated from the native orient genes. The rich emotional content can be conveyed by the “simple” design way, which is refined from the oriental philosophy, especially the influence of Taoist traditional aesthetics. The richest space can be expressed through the simplest form, the most rustic design colors and the most streamlined materials. The design form is simple, but the details are rich and the meaning is profound. The way in which using the “simplest” form conveys the meaningful “meaning”, expresses people’s pursuit of the spiritual world as well as emotional world, and reflects the desire for infinite freedom. The concept of “simple aesthetics” is the best expression of vivid coexistence of reality and reality, and it is the best way to show the organic integration of subjective and objective, and the organic combination of form and content.

3. “Simple Aesthetics” under the Background of Western Culture

In the period of modernism exploration, the pioneer of modern architecture, Adolf Loos, clearly put forward the idea of “ornament is crime” in the book *Ornament and Crime*. It believes that “simple geometric and functionalist buildings meet the mass people’s needs of the 20th century, instead of complicated decorations. The spirit of the architecture should be democratic for the public instead of a minority of dignitaries.” Peter Berens advocates functionalism to abandon tedious decorations, and adopts simplified, well-functioning shapes and structures. In 1928, the master of modernist architecture Mies van der Rohe proposed the design concept of “less is more”, which is known as the design principle of modernism,

and even noted as design philosophy of modernism. In the later 30 years, minimalism represented by this concept has become popular all over the world, so reviewers commented that Mies “changed the skyline of one-third of the world.” The minimalism of Mies is not only without modification, but also has an extremely strict concise form, a high standard of detail requirements, and a visual effect with rich expression. It is streamlined and condensed instead of blank-leaving, which shows the noble inner and elegant charm through “simple” design way.

Mies’s minimalism conformed to the development wave of the industrialization era and the objective state of massive housing demand after the war. His achievements were developed by materials, forms, and substance instead of intention. This kind of substance is the unity of geometric forms, content, and solid materials. Mies opposed formalism and aesthetic speculation. Under the approach of the Platonic architectural style, he used the rational construction and material features expressed his “simple” and “pure” philosophy. “Less is more” had a perfect reflection in his German Pavilion at Barcelona Expo. (Figure 5)

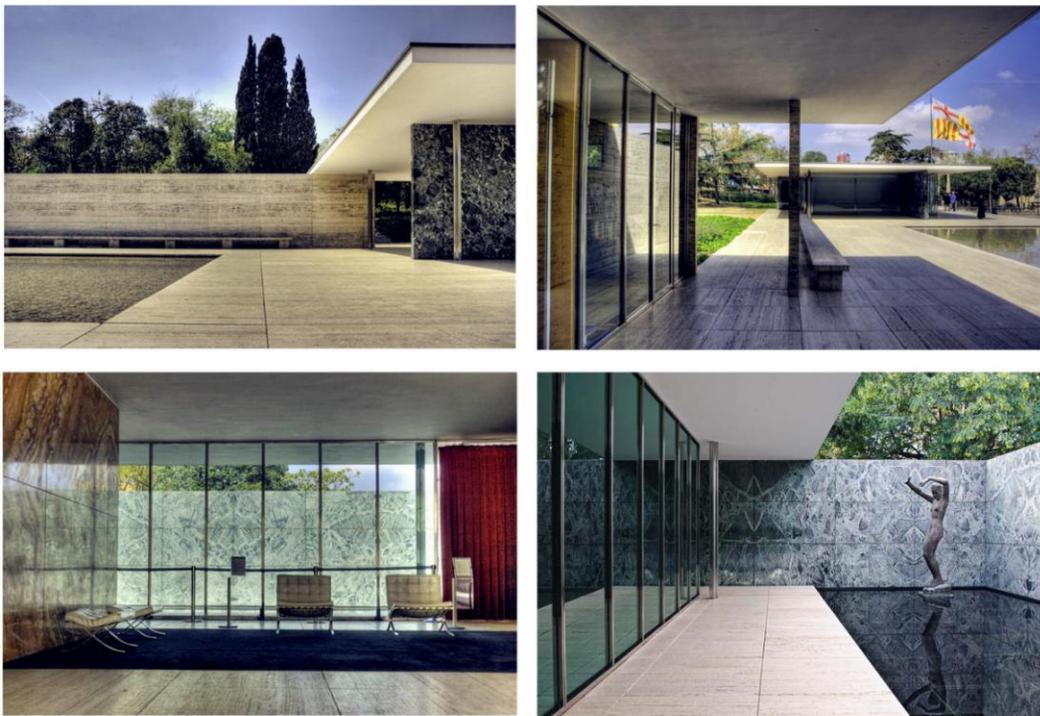


Figure 5. German Pavilion at Barcelona Expo by Mies

4. Embodiment of “Simple Aesthetics” Design Concept in Interior Design under the Fusion of Eastern and Western Cultures

Although there are many differences between “great truths are all simple” and “less is more”, the philosophical thought and ideological cognition contained therein are inadvertently the same. Even though there are no related link between them, they have a very similar “homogeneous” nature. The “simple aesthetics” design concept advocates the removal of a series of unnecessary and tedious decorations in the space, the restoration of the original appearance of things, and purification of things by the simplest way. Whether it is eastern or western ideology, the expression of “connotation” is pursued on the basis of “simplification”, and the deep aesthetic connotation conveyed through “simplification” strives for the unification of design and Tao.

4.1 Form: simple

The purpose of “simplification” is to simplify the complicated elements and improve the comfort of use. What

“simple aesthetics” pursues is simple form without reduction of content, essence, depth, and comfort, so that people can perceive infinite beauty in the limited space and express the realm of life through the “simplified” atmosphere of space. (Figure 6)

4.2 Color: clean

The “simplified aesthetic” design concept puts forward quite high requirements for the color application in the space. It is required that the use of color is relatively simple, the mix of color is pure and concise without too much pied colors, plain color as the main is the best choice. It is better to use the similar colors with same degree of brightness and purity as possible, decorated with a small area of embellishment colors. Reasonable and crafty color matching enhances the design artistry and expands the sense of space extension. (Figure 7)

4.3 Material: modest

The “simplified aesthetic” shows the original state of the material to the greatest extent, directly showing its texture and color, so that users or viewers can feel the natural state of the material directly, however, the type of material should not be too much, a few types of materials selected carefully can enjoy a good conversation with the space, and form a “beauty” order through integrated construction, and finally present itself in a simple form. (Figure 8)



Figure 6. Customized real scene of Jiusen house



Figure 7. Customized real scene of Jiusen house



Figure 8. Customized real scene of Jiusen house



Figure 9. Customized real scene of Jiusen house

4.4 Detail: precise

It is because that “simple aesthetics” is precisely using the minimalist processing methods that requires meticulous control to project details. It is said in *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* that “I was able to open my eyes to stare at the sunlight and clearly observe the slightest things when I was a child. Seeing the small things to examine their textures, then there will be something interesting unexpectedly.” The refinement of details has its own attractive beauty. Serving to people, designers use concise techniques to present restrained, elegant and concise works, and show their ability through the design effect of “simple but not unusual”. (Figure 9)

4.5 Attitude: pure

“Simple aesthetics” emphasizes the simplification of external decoration and expresses what space wants ultimately, to ensure the purity of the design. The word “pure” was first seen in *Chuang Tzu*. It is said that “pure and clean, keep static and same like before”. Simple and refined, meaningful and beautiful, the pure works are natural, sincere and have a fascinating power. Highly “simple aesthetics” can summarize and refine several or one element instead of the

accumulation of various elements, then the pure artistic expression, more tension and artistic effect of the space can be achieved.

5. The Positive Significance of “Simple Aesthetics”

“Simple aesthetics” which combines the essence of eastern and western cultures can reflect the inherent connotation of design projects and deliver beautiful design value to the public through simple techniques.

5.1 Meet the needs of the times

With economic society developing so fast currently, the tight rhythm of the city has brought great pressure to people’s work and life. Under this condition, do people need a higher-level refinement of the modeling concepts corresponding to social civilization? Is it possible to return to the natural and pure life state in the face of complicated life? It’s not just the formal meaning of which one’s turn to show, the spiritual level also need to be taken into consideration, so as to extract the design method from the rational perspective. Although minimalism originated from the west, there are simple connotation and philosophy like “simple aesthetics” are contained in Chinese traditional culture and art.

“Simple aesthetics” is a unique thought to explore the simple design with Chinese characteristics. It comprehensively considers the social and cultural background of east and west, and fully considers the dialogue between traditional China and contemporary China. The proposition of “simple aesthetics” in contemporary China not only has a distinctive era attribute, but also meets the material and spiritual needs of the Chinese middle class.

5.2 Improve artistic aesthetics

First of all, through the in-depth study of eastern and western cultures, “simple aesthetics” excavates the classic beauty hidden in the culture and pursues the expression of the connotation. It allows users to be more comfortable and enjoyable in the space of “simple aesthetics”, which can help them taste the beauty of the connotation, permanence, quality, and insipidity. Secondly, in line with the aesthetic needs of modern people, this design method with simple form and rich content is not limited to the function and form, it presents a high taste and highly highlights the aesthetic characteristics of the times. At the same time, the method of “simple aesthetics” will influence the future design with its unique charm as well. Design originates from beauty, and designers create beauty and guide the public to enjoy beauty.

5.3 Promote humanism spirit

The design concept of “simple aesthetics” takes people as the starting point and is “a popular and caring design activity”, which makes people relaxing, always reveals authenticity and touches people’s heart. The key to design is attitude. To serve people is the mission for designer, which is based on respect for life. Design can not only discover the current significance from historical resources, but also provide a better way to deal with and protect these resources. Extend traditional culture from tradition to the present, and reinterpret historical culture in contemporary language. This process embodies the promotion of the status of “human beings”.

According to Maslow’s needs theory, people’s needs are divided into five parts: physical needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. “Simple aesthetics” meets the different needs of people to the greatest extent, solves problems, provides solutions and expresses the design according to the audience's behavior habits, psychological characteristics, cognitive attributes, etc. Nowadays, People have light pursuit for material, but deep pursuit for emotional and spiritual needs. The artistic conception of “simple aesthetics” not only meets basic needs, but also prompts people to get rid of the real life and pursue a more open-minded life.

The “simple” design method can meet mass consumer needs today, the “connotation” design is in line with the middle-class psychological cognition, and the “beauty” expression matches with current social aesthetics. Mies once said, “architecture is the will of the times expressed in space terms, it is either, often changes and updates.” From this word we

can see the wisdom of this great architect. Design does not stick in the mud but updates with times. I hope that the design concept of “simple aesthetics” can match today’s consciousness of the times and stimulate a new vitality in the design world.

6. Conclusions

This article is an analysis of the application of “simple aesthetics” design concept in contemporary interior design. By analyzing the philosophical thoughts of “great truths are all simple” of eastern Taoism and the design philosophy of “less is more” born of western modernism, the design concept of “simple aesthetics” was proposed. At the same time, the specific application of “simple aesthetics” design concept in interior design was further elaborated from the five aspects of form, color, material, detail, and attitude. It is concluded that the “simple aesthetics” design concept has positive meaning value proposed in the contemporary Chinese interior design.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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