

THE CULTURE CREATIVE DESIGN OF TAIWAN LION: A CASE STUDY ON APPLICATION IN FURNITURE DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Of the cultural and religious ceremonies seen in Taiwan, the most common ones include the *che gu zhen* (chariot drum parade), *ba jia jiang* (eight generals troupe), *yi ge* (float parade), *wu gong zhen* (centipede procession), *wu long ji* (dragon dance), and *wu shi* (lion dance). Yet many of these are fading away due to time change and aging technologists, causing a crisis for the continuation of cultural traditions.

However, nowadays the lion dance faces the crisis of being lost. To invigorate the art and culture industries, the present study investigated the feasibility of promoting the lion dance culture through product design, to elicit the general public's identification with the land they live in.

A literature review and expert interviews were conducted—in particular with the master lion mask technologist Shih Shun-Jung—to explore Taiwanese lion dance culture in depth. Specifically, four experts were interviewed to collate their opinions and establish a set of guidelines for culture and creative product design, which were subsequently applied in the “Cloud Lion” furniture series consisting of a high stool and long bench. This demonstrates that cultural element transformation can revitalize both traditional culture and the creative industry.

Keywords: Cloud Lion , Cultural Creative design, Taiwanese Lion

1. Research Motivation and Objectives

Taiwan is a state infused with diverse cultural influences. However, behind the rapid economic development and lifestyle transition, preservation and development of local culture are faced with major challenges concerning the neglect of traditional culture by the general public as well as the lack of relevant funding and knowledge. Of the numerous religious and cultural ceremonies still being practiced, many have been well integrated into Taiwanese people's daily

lives, particularly those relating to festivals. In particular, the lion dance is one of such rituals that are to the people's daily life the most; it not only appears in temple fairs, but also at special occasions, such as weddings or the completion of a new house. Therefore, the present study reviewed the history and literature concerned with the Taiwanese lion dance, identifying the close association between religious beliefs and culture that reflects Taiwanese people's god-revering and etiquette-abiding character. Through analyzing the cultural elements in the Taiwanese lion dance, the present study expected to reflect its religious solemnity into the proposed furniture designs for the "Cloud Lion Long Bench." and "Cloud Lion" In this way, the general public can recognize the values of traditional art, which can be integrated into the creative industries by developing designs and products infused with local culture.

2. Research Objectives

The present study used a literature review, expert interviews, and a creative design approach to explore the artistic elements of the Taiwanese lion masks and the feasibility of incorporating these elements into practical furniture designs. In summary, the study's objectives are as follows:

1. To rouse people's collective memory of the Taiwanese lion dance, as well as their concern for traditional culture and arts;
2. To derive cultural symbols from the lion masks that can be repurposed into design elements, using this experience as the basis for integrating professional design codes into cultural thinking;
3. To formulate designs that are not only aesthetically appealing but developed with a metaphysical approach, revitalizing older culture by incorporating the meaning and spirit of traditional craftsmanship into modern designs;

To convey the cultural essence of the Taiwanese lion dance through the designs for the "Cloud Lion Long Bench" and "Cloud Lion".

3. Literature Review

Historical evidence attests that the lion is not native to China. The only way for lions to come to China was as an article of tribute, which would be kept in the imperial palace for the enjoyment of the emperor alone. However, propelled by the curiosity and imagination of the populace, court artisans' highly imaginative sculptures and paintings of lions soon became popular throughout the state. Additionally, as a Buddhist symbol, depictions of lions became popular with the spread of Buddhism in China, with the support of emperors in successive dynasties. The bodhisattva Manjushri has been depicted as riding a lion in the sutras, and Buddha has been said to expound in a voice that spreads world wide, which is likened to the roar of a lion that subdues all beasts.

Because Taiwan has inherited culture from China, the cultural associations with lions came to Taiwan with the early settlers, and have since taken root, becoming a folk symbol and charm to ward off or overcome evil. Furthermore, lion dance troupes have become indispensable in festivals and celebrations. This chapter presents an in-depth review of the cultural values and history of the lion dance, with special emphasis on its evolution in Taiwan.

3.1 History of the Taiwanese Lion Dance

The Taiwanese lion dance can trace its origin to relevant rituals in China; however, there is no concrete evidence regarding its precise origin. Despite varying records, the lion dance is generally thought to be originated in Persia, and came to China by way of the Central Asian state of Kucha, through the then-Chinese border town of Laingzhou, and eventually to the Chinese heartland around the dynasty of Northern Wei (Wang, 2003). Tseng (1997) also noted in his book *Lion Dance Skills* that the “the lion is not native to China, and it came to China with the spread of Buddhism from India.”

In the sutras that came to China from India, the Buddha is associated with lions. For example, the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom* mentioned that, “Buddha was a lion among men.” In *Taizi Rui Ying Ben Qi Jing* (the Sutra on the Life of the Prince in Accordance with Good Omens), it is recorded that “upon the birth of Buddha, five hundred lions came down from the snowy mountains and stood vigil at the gate”. Other evidence that lions came to China with Buddhism include (1) according to the sutra *Hu Qielan Shen Qi Fojing*, among the eighteen guardians for temples, the eighth one is a lion; and (2) in the Song dynasty scroll *Weimo Yan Jiao Tu Juan* by the famous painter Li Gong-Lin, Sakyamuni is depicted with Vimalakirti and sundry other Buddhist characters with the caption: “A lion lies prone beside Manjushri, fierce with protruding fangs and a scraggy mane; its huge paws and long claws make it look ferocious”. Apparently, with the popularity of Buddhism, the image of the lion as a guardian of dharma has become deeply rooted in Chinese beliefs.

The earliest known concrete written account of lions coming to China as an article of tribute is from the first year of the Gengshi Emperor (23 A.D.), near the end of the Western Han dynasty. Later, Ban Gu wrote in *Traditions of the Western Regions*, in the *Book of Han* that, “in the court there are plenty of excellent horses, and enormous elephants, lions, savage dogs, and huge birds that roam in packs outside in the fields; strange goods from faraway places all congregate here”. Still later, a section of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* (i.e., the *Compendium of Materia Medica*) describes lions as follows:

Lions, native to the Western Regions and resembling a tiger but smaller, are in a yellowish color like that of a golden terrier, although some individuals are also known to have a blue-green hue.

They have a big head and a long tail; when angered, all beasts are intimidated, and in death, even tigers and leopards dare not eat the carcass. In the Western Regions they are domesticated.

Lions were intermittently brought to China from the Western Regions as tribute, or as diplomatic gifts to imperial China. Therefore, the majority of the lions were kept in the imperial courts and not accessible to the common folk, who could only rely on hearsay and artistic representations of court artisans to fabricate an idea of what lions were like.

Thus, the establishment of lion images in China over the years, as well as the unique cultural traditions related to it, can be attributed to the economic and cultural ties between the East and the West in olden times. Later, when settlers from the Fujian and Guangdong regions came to Taiwan, they brought folk traditions and beliefs with them, which of course included the lion. In this manner, Taiwan was brought under the influence of the lion symbol, and has since developed unique folk culture from it.



Figure 1: Statute of the bodhisattva Manjushri accompanied by a lion in the Mogao Caves

3.2 Development of the Taiwanese Lion Dance

In Chinese tradition, the lion is considered as a mythical beast that wards off evil, subdues demons, and guards buildings. Additionally, the lion symbolizes fortune and happiness. Lion imagery is ubiquitous in earlier Taiwanese architecture, clothing, furniture, stationery, and articles of daily use, indicating its importance in the Chinese cultural sphere.

In Taiwanese culture, lions inevitably invoke the organization and traditions of lion dance troupes. Professor Tseng Yung-Yi of National Taiwan University explains, in his report for the planned Museum of Traditional Taiwanese Folk Art and Skills that “At first, Taiwanese lion dance troupes were formed to ward off marauding bandits and hostile entities outside of the settlement. Therefore, they were organized as self-defense militias that practiced martial arts to protect the community, and performed lion dances in celebrations and festivals. For this reason, the lion dance became extremely popular throughout various regions.”

Examining the history of Taiwan also revealed that, being a remote island, Taiwan used to be frequented by pirates. Although the Han Chinese have come to Taiwan in numbers since the Ming dynasty, most of those who came were either immigrants or exiled criminals, greatly outnumbered on a hostile island with dangers lurking all around; the harsh living conditions would thus deepen the significance of the lion dance to the early settlers. Furthermore, Taiwan has always been treated as a colony. After the Ming dynasty was conquered, the Koxinga used the island as a revival area for his attempts to reinstate the Ming dynasty and expel the conquering Manchurians; by then, the lion dance was thriving in Taiwan, and it flourished with the increased population.

The earliest account of the lion dance in Taiwan was an article in the Taiwan Prefecture Gazetteer edited by Gao Gong-Qian, which was published in the thirty-third year of Emperor Kangxi (1694 AD). “From the New Year’s Day to the Lantern Festival, mischievous youngsters dress up as cranes, lions, or horses, then visit households with shouts, dances, and rowdy music, to earn some gratuities; such behavior is called ‘riot in the hall’.” Similar entries can be found across chorographic records, such as the Chulo County, General History of Taiwan, and Revised Taiwan Prefecture Gazetteer. Lian Heng wrote in *Ya Yan* (Graceful Language) that “During the Lantern Festival, enthusiastic people like to perform the dragon dance with dragons built with bamboo strips and cloth, complete with colors and painted scales ... and there is also the lion dance, which is performed by practitioners of martial arts; such dances are popular in rural areas.”



It is clear that the early Taiwanese people extremely revered the lion, because it was an auspicious being against feared evil spirits. They even made up the groundless story that the lion

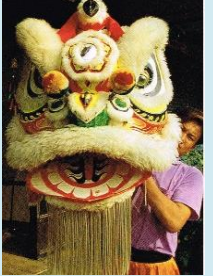


is the ninth son of the dragon, to further strengthen the lion’s exalted status. Furthermore, the establishment of lion dance troupes united able-bodied menfolk into teams that could shoulder the security of their communities, the military potential of which were certainly also tapped by the Koxinga and his army. Afterwards, the flourishing lion dance and its association with the traditional festivals became a unique festivity during holidays such as the Lantern Festival and Chinese New Year. Today, its performance remains essential in ceremonies and grand openings in Taiwan.

3.3 Lion Mask Designs and Styles

Research and interviews conducted by numerous researchers have showed that, although a wide variety of lion dances exist with corresponding masks, four varieties stand out as the most commonly seen designs in Taiwan today (Table 1).

Table 1: Predominant lion mask styles in Taiwan

Style	Colors	Features	Handling	Predominant Area
Taiwanese (Closed Mouth) 	Taiwanese lion masks usually feature green as the base color, but variations in red, yellow, white, and black are not uncommon.	A prominent forehead with a permanently closed mouth.	The performer holds the mask by two parallel vertical bars at the back of the mask.	Central and Southern Taiwan
Taiwanese (Open Mouth) 		Squarish and box-like, with a wide face and a large, moveable mouth.	The performer holds the mask by two parallel horizontal bars at the back of the mask.	Northern Taiwan, particularly among Hakka communities

<p>Cantonese (Fut San)</p> 	<p>Green, red, yellow, white, and black, representing the Five Elements, are commonly used. These colors also represent five generals in the Three Kingdoms era.</p>	<p>Big and round, with a prominent forehead and a flat, wide mouth.</p>	<p>The performer holds the mask by two bars fixed on the upper and lower sides at the back of the mask.</p>	<p>Guangdong and Guangxi in Southern China</p>
<p>Cantonese (Hok San)</p> 		<p>Relatively flatter and longer, with protruding lips like duckbills.</p>	<p>The performer holds the mask by two bars fixed on the upper and lower sides at the back of the mask.</p>	<p>Guangdong and Guangxi in Southern China</p>
<p>Pekingese (Northern Lion)</p> 	<p>The body is covered with gold, orange, or red fringes. It looks very lifelike even before the dance starts.</p>	<p>The body is covered with fringes in colors similar to actual beast fur, making it look like a Pekingese dog, hence the name.</p>	<p>The performer holds the mask by two bars fixed on the upper and lower sides at the back of the mask. The mouth is also controlled manually.</p>	<p>Areas north of the Yangtze</p>

As Table 1 shows, the style and coloration of the mask, as well as the dancer's costume and accessories, vary with environmental conditions such as the climate, as well as the customs of the region. Taiwanese lions are principally green in color, perhaps because Taiwan is in the temperate south, where green symbolizes protection because it is an effective camouflage among the abundant forests, shrubs, and grasslands. The colorful appearance of the Cantonese Xing Shi (awakened lions) reflects the flamboyant taste of people in Guangdong and Guangxi, where the booming seafaring trade in early years brought remarkable prosperity and wealth to the region. The Pekingese lions, in contrast, not only look like Pekingese dogs, but their yellowish colors also represent the Huangtu Plateau in the north.

The stylized design of the Taiwanese lion mask is worthy of preservation, not only because it reflects the extant culture, religious beliefs, and artistic achievements of the Taiwanese people, but also because it embodies a set of experiences and practices by which Taiwan's forefathers survived and ultimately thrived in their environment.

3.4 Elements in the Style of the Taiwanese Lion

From the above discussion of the types of lion head, we can see that cultures, habits, and appearances of lion heads are different by geography. In order to understand the significance of the appearance of Taiwanese Lion, this study conducted deep analysis on the Taiwanese Lion with a Closed Mouth. Guangdong Lion and Beijing Lion were introduced to Taiwan after the retreat of nationalist government, while the Taiwanese Lion with a Closed Mouth is a unique local lion appearance and the most common in lion dance in Taiwan. Thus, this study focused on the exploration of Taiwanese Lion.

This study specially interviewed Mr. Shun-rong Shih, a master craftsman of "Taiwanese Lion" who assumed that, "The most basic feature of the head of Taiwanese Lion is big and round. The positions of eyes, nose, mouth, and ears are divided by an invisible cross. Taiwanese Lion emphasizes the distinction of "Three Mountains and Five Mountains". Three Mountains refer to forehead, nose, and jaw. Plus the two cheeks, they become Five Mountains. They must be upright. "Three Mountains and Five Mountains" adopted the concept of Meridian and parallel to make the organs appear in appropriate portions and positions. The mouth looks like a shoe-shaped gold ingot. The face of Taiwanese Lion shall contain the Five Elements which are shown by the five colors, white, green, black, red, and yellow. It is difficult to produce the facial expression of Taiwanese Lion as it differs by the personalities of its creator.



Figure 2: The appearance of Taiwanese Lion

Master Shih emphasized in the interview that the craft embodies the idea that “the face is the mirror of the mind”; the expression on the mask is a reflection of the craftsman’s inner world, with the dignity, solemnity, strength, and dexterity shown in a mask’s expression echoing the craftsman’s mind. Therefore, lion masks made by different craftsmen and in different regions display distinct appearances, which in turn contribute to the diversity of these masks.

4. Methodology

To uphold the artistic values of Taiwanese lions, the present study explored transforming and applying cultural images to integrate elements of the style and dance of the lions into furniture design. To facilitate the transformation of elements, the present authors interviewed Shih Shun-Jung, the aforementioned master lion mask craftsman, Li Yuan-Heng, an art salon designer living in France, and two professional product designers, and gathered their suggestions to form a set of guidelines for furniture design incorporating elements of the Taiwanese lion.

4.1 Field Study

Design elements of the Taiwanese lion mask were identified from the expert interviews. Elements drawn from the shapes, symbolism, and coloration of the masks, and the meanings behind them, are listed in Table 2.



Figure 3: Master lion mask craftsman Shih Shun-Jung and one of his masterpieces

Table 2: Elements in the Taiwanese lion mask design

Aspect	Elements and Description	Meanings
Shape	<p>The Cross Method The face of the mask should be divided by a cross, which determines the locations for facial features such as the nose, eyes, mouth, and ears, as well as the locations for the cheekbones, forehead, and lower jaw. These features must be well-proportioned and symmetric, and give the face a human-like feeling.</p>	The cross method is not only a precise way to place facial features; it also implies fairness and justice.
	<p>Three Mountains and Five Ridges The “three mountains” refer to the forehead, nose, and lower jaw, which comprise the “five ridges” together with the two cheekbones. It is in essence a positioning technique similar to latitude and longitude; the positions of the forehead, nose, and lower jaw are determined by the longitudes, whereas the cheekbones are determined by the latitudes.</p>	Friends from the three mountains and five ridges (implying every corner of the world) come together to combine their powers and become stronger, and also to develop a sense of cohesiveness.
Symbolism	<p>Sycee The mouth is shaped like a sycee, with protruding fangs to make the face more intimidating.</p>	The sycee represents wealth, and by extension to be free from material insecurity.
	<p>Hooked Clouds The hooked cloud-like marks on the face are not mere decoration; they also have a relief-like effect that increases the depth of the face.</p>	The hooked clouds represent being at ease and free from constraints, and they also imply the continuation of life, auspice, and happiness.
Coloration	<p>Wu Xing Chinese tradition reckons metal, wood, water, fire, and earth to be the five elements that constitute the world. Gold and white are believed to be the colors for metal; green the color for wood; black and blue the colors for water; red, orange, and purple the colors for fire; and yellow and brown the colors for earth.</p>	The Wu Xing are the components of the whole world, which changes as the five rise and decline. In Chinese tradition, the Wu Xing are the forces behind individual fates, and also the driving forces that initiate the changes and cycles in the world.



Figure 4: Facial features on a lion mask

Notice that the shape of the mask places great emphasis on its balance, symmetry, and symbolic meanings, in addition to the coloration that contains Taoist concepts and outlooks. The face is a manifestation of the traditional “spherical heavens and square earth” worldview, which is further emphasized by the ten circles on the mask, including the whole face as a big circle, and other smaller circles that form the forehead, the tip and two wings of the nose, the two cheekbones, and the prominent lower jaw that consists of three circles. These ten circles signify the Chinese expression *shi quan shi mei* (perfection in every aspect).

The mask colors are symbolic in Wu Xing theory, which considers the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth the constituents that distinguish yet blend together everything in the world (Figure 22). In most of Taiwanese lion masks, yellow is used as the base color, which represents the earth element; the red flames on the forehead and green hooked clouds by the cheeks represent the fire and wood elements; the black brows represent the water element; and the Chinese character *wang* (king) painted in gold on the forehead, as well as the white eye sockets and teeth, represent the metal element. Therefore, in the coloration of the lion mask, the “mutual reinforcement and inhibition” relationship among the Wu Xing is well represented, reflecting that the representational approach in traditional Chinese art is all-encompassing, making the artwork a self-contained microcosm.



Figure 5: Wu Xing based coloration

4.1 Establishment of Design Guidelines

After interviewing the aforementioned experts, the following set of design guidelines for the Taiwanese lion masks was drawn up through extensive discussion.

1. The postures and spirits of the lion dance must be well preserved, to facilitate the collaboration between the dialectic objects and metaphysical spirit that will enrich the design.
2. To meet modern needs, mixed multiple materials that correspond to the design elements can be used to creatively transform and implement the cultural elements in product designs.
3. If a design depends upon the Wu Xing and corresponding coloration as the sole design element of the Taiwanese lion, optical color mixing can occur as a result. Designers are hence advised to draw on single colors for their designs.
4. Because the face of the Taiwanese lion is a combination of circles, the designers are advised to make good use of side and corner features in the product image.

5. Cultural and Creative Design

5.1 Transforming and Implementing Cultural Elements

Generally, designers transform their personal cultural experiences, sensory perceptions, and intuitions into design elements. Therefore, suitable adoption of element transformation techniques and approaches in design thinking, which can be achieved through exploration of the cultural elements, facilitates the versatility of the cultural and creative design.

Analyzing the objective conditions in the transformation of elements in Taiwanese culture revealed the following assertions. Lin and Li have expressed that most of contemporary culture and creative products are merely the imitation of forms, or even just the symbolic re-representation of textures and colors, whose lack of cultural imagery and connotations make them powerless to enhance culture. Likewise, Leong, D., & Clark, H. maintained that each of the materials, functions, and structures in a culture and creative product is a channel that conveys the aesthetics, security, taste, and stylishness of the product design; therefore, these features are a primary medium for the communication between user and product, as well as a reflection of the lifestyle of people in the region, and the purpose of creatively incorporating cultural elements into a product should be to convey a comprehensive image of the culture and people in the region. Handa (1999) indicated that the traditional cultures and lifestyles of each country have unique identities that, if used well in product design, can enhance the uniqueness of the products and increase consumer experiences in the highly competitive globalized market. Regarding the cultural connotations of products, Ho, Lin, and Liu (1996) argues that culture-infused product design should involve a re-examination and reconsideration of the cultural connotations in an object, to give the cultural factors a revitalized aspect in modern design.

On the basis of the preceding discourse, culture and creative product design is an approach that re-examines the cultural connotations of traditional objects and then modernizes and integrates them into contemporary products. To implement such element transformation methods in practice, the present study has identified the following key points, to go beyond the mere imitation of forms or symbolic re-representation of textures and colors.

1. The characteristics and attributes of materials should be emphasized, and so should the functions and structures of the product.
2. The cultural images should be transformed into tangible styles based on life experiences.
3. The encoding and decoding relationship between the product and its user should be carefully considered, so that the product can act as a bridge of communication between the designer and users.

5.2 Transformation of Cultural Imagery

By integrating the transformed elements of the Taiwanese lion, the authors of present study developed the designs for the “Cloud Lion High stool” and “Cloud Lion Long Bench” in two years. As illustrated in Figure 7, the design process consisted of three aspects: gathering cultural inspiration, practical integration and feedback, and analysis of cultural elements. Gathering cultural inspiration was a process of extensive literature review to trace the evolution of the artifact through time, combined with expert interviews to understand the historical context in its development, which facilitated the deconstruction and assessment of the artifact’s cultural elements to create design guidelines. The practical integration and feedback involved the reorganization and rearrangement of cultural elements after the deconstruction, the search and development for new materials to be combined with traditional working methods, and the adjustments of products based on feedback from user surveys.

Overall, the authors emphasized the analysis of cultural elements. Useful symbols and design parameters were first extracted through the abstraction of the cultural elements; subsequently, to ensure the transformation of such elements maintained conformity with the metaphysical principles behind them, the elements were examined to (a) determine these metaphysical principles, and (b) verify whether the specifications for the elements could satisfy modern behavior patterns. Then attention reverted to the study of external features, to understand the properties and functions the elements would bestow upon the artifact. All of these procedures involve the generalization of the metaphysical principles associated with the artifact’s external features from its corresponding spiritual qualities, which had to be repeated numerous times to ensure a comprehensive and well thought-out design that would be both innovative and practical.



Figure 7: Transformation of cultural images

Furthermore, the study established three solutions for designers when encountering a complicated element conditions:

1. Extracting the side and corner features of the cultural element.
2. Exaggerating and applying minute details of the cultural element.
3. Directly applying the entire cultural element as a symbol.

In principle, these three solutions simplify the image of the cultural element concerned, and then either extract a portion of the element for transformation, or exaggerate a minute detail of the element; alternatively, the element could be used directly as a symbol, which is normal practice in designing. In the end, the study was able to amass plenty of complete cultural elements for the intended designs through the transformation and integration of cultural images. These cultural elements were subsequently used, in conjunction with the results of literature review and the input from the experts, to produce a set of design guidelines. Of course, specifications such as product functions and user needs were required before the intended designs could be completed.

6. Design Guidelines in Actual Practice

The proposed design guidelines in transforming cultural imagery are intended to inform the design of real products. To verify the effectiveness of these guidelines in practice, the authors applied them to transform cultural images and design actual products, ensuring the adoption of a variety of connotations and concepts. Accordingly, the “Cloud Lion long bench” and “Cloud Lion” were designed as a series of cultural and creative products. The design processes are described in detail in this section.

6.1 Design Concepts of the “Cloud Lion long bench” and “Cloud Lion”

The present study found that benches and stools play a substantial role in the lion dance. Specifically, they are frequently stacked or crisscrossed during a performance to simulate terrain features such as hills or streams around which the lion crawls or prances high and low, imitating the behaviors of real lions in the wild.

Moreover, the study has also noticed that benches and stools are often placed in front of temples or in the shade of large trees, which are traditional places in Taiwan to leisurely get together; hence, they stand for an irreplaceable image in the traditional Taiwanese lifestyle. Therefore, this study selected them as a medium for integrating Taiwanese lion imagery into a modernized design.

6.1.1 Cloud Lion long bench

The long bench is designed in the same manner as general long benches that are used in the lion dance, which are often staked up or arranged in a manner that simulates a hill or slope for the lion to ascend, with the symbolism of attaining higher achievements in life. Its wooden structure is supported by mortise and tenon joints, and the surface is decorated with the engraving of a lion mask. Part of the seat surface is covered by an inlaid black marble slab that simulates the back of the lion, and the symbolism is further strengthened by hooked clouds at the tip of the bench legs that represent the legs of the lion. Moreover, the black marble slab gives the simple design a lively but peaceful impression.



Figure 11: Long bench



Figure 12: Demonstration of the Cloud Lion long bench

6.1.2 The design concept of "Cloud Lion", a new type of rocking chair in Taiwan

The design of "Cloud Lion" rocking chair attempts to break through tradition. In addition to the cooperative development with professional furniture manufacturer, the chair focuses on the radian in line with ergonomics and extreme simplified design, which was different from average rocking chairs. It combines traditional process, technology, and spirit. As of structural capacity, it combines smiling curve with massif-shaped radian to form interaction force and make the overall structural stress more stable and visual effects more balanced. Thus, when one sits or lies on it, he/she can have calm and peaceful state of mind.

The design and production of the seat and back of "Cloud Lion" is of unibody structure covered by red leather and dotted by golden copper nails (lion-shaped buckle), which looks like the pattern of ancient palace gate. Its concept is derived from the decorative tassels on the back of Taiwanese Lion to imply the overall appearance of Taiwanese Lion. Its structure is an attempt of the abstraction of Taiwanese Lion appearance and implies the state of a sleeping lion so that users can experience the curved modeling of the chair.

The lower part of the chair integrates traditional embroidery and has the patterns of sea tides embroidered with gold threads. When Taiwan Lion dances, the tassels in the colors of the Five Elements moves and forms the pattern like sea tides. In order to integrate the traditional technique and the specific patterns of the sea tides in the design of "Cloud Lion" chair, the design had specially adopted professional electric embroidery technique with gold threads to present the refined style of traditional processes. The different parts of the chair echo with each other and integrate complete overall design in line with the design specifications and spirits of the experts. The practical design of Cloud Lion chair shows the style and unique design of cultural creativity.

The framework of the chair is welded by stainless steel. Its surface is mainly covered with red leather. Especially, the lower part of the chair has the patterns of sea tides which look like the movement of the tassels when Taiwanese Lion is dancing. Such sea tide patterns are embroidered by gold threads to showing the gorgeous and noble characteristics.

In the design of the rocking chair, the pattern of "Taiwan Lion" has been reduced to the size of a buckle. The lion-shaped buckles not only enhance the beauty of the chair, but also imply the connotation of vitality and blessing. The buckles are made by bronze with 3D delicate carving of lion head and mane. The smooth buckles will not scratch the leather or human skin. They serve for the functions of connection, fixation, decoration, and security of structure.



Figure 8: Front view of “Cloud Lion” rocking chair



Figure 9: The professional exhibition of “Cloud Lion” rocking chair at 2015 Taiwanese Designer Exhibition Week



Figure 10: Lion buckles of “Cloud Lion” rocking chair

6.2 Application of the Design Guidelines

In the design process of the “Cloud Lion long bench” and “Cloud Lion”, the present study implemented the design guidelines with mixed multiple materials to create products outside of the traditional working methods as follows:

1. The Taiwanese lion mask was transformed into three-dimensional abstract forms and integrated into the proposed products. The elements in the Cloud Lion stool series were taken from abstract representation of the mask and body of the lion dancers, deconstructed and converted to suit the form and function of stools. In retrospect, second degree abstraction is a better approach, because it invokes the traditional forms while also allowing an easier integration with the modern functions of the products, which is essential in preventing the products from becoming mere artworks or sculptures with traditional elements.
2. To meet modern needs, mixed multiple materials has been used in the culture and creative product design. The Cloud Dragon series used wood as the basic material, combined with the ceramic plate in the bar stool and the marble slab in the long bench. This was not only to increase the high-end impression of the products; the contrast between the materials adds vitality.
3. Because the face of the Taiwanese lion mask is a configuration of circles, features have been added at the products’ sides and corners. Integrating motifs from traditional artifacts into both products has made them more aesthetically pleasing, and bestowed on them the symbolism of continuous prosperity and fortune. Therefore, integrating cultural motifs also rises modern products in a meaningful way.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the design of two products implementing motifs drawn from the Taiwanese lion dance mask through the transformation of cultural imagery, furnishing a real-world example of how to creatively develop culture and creative products. In this particular case, this was realized by exploring the significance and human spirit of the Taiwanese lion, which were discovered through field studies and expert interviews. Furthermore, the present study has confirmed the value and uniqueness of local Taiwanese cultural material. The lessons gained throughout the design process can be summarized as follows.

1. On the integration of abstract elements in product design:

While working on the Cloud Lion series, the authors found that the overwhelming diversity of the symbolic elements present in the Taiwanese lion mask made the extraction of motifs a challenging task. Accordingly, prospective designers are suggested to deconstruct the artifact

before transforming the cultural elements, to reduce the complexity of the operation and optimize the designs and applications.

2. On the inheritance of traditional Taiwanese culture and techniques:

In the numerous visits to the master lion mask craftsman Shih Shun-Jung, the authors noticed that most of the lion mask craftsmen are advanced in age now, and facing a succession crisis. Younger generations are unwilling to take up the trade, because they find it tedious, that it does not generate enough income for the basic livelihood, or that they simply do not enjoy traditional artifacts in these changing times. By actively studying the lion mask culture in Taiwan, the present authors hope to awaken Taiwanese people to the memories, inspiring them to find innovative ways to pass on their cultural heritage to future generations.

3. On the timeliness and diversity of integrating transformed cultural motifs into modern designs:

An integrated design approach is the most effective way to develop culture and creative products. Drawing on the full range of options for transforming design elements—exploring dialectic and metaphysical meanings, considering side and corner features or minute details, or just representing objects directly—generates extracted motifs that are more versatile and can more easily be matched to the functions of the intended products. After years of trial and error, the authors have proven that this approach does not become obsolete with changing times or ideology; quite the contrary, these mechanisms can generate more diverse responses to design parameters and inspire endless possibilities.

4. On the spirit and meanings of the design:

The design approach presented in this study can inform the form or style of products. Designers must conduct a literature review to explore the dialectic and metaphysical spirit of the traditional material, because the underlying cultural connotations can only be identified through such research. This process should enhance the designers' sensibilities, and in turn, their abilities to choose suitable materials, color, and stylization that facilitate users to recall or perceive the value and connotations of cultural elements. Therefore, the development of such sensibilities is essential to incorporate the spirit of traditional cultural elements into modern product design.

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