

Traditional Ethnic Furniture in Tibetan Culture

Jiahui Zhang, Jun Li*

College of Material Science and Art Design, Inner Mongolia Agricultural University, Hohhot 010018, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China

*Corresponding author: Jun Li, cc98954@163.com

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Abstract: Ethnic furniture is a kind of furniture unique to ethnic minorities in China. The furniture of various ethnic groups has unique features in structure, color, and pattern application. Due to its geographical, economic, and cultural reasons, ethnic furniture can carry and express culture through its own characteristics such as shape, color, and building process. Ethnic furniture includes Tibetan furniture, Bai furniture, Yi furniture, Dai furniture, Korean furniture, Mongolian furniture, Miao furniture, Uyghur furniture, and so on. This ethnic furniture has strong regional cultural and artistic characteristics, reflecting the national cultural connotation it represents. With the development of history and cultural characteristics, it can be said that furniture is another form of history. When one enters the home of the Tibetan people, one will be overwhelmed by the pieces of carved and exquisite cabinets, tables, boxes, and other furniture. Tibetan furniture is a part of the life of Tibetans, as Tibetans control the development and style of Tibetan furniture. Therefore, this paper studies Tibetan furniture, as it has great significance in Tibetan culture.

Keywords: Tibetan furniture; Tibetan culture; Ethnic furniture

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1. Tibetan furniture and culture

Tibetan furniture has a long history. According to the “Brief History of the Tibetan People” and the “Teachings of King Songtsen Gampo”, there were historical events such as recruiting carpenters to build Jokhang Temple during the Tubo Dynasty, which laid the foundation for the development of Tibetan furniture and also became an important medium for the inheritance and dissemination of Tibetan traditional culture. In the period of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan furniture work reached its peak, not only using a large number of materials to produce crafts with distinct local characteristics but also absorbing folk skills from other regions and organizing them to form a unique style. It can be seen that Tibetan furniture has a long and enduring history^[1].

The essence of Tibetan culture is contained in Tibetan-style furniture, which is centered on the life of the Tibetan people and embodies the wisdom of predecessors and the technology of future generations. For thousands of years, the industrious and intelligent Tibetan people have used their outstanding painting art, exquisite carving talent, and highly nationalistic decorative techniques to create an outstanding Tibetan furniture culture with unique structure, exquisite shape, many colors, and fine workmanship. It not only retains

the characteristics of primitive simplicity of rough and bold, robust and deep, but also reflects the distinctive regional characteristics and national style, and has a high collection value. Tibetan-style furniture comes in a variety of forms and colors, such as gates, window beams, pillars, and other architectural decorations with complimentary carving and painting, that show a warm, bright, happy, and auspicious atmosphere and style ^[2].

2. Tibetan furniture detail

2.1. Materials of Tibetan furniture

After detailed investigation and research, the Tibetan furniture makers found that the southeast of Tibet has rich forest resources, which makes it easy to obtain the required wood. In addition, due to the lack of transportation in Tibetan areas, transporting wood to Tibet from other places will increase the cost, so it is more economical to use locally produced wood ^[3]. Hence, the Tibetan furniture makers chose local wood as the main material.

Under normal circumstances, Tibetan furniture is made of softwood such as fir (such as Nyingchi spruce and Himalayan redwood, also known as Tibetan larch), cypress, pine, and walnut. A small number of Tibetan furniture will use rare plateau hardwoods for simple carving, but this is relatively rare. The humid climate of the Tibetan Plateau and the rampant pest damage to the wood are serious, resulting in the wood used for Tibetan furniture being susceptible to decay, so some furniture cannot be kept for a long time. To make up for these shortcomings and deficiencies, Tibetan furniture makers use some auxiliary materials to protect and beautify furniture. For example, the use of materials such as tung oil, putty, cloth and butter lamp ash on the outer surface of furniture can form an effective protective layer. These auxiliary materials not only increase the service life of the furniture but also provide a unique decorative effect for the appearance of the furniture ^[4].

In the early days, Tibetan furniture did not have painted decoration, and the quality of the furniture was judged based on the wood material. However, due to the reduction in wood supplies and limited high-quality wood resources, much Tibetan furniture was made with poor-quality wood. To solve this problem, people began to paint and decorate the surface of the furniture, which can make up for the lack of wood quality and make the furniture more beautiful. The evaluation criteria for Tibetan furniture have changed with time, and more attention has been paid to the quality of the painting to measure its grade.

2.2. The making of Tibetan furniture

Tibetan furniture is well known for its unique style and distinctive features. Although the production process and decorative techniques were influenced by the styles of ancient Central Plains, India, and Central and Western Asia, the craftsmen of Tibetan furniture still formed their own unique artistic style. The Tibetan craftsmen pay more attention to painting and decoration, rather than pursuing rare furniture materials or excessive carving. For enthusiasts, Tibetan furniture is not only a practical piece of furniture but also a cultural symbol with strong colors, due to its gorgeous decoration and simple shape ^[5].

In terms of modeling structure, old Tibetan furniture uses solid wood structure, mainly frame type, and mostly adopts mortise and tenon combination. The base material is made of solid-sawn wood and solid wood board, so there are no seams that will affect the painting. However, in the post-production of Tibetan furniture, splice boards are used and cloth is affixed to large areas of painting. Therefore, the cloth has also become a typical basis for judging the period of Tibetan furniture.

In terms of decorative techniques, Tibetan furniture has unique characteristics and colorful decoration. These include painting, jewelry setting (such as turquoise, coral stone, cat's eye, and so on), iron nail sealing, wood group edging, carving and hide setting. Almost all of the Tibetan furniture is covered in gorgeous paint, and some even have texture changes. Decorative patterns are varied, gorgeous, and beautiful, mostly related to

wealth and jewelry. Some of the designs are bold, subtle, and modern. In the painting techniques, the layers are rich and the colors are bright, showing the strong folk interest. In addition, the surface decoration often uses gold-painted patterns and carved decorative patterns, and uses luxurious metal parts to show a luxurious style ^[6].

2.3. Features of Tibetan furniture

2.3.1. Modeling characteristics

The shape of Tibetan furniture is relatively simple and the variety is limited. They show a simple and gorgeous form, with regular geometric patterns as the layout principle, the plane space is orderly and divided into various shapes. Tibetan furniture does not pursue the complexity and twists of the form, usually a rectangular or square structure, one without support legs is called a box, one without drawers is called a table, and one with both is called a cabinet. Tibetan furniture is simple and lovely compared to the various furniture types today. This simple and practical design style gives Tibetan furniture a unique charm in modern homes. In addition, Tibetan furniture also pays attention to detail and decoration, often using exquisite carvings and inlays to increase the sense of art ^[7].

Much of the traditional Tibetan furniture has no support legs and is made directly into the shape of floor-to-floor cabinets, which are similar to the houses they are in and are square, with few arcs or curves. This reflects the characteristics of Tibetan furniture that tend to be architectural to a certain extent. This style of furniture is usually made of heavy wood to ensure durability. Moreover, the decoration also tends to be simple and rich in symbolic patterns to highlight the deep heritage of Tibetan culture. This structural and decorative style of furniture is very suitable for the plateau climate and living environment and also highlights the Tibetan people's reverence and respect for the natural environment ^[8].

In addition to religious-related offerings, sutra tables, and other items, most Tibetan furniture uses a box-type shape. These cabinet types of furniture are called "brocade cabinets" in Tibet. Cupboards are usually cabinets or lockers made of wood with elaborate carved and painted decorations. They are often unique and ornate, combining Tibetan art, religious beliefs, and living needs, and have become one of the important pieces of furniture in Tibetan homes. They not only provide the function of storage but also show the wealth and status of the owner ^[9].

Most of the cabinet furniture has a square shape, so people can freely choose the size according to the needs of the interior space, and the pieces of furniture can be spliced, thus greatly increasing the use of Tibetan furniture. In addition, the design of the cabinet furniture is also very flexible, as people can choose different materials, colors, and decorations according to personal preferences and room style, to integrate and add beauty and practicality to the interior space. At the same time, cabinet furniture can also be equipped with various functions according to needs, such as drawers, partitions, hooks, and so on, to help organize and store items and improve the efficiency of use. In short, the variety and flexibility of the cabinet furniture make it an ideal storage choice.

Tibetan furniture shows a calm and lively style. Its shape is square and resolute, giving people a sense of stability, while bright colors and patterns represent vitality. Usually, the background color of Tibetan furniture is red, yellow, and brown, and the pattern is presented in a variety of rich colors and styles. Some people describe the colors of Tibetan furniture as colorful as the skirts of women in Tibetan pastoral areas. The furniture is often carefully carved and painted, showing various auspicious patterns, such as Tibetan lotus flowers, Tibetan knots, and so on. In addition, Tibetan furniture is often decorated with precious metals such as gold and silver to make it more gorgeous and rich in texture. These unique design elements make Tibetan furniture play a prominent role in decoration and convey profound cultural connotations. Whether placed in the living room, bedroom,

study, or office space, Tibetan furniture can give people a unique and luxurious feeling, so that the entire space becomes full of artistic atmosphere ^[10].

The patterns of Tibetan furniture are often composed of designs that combine religious elements and ethnic characteristics. The religious color is mainly reflected in the depiction of some common Buddhist symbols and scriptures, such as the image of the Buddha, the lotus flower, the eight treasures, and auspicious symbols. These patterns not only show the Tibetan people's devotion to the Buddhist faith but also convey the yearning for well-being and auspiciousness.

2.3.2. Decorative features

The decorative craft of Tibetan furniture is largely similar to that of other ethnicities and is mainly divided into three aspects, carving, embedding, and painting.

In the production of Tibetan furniture, carving is an important process. This kind of carving mainly includes different forms such as through carving and relief and line carving. By performing these carving operations on the surface of the furniture, it can show a sense of hierarchy and give people a unique aesthetic ^[11].

Although the carved patterns of Tibetan furniture are not complicated, they are unique and full of charm. Under the premise of ensuring the robustness of the structure, this carving can be decorated on the furniture. Although the shape of Tibetan furniture is simple and usually square, the carving process can achieve a very complex degree. Through this elaborate carving technique, Tibetan furniture has been uniquely decorated in appearance, showing extraordinary craftsmanship. This kind of carving is not only a simple decoration but also an artistic expression. Through the change of texture and pattern, Tibetan furniture can convey a deep cultural connotation.

In the production of Tibetan furniture, pine stone, coral stone, and cat's eye are often used for fine inlaying techniques. In addition, animal bones and hides are used as decorative materials, and iron spikes are used for edge sealing. The idea behind the selection and production of these materials is to be close to life, using locally available materials. It can be seen that in the process of Tibetan furniture production, the choice and use of materials are regarded as important factors to emphasize the harmony and unity of the living environment ^[12].

Tibetan traditional furniture is famous for its strong and bright colors, which give the furniture a simple, heavy, and festive atmosphere. Almost all Tibetan furniture is covered with gorgeous patterns, and each pattern implies a specific auspicious meaning, forming a unique Tibetan furniture culture. It can be said that this furniture realizes the concept of designing with intentions and auspicious meaning. The decorations and patterns on the furniture are rich in meaning, including but not limited to Buddhist teachings, elements of nature, animals, and traditional stories. These patterns are not only the inheritance and expression of Tibetan culture but also reflect people's desire to pursue good luck and happiness. The painting techniques of Tibetan furniture production are unique and exquisite, which can integrate traditional Tibetan totems into a variety of different furniture, forming an integrated art. Through this furniture, people can feel the profound heritage and unique charm of Tibetan culture.

3. Collection of Tibetan furniture

3.1. Tibetan furniture and placing environment

When placing Tibetan furniture, it is necessary to consider the overall harmony of the environment. First, choose a spacious and bright room or space to place the furniture. This allows the characteristics of the furniture to be displayed and visually increases the sense of openness of the space.

Secondly, the placement of Tibetan furniture needs to follow certain rules and principles. Generally

speaking, the placement of furniture should pay attention to symmetry and balance. For example, beds, tables, and chairs can be arranged symmetrically, making the whole space look more orderly and stable. In addition, pay attention to the proportional relationship between furniture and space, and avoid furniture that is too large or too small, affecting the overall beauty. In addition, also choose the right accessories to echo the Tibetan furniture. For example, hang a painting with Tibetan elements on the wall, or place some carpets and fabrics with Tibetan patterns. These accessories can further emphasize the style characteristics of Tibetan furniture, adding a sense of interest and uniqueness to the entire space. Finally, pay attention to keeping the furniture clean and maintained. Tibetan furniture is usually made of natural materials, such as wood, leather, and cloth, so regular cleaning and maintenance can extend the life of the furniture, while also maintaining its original color and texture ^[13].

3.2. The inheritance and development of Tibetan furniture

Tibetan furniture is a classic example of ethnic culture furniture, which has strong social, regional, and national characteristics. The Tibetan culture originating from the Tibetan Plateau has injected the practical elements of national culture into Tibetan furniture, making it a unique product that cannot be copied by other types of furniture. Based on a long history and culture, Tibetan furniture revolves around the life of the Tibetan people. Tibetan furniture has an outstanding history, culture, and story, which has become an indispensable part of traditional Tibetan culture, so more efforts should be made to protect and inherit the history and culture contained in Tibetan furniture ^[14].

From the current market analysis, the more rooted the local products, the more they can stimulate the development of the international market. New design ideas in the national culture that can retain the advantages of ethnic culture furniture is a new challenge facing the industry. Tibetan furniture should seek a way of integrating tradition and modernity. Only by transforming the resources of Tibetan culture and art into the resource advantages of contemporary reality can the unique characteristics of Tibetan furniture be maintained. By keeping pace with the current time, constantly updating and developing, while not losing its characteristics when adapting to the time, can the culture be revitalized.

4. Conclusion

Tibetan furniture has a long history and unique national style, forming a unique cultural connotation. As an ethnic culture furniture art, Tibetan furniture with its rich and colorful culture and historical accumulation, shows a unique aesthetic art. Through the analysis of Tibetan furniture, this paper has explored how to better inherit, develop, and innovate Chinese ethnic culture furniture ^[15].

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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