

THE PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN TRADITIONAL PACKING AND GREEN DESIGN

Chuko, Cheng¹ and Chang, Hsiao-Yun¹

¹Graduate Institute of Design, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan

rdoffice@mail.cyut.edu.tw

Abstract:

Progress is being made in science and technology every day and there has been rapid development in information. Enhanced by business and capitalism, it seems that we human beings need to know about the outer world via “vision”. Packing, having developed rapidly under such conditions, appears in great variety, causing people be twisted about the use of packing.

Keywords: packing、green design、design science

Advanced Chinese and Japanese Dictionary (published in Japan) explains the meanings of packing as prepare and wrapping luggage (originating from Fenglufu a piece of cloth with which person wrapped himself while taking a bath, or wrapping something with a square towel (referred to as Fenglufu) to distinguish it from other people's. This towel is really like the cloth Chinese use to pack a parcel (Figs 3 and 4).

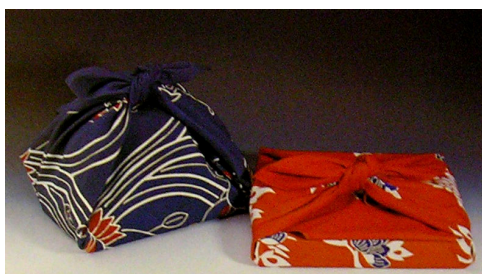


Fig. 3 Japanese Fenglufu



Fig. 4 Japanese Fenglufu

The word “packing” appeared first in the 19th century (Kuangxu Period of the Qing Dynasty). It was collected in an Oxford dictionary and defined as the act of “wrapping an object to make it look fashionable” and the “transmission of advertising message”. From the definition we can see that packing must be constructed with the realization of a transaction and value, which gradually becomes a component of commodities.

In a word the words wrapping, filling and packing are defined differently in different countries. Their meanings and usage, however, are more or less the same. People's ideas about packing seem to be the same though there can be differences in history background, culture and customs. They all have the meanings of making a parcel, bundling, and packing one's bags, packing, wrapping and putting something in a container to protect it, plus with the functions of transporting and decorating the object so as to make it circulate.

3. The dawn of green design in traditional print advertisements

Documents about packing in China started in the Bei Song Dynasty (from the 9th to 12th century). The white rabbit trade mark of Liujia Gongfu Zhenpu in Jinan was the first to use print advertisement on packing as recognition and convey an advertising message. Its graph was a white rabbit holding a pestle with two lines of expressions, “Liujia Gongfu Zhenpu in Jinan, the white rabbit in front of the door as the mark”, showing that at the time of the Bei Song Dynasty in

China there had appeared packing with advertisements for promotion and recognition (Fig. 5). It developed and gradually became popular in shops in the Ming and Qing dynasties and was used greatly in directions for use of a commodity and packing paper on which there were usually the name of the shop, the trade mark, advertising expressions and relevant pictures etc. though printed only in single color. This, however, not only reduced the cost in expenses and human resources, but was also consistent with the characteristics of “less printing” in the green design nowadays and the effect of advertising (Fig. 6).

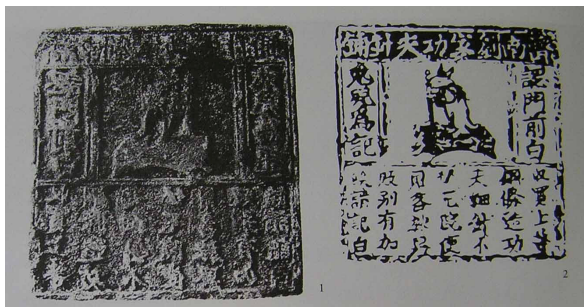


Fig. 5 Liujia Gongfu Zhenpu in Jinan in the Bei Song Dynasty



Fig. 6 Wrapping paper for troche in the Qing Dynasty

4. Understanding the concept of green design for packing from traditional vocabulary

In the popular novels wandering here and there in the Ming and Qing dynasties in China, one can read detailed narration about the life in those times. For instance, in *Jinpingmei* there was the expression, “You two can get some drinks with this. I will thank you if you help with that.” In the *Story of the Red Mansion* we have, “Some days after I will give them some money so they can get some drinks and snacks.” In the story, “get some drinks with this” means to buy some drinks with an empty bottle.

There is another expression “carry away leftovers from a meal”. This expression, now used as menace meaning “bear all the consequences”, originated as an act that people often had a piece of cloth (a piece of cloth for wrapping, the same the plastic bags nowadays) with them all the times in ancient times and wrapped the odds and ends up in a parcel to carry with them when they went on a trip. They did so even when they went out for a dinner, for they could pack the leftovers after dinner and nothing of this was provided in the restaurants. From this, one can see

that people in ancient times had developed the habit of preparing shopping bags for themselves, which is also a good example of packing culture in traditional green design.

5. The concept that shows green design in traditional packing

As far the history of the use of packing is concerned, it could be traced to the early ancient times after the appearance of human beings but before there was civilization when humans had learned to make leather bags with animals skin or weaved baskets with reed for use in daily life.

In early times when society did not develop steadily and there was not advanced science and technology, everything needed in life depended on the great investment of human resources and they were all made by hand. For people in those days, the nature was the source of materials free of charge, like wood, rice straw, bamboo and so on. They made things with materials easy to get around them, even for transport for the purposes of business. They also has goods packed when they took them for sale in the market, thus we can see various packing in shops like fish meat packed with taro leaves (Figs 7~9), Youtiao packing (deep-fried dough sticks, Fig. 10), cake packing (Fig. 11) and bags for rice (Fig. 12) etc.

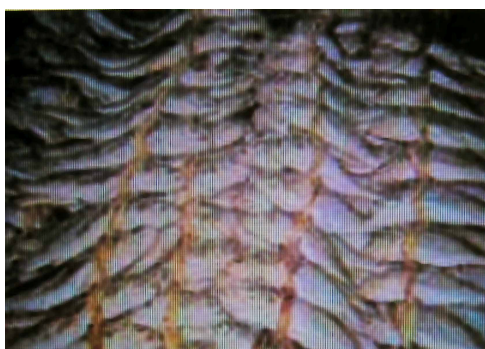


Fig. 7 Packing of dried fish in early times

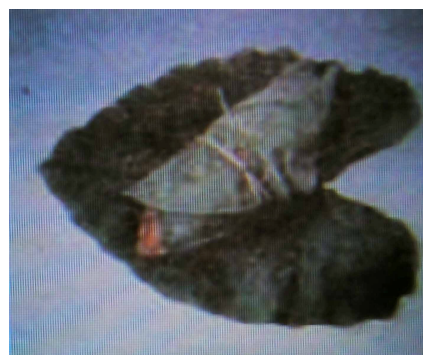


Fig. 8 Packing of dried fish in early times



Fig. 9 Packing of dried fish in early times

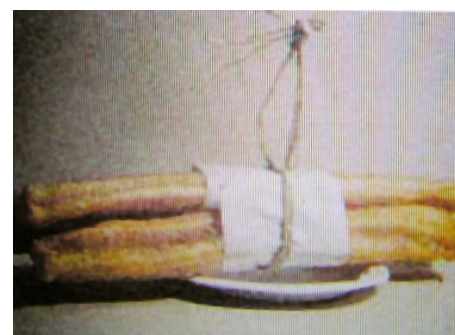


Fig. 10 Youtiao packing in early times

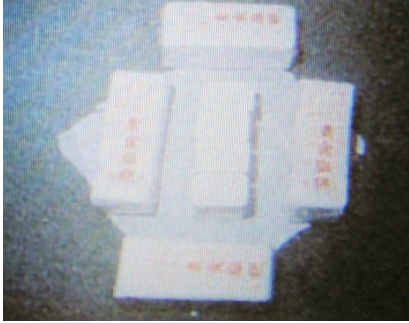


Fig. 11 Cake packing in early times



Fig. 12 Gunny bags for rice

6. Ideas going far away from the concept of green design

After the Industrial revolution in the 18th century factories with great efficiency appeared one after another like bamboo shoots after a spring rain and, with the development of science and technology, a large number of various chemical materials were put into use in daily life, plastics, transparent films and aluminum foil were employed in the packing market, which resulted in great drop in cost and increase in sale while traditional manual packing gradually disappeared for being unable to keep up with the demand, except a few that last till the present time for use in traditional festivals like Zongzi (a pyramid-shape dumpling of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves) packing.



Fig. 13

Now under the condition that living standard has been boosted and people's ability to consume has been raised, the form of consumption is turned gradually from functional layer to the need on the spirit layer. With the guiding of capitalism and commercialization, old goods are weeded through to bring forth the new constantly and they become more complicated and exquisite,

usually pronouncing their existence with new appearance. Naturally, packing that is attached to commodities is influenced and tends to be more complicated and exquisite. However, with their rapid development, such things that did not exist before now has brought to human beings and the earth unavoidable harm like polluted air, rubbish, polluted environment and spoiled ecology. Is the coming of hi-tech a step forward in the history of human civilization or a trap implying that human beings will be faced with greater crisis? This is an interesting question. A product goes on cycles in the process of “in use—problems found—improved”, and human beings solves all the problems through “developing and innovating”. From another point of view, however, this seems to produce more problems, as the saying goes, “you may be happy for one thing, but there is also something that worries you.” When we are happy with the progress in science and technology, what comes along is the chain effect that may even do harm to the living space of human race (as are the problems in the discussion about the waste of natural resources and environmental pollution above).

VII. Conclusion

Packing not only contains some cultural and social concept, but is also the carrier of the culture of a state or people. An analysis on documents about history can find that packing represents the idea that people recycled resources. It makes us think over how the concept corresponds to the new design philosophy (like green design) in the present time.

With the changes in modern consumption ideas, the change of the purposes, the materials and technical means of packing, the ways and the connotation of modern packing design have also been extended greatly. Except for the functions of transport, carrying, sheltering and storing, packing must also bear the responsibility of promotion. In order to attract consumers manufacturers concentrate their efforts on commodities to stimulate sale. For this purpose, there has been too much stress in packing, which in turn results in the waste of resources and a great deal of rubbish, which in turn needs more time, energy, money and human resources to handle. Is this not a kind of waste? Is this the original intention to make better from good in design? Manufacturers develop a lot to meet people’s demand while the real purposes and use have turned from “actual use” to “vision enjoying” at the mental layer. This may be the important aim of modern designers. It, however, goes against the basic concept of the philosophy of green design.

Packing stands at the same time for the style of a time. With the popularity of utilitarianism nowadays, standardized packing from mechanic production is no different from each other, while

in contrast, what traditional packing represented was the warm feeling that could not be replaced in the material civilization. In the international market where lots of things look similar, traditional packing contains both national culture and characteristics, and in the consumption forms where mental things are stressed, traditional packing can as well be a good expressing way.

Packing should be part of a commodity. "Light, thin, short and small" are the indexes for modern consumption, and lots of commodities are produced in the current. Packing design will soon make it light. This is the idea in traditional packing design in which the materials were simple to produce less rubbish, and partial printing for the purpose of stress could also help drop the cost and at the same time convey the message quickly. The idea of collective packing would certainly reduce the waste of materials, which comply with the trend of green design in the design philosophy in future.

For the last few years, many enterprises have had stress on the improvement of products, and in this process, the functions of "objects" are generally more or less the same except for the differences in shape, color and materials. The final difference, however, lies in how people use the objects. On careful consideration, we find that what green design need to appeal and express should be the spiritual significance and the philosophical denotation of utility, not just the development of technology for producing "objects" or the change of the shapes of products.

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