

The Integration Path of Zhuangzi's 'Sitting in Oblivion' Thought and Contemporary Sitting Product Design

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Abstract: In the contemporary context of digital existence and consumerism, the design of sitting furniture gradually transcends the level of material function and turns to the deep care for the physical and mental healing of users. This paper takes Zhuangzi's idea of 'sitting in oblivion' as the cultural gene, and explores the innovative integration path between oriental philosophical wisdom and modern sitting furniture design. Through the deconstruction of the philosophical meaning of 'to degrade the limbs, to deprive oneself of wisdom', the paper proposes a four-dimensional translation model of 'form fading - material narrative - behavioural guidance - field construction', and constructs a contemporary design strategy of sitting furniture with cultural subjectivity.

Keywords: Zhuangzi; 'Sitting in Oblivion' Thought; Philosophy; Sitting Furniture; Product Design

1. Introduction

In the contemporary society dominated by digitalisation and consumerism, seating design has gradually shifted from a single functional demand to a deeper concern for the user's physical and mental state. The crisis of design convergence under the wave of globalisation has prompted academics to re-examine the cultural restorative value of Eastern philosophy. When the ergonomic chair is caught in the 'involution' predicament of technology iteration, and when the 'new Chinese' design stays in the surface expression of pattern reproduction, the contemporary seating needs to go beyond the pursuit of physical comfort and return to the 'sitting' behaviour carried by the user. The act of 'sitting' carries a sense of cultural ritual and spiritual healing power.

As the core practical wisdom of Zhuangzi's theory of 'sitting in oblivion', its way of 'leaving the form and going to know' forms a cross-

temporal dialogue with the contemporary theory of embodied cognition, and provides a philosophical anchor for reconstructing the relationship between human-chair-environment. This paper breaks through the semiotic path of 'form-meaning correspondence' in traditional design research, and analyses the three dimensions of the philosophy of sitting in oblivion from a phenomenological perspective: the reconstruction of spatial perception through the disintegration of the limbs, the guidance of the state of mind flow through the suspension of consciousness, and the awakening of cultural memories through the symbiosis of the field. This paper not only responds to the demand for healing design in the post epidemic era, but also explores the possibility of constructing Chinese design discourse at the level of cultural genes. The thesis follows the logic of 'Theoretical Traceability - Current Situation Analysis - Strategy Construction', and explores the innovative path of sitting tools with cultural subjectivity through the interdisciplinary fusion of oriental philosophy and design, opening up a new dimension for the contemporary translation of traditional philosophy.

2. The Theoretical Origin and Design Revelation of the Philosophy of Sitting in Oblivion

Zhuangzi's idea of 'sitting in oblivion' is rooted in the deep philosophical system of 'The Great Master', which is the heart of Daoist meditation [1], and its core, 'Fall from the body, depose the cleverness', is not a simple negation of the body and the intellect, but rather, it is to reconfigure the relationship between the subject and the world through the dismantling of the structure of dichotomous opposition. The relationship between the subject and the world is reconstructed by dissolving the structure of dichotomy. The 'degradation of the body' points to the transcendence of the limitations of the physical body, emphasising the liberation of the

subject from the temporal and spatial constraints of the figurative body through the abandonment of the attachment to the physical body, so that the subject enters a state of unobstructed 'travelling'. This kind of transcendence does not negate the existence of the body, but rather, through the suspension of the direct experience of the senses, enables the subject to gain an insight into the nature of existence in the process of 'leaving the form'. On the other hand, 'to be wise' is a fundamental reflection on the mode of cognition, through the weakening of the rational framework of subject-object dichotomy and the elimination of artificially constructed cognitive barriers, so that the subject can reach a non-objective coexistence with all things in the clarity of 'going to know'. This dual-dimensional cultivation path essentially builds a dynamic dialectical relationship - achieving reconstruction in deconstruction, and reaching a higher level of affirmation in negation. As Zhao Zhijian wrote in his book *Sitting in Forgetfulness*, 'Now I consider getting rid of flashy things and returning to my substance. To gain Daoist merits for myself, I let my physical structure fall away and sit in oblivion. I practice this perseveringly and gradually feel it quite helpful.' [2]

The "zone" in which the theories, reflection and semantic concepts belonging to philosophy overlaps with the design language. It is the role of the designers to update their own practices by interpreting the philosophical thought and reacting to it with their own means to create new design visions. [3] numerable elements - both philosophical (ontological and epistemological assumptions and theoretical perspective) and practical (issue to be addressed, purpose, aims and research questions) - are influential in the process of selecting a research methodology and methods, and that these elements and their inter-relationships must be considered and explicated to ensure a coherent research design that enables well-founded and meaningful conclusions. [4] From the perspective of design philosophy, the triple revelation of the idea of 'sitting in oblivion' reveals the response of Eastern wisdom to the dilemma of modernity. The experience of presence emphasises that design should go beyond the single dimension of functionalism, and through the creation of an immersive spatial and temporal field, awaken the subject's deep perception of the existential situation; the blurring of subject-object

boundaries challenges the hegemony of the 'human-centredness' of traditional design, and advocates reconstructing the relationship between object and self with a non-domineering attitude, so as to make design a medium of connection rather than separation; and the moderation of the boundary between object and object is a medium of connection, and a medium of separation is a medium of separation. The principle of moderation implies the practical wisdom of Daoism's 'Wu Wei', which requires design intervention to maintain prudent restraint, avoiding the erosion of the natural order and freedom of the subject through excessive intervention. This trinity of methodology is essentially a philosophical demystification of the design paradigm dominated by instrumental rationality, elevating design from the level of technical operation to the height of existentialism.

Li Zehou's concepts of 'virtual stillness' and 'emptiness' revealed in *Chinese Aesthetics* further deepen the revelation of this oriental philosophy to modern design. 'Void and quiet' is not a negative blank, but a dynamic space for meaning generation through white space and unfinishedness for the viewer's subjective participation; "Emptiness" points to the transcendence of material carriers, and emphasises the transmission of spiritual meaning beyond the appearance through the simple language of form. 'Emptiness', on the other hand, points to the transcendence of material carriers, emphasising the transmission of spiritual meaning beyond appearances through simple formal language. This path of de-tooling reflection not only subverts the logic of efficiency and utilitarianism-oriented design, but also reconstructs the symbiotic relationship between objects and people at the existential level - design is no longer a subjugation of the object, but a poetic medium for the subject to dialogue with the realm of existence. Within this framework, the philosophy of sitting in oblivion provides a possible path for contemporary design to transcend anthropocentrism, anchoring the ultimate value of design in the guardianship and awakening of the true state of life.

3. Current Situation and Challenges of Contemporary Sitting Designs

3.1 Contextual Analysis of Consumerism and Digital Survival

Within the framework of Baudrillard's 'hyperreal' theory, contemporary seating design is caught up in the infinite proliferation of symbolic value. The logic of consumerism is to reconfigure objects into components of a symbolic system by divorcing them from their practical functions, a process that is particularly evident in seating design. In the capital-driven market cycle, designers are forced to transform the chair into a rapidly iterative fashion symbol - the curvature of the back, the decoration of the armrests, and even the texture of the material are all encoded as symbols of identity or lifestyle, and its essential function as a support for the human body is gradually degraded to an accessory attribute in the life cycle of the commodity. At the same time, the popularity of digital tools has ostensibly achieved a leap in the efficiency of form generation, but in fact, parametric algorithms have exacerbated the tendency of virtualisation of the design: algorithms in the deconstruction of the traditional logic of ergonomics are often guided by the statistical preference of visual databases, and the generated fluidic surfaces, although mathematically topologically pleasing, have reduced the tactile experience of the seat's contact with the human body, such as the distribution of pressure and the transmission of temperature, to a secondary parameter. This technological alienation presents an even deeper contradiction in the field of intelligent seating, such as the 'health monitoring seat' implanted with biometric sensors, which constructs a digital twin through the real-time collection of data streams such as heart rate and body pressure, but this interaction paradigm based on quantitative indexes cuts off the embodied perception that should have existed between the user and the seat - when the adjustment of the seat cushion's softness and firmness is completely left to the user, the seat's body will be able to feel the seat's pressure distribution and temperature conduction. When the adjustment of the seat cushion is left to the algorithm based on the spinal curvature data, the symbolic intermediary between the muscle memory of the human body on the support strength and the physical feedback of the seat is formed, which ultimately alienates the basic physical behaviour of 'sitting' into an abstract interaction on the data interface.

3.2 Imbalance between Function and

Experience: the Design Dilemma

In the contemporary design of seating products, the research content and application range of Ergonomic are extremely wide [5], and the quantitative index system is being alienated into a kind of technological hegemony, and its measurement framework in the name of scientific empirical evidence essentially dissolves the ontological significance of the seating device as an extension of the 'body'. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO11226) reduces the human body to a static model of 26 biomechanical nodes, and constructs a normative system of the so-called 'ideal sitting posture' through quantifiable physical parameters such as pressure distribution and joint angles. This mechanical reductionism not only strips away the spatial and temporal continuity of bodily perception, but also forms a fundamental opposition to the dynamic demand for comfort corresponding to the flow of 'qi' in Chinese philosophy, such as the key to problematize the characteristic of Zhuangzi's cultivation lies in the Daoist's extraordinary insight into 'qi'. In Zhuangzi's unique vision, qi of meditative cultivation is not only the physiological breath that concerns the primary living conditions of humans and all lives, but also an objective vitality or vital energy similar to "pneuma", the ancient Greek word for breath or spirit. [6] In the field of high-end office chairs, this alienation of technical rationality reaches its extreme: 16-segment mechanical adjustments reduce ergonomics to a game of spatial positioning in a Cartesian coordinate system through knobs, levers, and other precision controls. Functional modules such as back tilt and seat depth adjustment each form an independent parameter system, forcing the user to fall into cognitive overload in repeated calibration. This seemingly perfect fit logic is actually an extension of Descartes' "mind-body dualism" - the living body is disassembled into assembled mechanical parts, no longer as the main body of the world of perception, this technical rationality of the supreme design thinking, and ultimately, the seating from the body-bearing artifact alienation. This kind of techno-rational design thinking ultimately alienates the seating device from an object that carries the body to a device that disciplines the body, further depriving the human body of its vitality and vitality.

3.3 Reflection on the Lack of Cultural Subjectivity

In the interaction and collision of global design discourse, the dialogue between different cultural systems has not yet achieved a real balance. The principle of ‘form follows function’ advocated by Western modernism, with its clear logical structure and technical adaptability, provides a universal paradigm for globalised design practice. The positive significance of this cross-cultural dissemination is that it promotes the standardisation of design language, but it also invariably puts pressure on the reconstruction of the deep philosophical meanings in the Eastern tradition of making things - for example, the ethical view of materiality carried by ‘the vessel carries the way’ has gradually been compressed into the form of For example, the ethical concept of materiality carried by ‘Ware carries the Way’ has gradually been reduced to decorative elements in the formal spectrum, and the cosmic cognitive model of ‘making wares and keeping images’ behind it is difficult to be completely translated in the modern design context.

The penetrating influence of cultural potential is not only reflected in the surface of form and language, but also in the ontological level of design thinking. The oriental wisdom of ‘the symbiosis of objects’ emphasises the dynamic symbiosis between objects, the environment and the user, and this fluid view of design can provide inspiration for solving the dilemma of technical rationality in modern functionalism. However, at the practical level, the transformation of cultural genes often encounters the simplification of the interpretation dimension, such as the ethical symbol system of Ming furniture, which is a metaphor for morality, is often deconstructed as an aesthetic presentation of wood texture in the contemporary application of materials, and its spiritual dialogue of ‘understanding through materiality’ is in urgent need of design discourse. The dimension of spiritual dialogue of ‘understanding through materialism’ is in urgent need of continuation through the reconstruction of design semantics.

In the face of this imbalance in the stage of cultural expression, it is more important for the design community to explore the path of modern transformation of local wisdom in a gentle and sustainable way. ‘National is the world’, only by continuing traditional Chinese culture through design can traditional Chinese culture be

recognized by the world and Chinese design can be on the world stage. [7] By refining the core concepts of Eastern philosophy, such as ‘the unity of the real and the imaginary’ and ‘the unity of tools and Daoism’, and constructing a design grammar that can respond to the contemporary needs without losing the cultural roots, we may be able to open up a new dimension of multi-symbiosis in the globalised design landscape. This is not a confrontational critique of the established system, but an attempt to transform the traditional wisdom of ‘mutual construction of object and self’ into a deep-rooted nutrient to activate modern design innovation with a more relaxed attitude in cross-cultural dialogue.

4. The Integration Path between Oriental Sitting Philosophy and Contemporary Sitting Design

4.1 Form Fading: De-symbolised Design Expression

As mentioned in section 3.1, in the design context dominated by contemporary consumerism, the semiotic mechanisms enable the emergence of economies of scale and scope in the form of specialized functions [8], and the design of seating furniture is caught up in the infinite proliferation of symbolic value, and has been reduced to a carrier of symbolic expression, where the complex decoration and the accumulation of figurative cultural elements have weakened the functionality and spirituality of the objects. The deeper meaning of the oriental philosophy of ‘to degrade the body, to deprive the mind’ provides a solution to this problem - by stripping away the interference of visual symbols and returning to a pure dialogue between the body and the objects. The strategy of form fading uses geometric deconstruction as a technical path to break down the fixed form of traditional chairs into abstract functional units, and at the same time weakens the physical boundaries between the product and the space with the help of interface blurring. This design thinking not only echoes the aesthetics of Daoism, ‘to the extreme of emptiness, to keep the stillness and certainty’, but also reconstructs the essence of the experience of ‘sitting’ through the elimination of formal recognition: when the visual focus is withdrawn, the user's body perception naturally shifts to the subtle changes in the gravity transmission during the seated

posture, and the dynamic support relationship between the object and the human body.

The MUJI Beads Sofa (Figure 1) designed by Japanese industrial designer Fumie Shibata for MUJI is a typical practice of the strategy of 'form fading'. Through geometric deconstruction, the fixed form of the traditional sofa is dismantled into six sets of modular sides - two flexible units made of stretch fabric and four rigid units made of canvas. These functional units are not attached with cultural symbols, but only in the form of abstract geometrical blocks, and the physical boundaries between the modules are blurred by seamlessly connecting the interfaces and gradient treatment of the same colour, so that the sofa is visually presented as a piece of flowing topology. The ductility of stretch fabric and the rigidity of canvas form a dynamic balance, dissolving the symbolic layering logic of the traditional sofa's 'cushion-frame'. As the user settles into the seat, the adaptive deformation of the soft sides works in conjunction with the stable support of the rigid units, and the force of gravity is transferred to the body through the micro-tensions of the fabric, rather than relying on visualised structural representations. This design forces the user to break away from the preconceived notion of the 'sofa' symbol, and instead explore the optimal seating position through the subtle sensation of pressure distribution on the hips and back, alluding to the Daoist realm of 'falling off the limb' and forgetting the realm of sitting.



Figure 1. MUJI Beads Sofa
Source from: MUJI Online Mall
(<https://www.muji.com>)

4.2 Material Narrative: a Dialogue between Nature and Time

As mentioned in section 3.1, the interaction paradigm of contemporary seating product design based on quantitative indexes has severed the embodied perception that should exist between the user and the seat, and it should be transformed from a paradigm of 'mastering

matter' to 'listening to materiality', sublimating the role of material from a passive carrier to a narrator with subjectivity. The role of material should be sublimated from a passive carrier to a narrator with subjectivity. The ecological wisdom of the Eastern philosophy of 'spring with things' is reflected in the respect for the true nature of materials - the designer no longer tries to cover up the traces of nature, but builds a symbiotic relationship between objects and the time sequence of heaven and earth by strengthening the physical memory and time dimension of materials. The human and nature's symbiosis is an important foundation in the modern design industry. Adding the same to the home brings the warmth felt in nature. [9] The material narrative strategy is based on the kernel of 'the object and the self', which not only includes the faithful presentation of the natural texture, but also needs to retain the 'unfinished' nature of the material in the technical intervention, so that the objects become the organic text that carries the rhythm of life.

Take Taiwan designer Shi Dayu's work 'Chair Gentleman' (Figure 2) for example, its design abandons the mandatory shaping of bamboo material, and instead follows the materiality of bamboo in a humble manner. The fibre direction, flexibility and natural colour of bamboo become the starting point of the design: the seat is arranged in a square-circle frame surrounded by bamboo strips, which not only preserves the original texture of bamboo, but also echoes the 'breathability' of bamboo with the geometric structure of the white space - the space between the bamboo circles naturally expands and contracts with the change of humidity, giving the seat a dynamic and dynamic feel. The space between the bamboo rings expands and contracts naturally with changes in humidity, giving the seat dynamic ventilation; the subtle curvature of the curved surface of the bamboo strips relies on the elasticity of the bamboo material itself to form a 'sense of light elasticity', which allows the sitting posture to form a two-way interaction with the material.

The designers have deliberately preserved the 'unfinishedness' of bamboo by weakening artificial intervention - the unsealed bamboo cross-section and the not-quite-symmetrical texture arrangement have all become entrances to the participation of time. With the use of the bamboo, the surface colour gradually oxidises to a warm amber, and the subtle traces of wear and

tear, together with the natural concavities and convexities of the bamboo joints, weave a unique narrative of the object's life. This design strategy is in line with the oriental ecological wisdom of 'springing up with things': materials are not objects to be conquered, but organisms that cohabit with human beings. The silhouette of the chair's 'Jun' character is a metaphorical transformation of the Chinese character's structure, and also suggests the existence of bamboo as a 'gentleman'-a material that ages gracefully in time, but always retains its backbone and dignity. dignity. The object thus becomes a medium of dialogue between nature and civilisation, where the physical memory of bamboo (e.g. growth rings, fibre density) and the memory of human use (e.g. hand luster, traces of body pressure) are superimposed to construct a symbiotic poetics that transcends time and space.



Figure 2. Chair Gentleman
Source from: Reddot (<https://www.reddot.org>)

4.3 Behavioural Guidance: from Function to Consciousness

As mentioned in 3.2, a design mindset in which technical rationality is paramount will ultimately alienate the seating device from an artefact that carries the body to a device that disciplines the body. In the contemporary society of material abundance, seating design often falls into the one-way trap of functionalism, reducing ergonomics to passive physical adaptation. The behavioural dimension of 'coño limbs, depose wisdom' in the philosophy of seating and forgetting reveals us that the real liberation of the body is not to be achieved through the uncontrolled supply of comfort, but rather, it is necessary to establish a spiritually oriented behavioural paradigm, which is manifested as

'behavioural guidance' in product design. 'Behavioural guidance' is a term proposed by ecopsychologist James Jerome Gibson in his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. behaviour between objects and organisms. [10] By reconfiguring the semantics of the action of sitting, he sublimates everyday living into a ritual practice of self-reflection - a transformation that is not a negation of function, but rather a two-way domestication of the relationship between the body and the artefacts through a restrained design intervention.

Naoto Fukasawa's Hiroshima Armchair (Figure 3) vividly interprets the philosophical meaning of 'behavioural guidance' in seating design with a condensed oriental aesthetic language. The chair's curved backrest does not simply conform to the human body's curves, but through its subtle concave curvature and tilting angle, it suggests that the user maintains a seated posture with a naturally stretched spine. When the body comes into contact with the back of the chair, the gradually narrowing sense of enclosure on both sides creates a gentle tactile reminder, prompting people to unconsciously adjust the rhythm of breathing the moment they settle into the seat - this kind of design is not a mandatory discipline, but rather a medium for the shape of the object, transforming the physical control of 'sitting down' into a spontaneous body awareness. This design is not a forced discipline, but the medium of the form of the object, which transforms the physical control of 'sitting upright' into a spontaneous body awareness. This design coincides with the logic of behavioural guidance of ancient Ming furniture in China, both of which use the wisdom of 'hiding skills in form' to fuse etiquette into daily living.



Figure 3. Hiroshima Armchair
Source from: Maruni Corporation
(<https://www.maruni.com>)

4.4 Field Construction: Spiritual Extension of Space

As mentioned in 3.3, the penetrating influence of cultural differences is not only reflected in the surface of morphological language, but also in the ontological level of design thinking. Since ancient times, the Orient has respected the wisdom of creation of 'the mutual existence of things', emphasising the dynamic symbiotic relationship between objects, the environment and the user, and highlighting the cosmic concept of 'heaven and earth are born together with me, and all things are one with me' - the seating furniture no longer exists in isolation, but serves as a medium to activate the energy of space, guiding the user to enter into a spiritual extension of the object and the user. The seating device no longer exists in isolation, but acts as a medium to activate spatial energy, guiding the user to enter a meditative state where things and I are blended. A study has shown that the seating furniture designed with dealing physical, activity-use and meaning dimensions all together had affected the preference, using frequency and period significantly. The findings of this research reveals the importance of multi-dimensional thinking in designing seating furniture. [11] Contemporary seating design has broken through the functional limitations of traditional objects and turned to the overall construction of spatial spirituality. Through the multi-dimensional synergy of geometrical order, light and shadow narratives, and body perception, the field construction strategy transforms seating into a spiritual container carrying cultural memories and the collective unconscious, and realises the poetic transformation of the physical space into a psychological space. This fluid view of design can provide inspiration for solving the technical rationality dilemma of modern functionalism, and this leap in design thinking also reflects the return of the subjectivity of Eastern culture.

The seating area of the 'Ibaraki Kasugaoka Church' (Figure 4) designed by architect Tadao Ando is an exemplary example of this concept: the wooden benches are unadorned, embedded in a strict axial relationship under the cross formed by the narrow slit of light, and the warm natural texture creates a quiet and deep dialogue with the sacred light and shadow. When the user sits down, the topology of space formed by the compressed horizontal vision and vertical smoothness forces the vision to be inwardly

constricted, while the tactile perception is sharpened by the warm and delicate texture of the wood. This kind of design thinking, which constructs 'the sitting tool is the dojo' by stripping away the visual redundant information, alludes to the meditative philosophy of the Oriental 'sitting and forgetting the dojo', and ultimately achieves the philosophical realm of Zhuangzi's so-called 'heaven and earth have great beauty without saying anything' in the 'symbiosis of things and realms'.



Figure 4. Ibaraki Kasugaoka Church
Source from: Ibaraki Kasugaoka Church
(<https://ibaraki-kasugaoka-church.jp>)

5. Conclusion

Contemporary seating design needs to go beyond functional limitations and focus on physical and mental healing and cultural identity. This paper takes Zhuang Zi's idea of "sitting in oblivion" as the core of oriental Taoist philosophy, and proposes a four-dimensional model of "form hiding-behaviour guiding-material narrative-field construction", which weakens symbolic expression, reconstructs the relationship between the object and the self, activates the material spirit and creates a spiritual field. The research breaks through the traditional design paradigm, integrates oriental philosophy and contemporary technology from an interdisciplinary perspective, and through the verification of cases such as "MUJI Beads Sofa" and "Hiroshima Armchair", balances function and spirit, tradition and innovation, and sublimates "sitting" into a cultural ritual. Sitting" is sublimated into a cultural ritual and existential experience. In the future, the research will continue to explore the combination of intelligent technology and sustainable materials, to promote the transformation of design from "object manufacturing" to "meaning generation",

and to provide new possibilities for reconstructing poetic living in the technological era.

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