



A Study on Design Concepts of Yixing Zisha Teapot Based on the Theory of Semiotics

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Semiotics has been studied in the field of art design. The Yixing Zisha teapot is a traditional Chinese design product originating from Yixing City, Jiangsu Province, China. Its manufacturing techniques have been listed as China's intangible cultural heritage. The paradigm for producing Yixing Zisha teapots has been established since the late Ming Dynasty. The technique has been passed down from masters to apprentices through oral instruction and demonstration, and there are no written records of the design methods and principles. This study is based on qualitative research methods, through the analysis of relevant literature and the observation of the shape of the classic Zisha teapots recognized by the Chinese government, selecting samples from different shapes of Zisha teapots, and analyzing the evolution of the times, design concepts can be discovered within the Yixing Zisha teapot design system. Based on Morris's semiotics theory, this study analyzes the concepts of Yixing Zisha teapot design from the perspectives of Syntactics, Semantics, and Pragmatics, to find out the elements, principles, and methods in the design of Yixing Zisha teapots.

Keywords: Yixing teapot; Product design; Design concept; Semiotics



1 INTRODUCTION

Regional culture is a distinctive and recognizable cultural resource consisting of various cultural symbols. From a design perspective, regional cultural creative products are the material carriers of the regional cultural symbol system, which decodes and disseminates cultural symbols through design forms. (Li et al,2021) Design is a process of discovering and solving problems. Yixing Zisha Teapot is different from general product design in manufacturing, which is a traditional Chinese non-material cultural heritage. Tea culture has a long history in China, from tea boiling in the Tang Dynasty to tea brewing in the Ming Dynasty, and the popularity of Zisha teapots gradually followed changes in tea-drinking methods. Consumers have started paying attention to the form and decoration of the appearance of Zisha teapots, while still meeting their functional needs. This has made Zisha teapot a product that combines both appreciation and usage.

The American semiotician, Charles Morris, proposed that semiotics is composed of three branches: syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics. His viewpoints on semiotics have formed the basic framework of semiotics, which studies the problems of symbols from the aspects of their forms, meanings, and usage. (Tan,2012) The research findings have been applied in linguistics, aesthetics, and other fields as a theoretical model to analyze the problems of design aesthetics, emphasizing the systematic study of the construction, meaning, and function of Yixing Zisha teapots.

2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH METHOD

The primary research method used in this study is "case analysis," which is a common method in qualitative research methodology. The researcher collected a large amount of relevant information about the specific case being studied and interpreted and explained its value and significance based on the case's unique characteristics and living environment. (Li,2009) As mentioned in the book "Research on Traditional Chinese Utensil Design," each case has a clear attribution and unique characteristics. Through case analysis research, the design characteristics of traditional Chinese utensils can be summarized, as well as the source and flow of modern utensil design. The unique natural and creative perspectives of our ancestors reflected in the design of traditional Chinese utensils still maintain their timeless significance today. The aesthetic concepts of "unity of heaven and man" and "utility first" have value for the development of contemporary design. (Wang et al,2010) Therefore, there are two objectives for this case study: first, to explicate and evaluate the significance and value of these concepts; and second, to explore and grasp their causal patterns, directly serving design practice.



Yixing Zisha teapots were prevalent during the Ming Dynasty, with the main raw materials coming from the Zisha soil of Yixing City in Jiangsu Province. They can be divided into three categories: purple clay, red clay, and green clay. Due to the special structure of the double air holes, the teapot can better retain the aroma of the tea, making it a more popular tea set. The production techniques of Zisha teapots differ from those of other ceramic teapots, with an independent production paradigm. After firing, the Zisha teapot is not glazed, preserving the original texture of it. From the Ming Dynasty to the present day, there have been over a hundred different shapes of Yixing Zisha teapots. This study's case analysis is selected from the ten classic teapots certified by the Chinese government. According to the second edition of the Yixing Zisha teapot classification method, they are classified into geometry, rib, and bionic forms, as recorded in "Appreciation of Yixing Clay Teapot Shapes" by Qian (1992). The shape of Yixing Zisha teapots is related to different times and different classification issues. Therefore, the horizontal and vertical "comparison methods" will also be used in the case study to analyze the design elements of Yixing Zisha teapots.

3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Top Ten Famous Yixing Zisha Teapots in History

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Yixing ceramics were concentrated in the Ding Shu area. The Yixing clay kilns in Shushan burned various daily-use items, and the production system of Yixing Zisha teapots gradually became independent. They were exported to various parts of the world and were known as "red porcelain." During the reign of Emperor Hongzhi of the Ming Dynasty, a group of monks from Jingsha Temple created large circular pots using high-quality Zisha clay, which quickly gained popularity. In the early years of the Zhengde period (1506), Wu Yishan, accompanied by his servant Gong Chun, learned the techniques from the Jingsha Temple monks and subsequently created a series of exquisite pot designs, including the "shuyin" (tree trunk) pot. Following this, a large number of contemporary celebrities such as Shi DaBin, Chen Mingyuan, and Chen Hongshou developed the design and production of Zisha teapots to the pinnacle of their abilities, showcasing the unique charm of the craft. As a result, the style and design of Zisha teapots continue to develop.

Up to this day, there are over a hundred variations of Yixing Zisha teapots. Through observation and comparison, innovative designs of these teapots can be classified into two categories: first, seeking creative points within the traditional classic shapes; and second,



subjectively exploring based on artistic design principles and methods. Successful innovations will contribute significantly to research, offering guidance for practitioners in the design of Yixing Zisha teapots. However, failed innovations often result from a lack of reasonable combination of design elements and principles, leading to issues that deviate from the traditional Chinese philosophical and aesthetic principles of Yixing Zisha teapots. In 2013, the Chinese government recognized the top ten historical Yixing Zisha teapots with the aim of preserving the unique design methods and aesthetics.

Each of the top ten teapots has a different design inspiration, often obtained through observation of objects. The “GongChun” Teapot, previously mentioned in research, is hailed as the first Zisha teapot. It was created by Gong Chun, who modeled the teapot after a tree knot on a ginkgo tree. The “Jinglan” Teapot is one of the Chen Mansheng series, and it was the first teapot created by Chen Mansheng. The original design of Jinglan teapot was inspired by the wooden frames used to support traditional Chinese wells, which are shaped like the Chinese character for "well" and have protrusions above the ground. The old saying in China is that knowledge is like the necessary water in life, and only by constantly absorbing ,it can live a healthy life. "Plum Herald Spring Pot" is one of Zhu Kexin's most famous works. With the theme of plum blossoms in spring, the decoration techniques of carving and kneading are used to paint with clay to vividly show the state of plum blossoms and branches. Most of the bionic teapots show wonderful meanings through natural objects, which is the connection between designers and consumers, and the embodiment of the semantic part of semiotic theory. Geometric Zisha teapots, especially circular teapots, are the most numerous, part of which is the design of imitation objects. Su Dongpo was demoted to teach in Shushan, and found that the local Zisha teapots use better than copper and iron utensils, so he used local materials and imitated the metal utensils to produce a clay teapot with spout and handle. The "Dongpo Tiliang" pot is the earliest "Shi Piao" pot. In addition, designers usually use geometric figures to reorganize and cut to fully demonstrate the rationality of the shape of the Zisha teapot in the design composition. Duo Qiu pot, which means to base the ball, also refers to the combination of multiple balls. From the perspective of the appearance, it does not seem like a ball, but after a detailed analysis, you will find the advantages of the design combination. The body of the pot is a big ball. Of course, some pots have their shape properly flattened, which is also for the sake of overall beauty. The pot lid is half a ball, while the spout and handle are cut from arc. However, if it is just randomly pieced together with these kinds of circles, arc, it will become a strange shape, which requires the designer to process and transform after design thinking.

Name	Category	Objects	Author
GongChun	Bionic		GongChun
FangGu	Geometry(circle)		ChengSouzhen
ShiPiao	Geometry(circle)		ChenMansheng
DuoQiu	Geometry(circle)		ShaoDaheng
YuHuaLong	Bionic		ChenZhongmei
JingLan	Geometry(circle)		YangPengnian
FengJuanKui	Bionic		YangFengnian
MeiBaoChun	Bionic		ZhuKexin
TiBi	Geometry(circle)		GuJingzhou
YiKunZhu	Rib		ShaoDaheng

Figure1: Brief introduction to Top Ten Famous Yixing Zisha Teapots in History

3.2 Yixing Zisha Teapot Shape Design Method

Usually ceramic designers consciously apply Gestalt psychology and archetype theory in the stage of image accumulation in the early stage of design, do some symbolic regularization, classification, collection and research, and use composition methods to recombine symbols in the design, Serving pottery creations.(Xiao et al,2005) Zisha teapot is a branch of ceramic product design, and the application of design symbols in the shape design of ceramic products can be referred to. The method of ceramic art products is mainly to design and create ceramic artworks from the plane and three-dimensional composition of basic shapes such as points, lines, surfaces, and other elements. Ceramic special techniques such as engraving, decals, hollowing out, depiction, etc., improve the shape of ceramic products so that they can produce specific spatial volume and texture. Similar to other products, ceramic products follow the rules from shape selection to deformation in terms of shape, color, and texture, and complete the form design according

to aesthetic principles such as unity and change, symmetry and balance, harmony, contrast and rhythm.(Xue,2021) According to the method and law of the form design of ceramic products, the method and law of the shape design of the Yixing Zisha teapot can be obtained, so as to preliminarily establish the design components of the Zisha teapot system under semiotic theory.

The design method of Yixing Zisha teapot is not to directly select the points, lines and surfaces in the constituent elements, but to the "imitation method" according to the objects in life. In his research, Liu pointed out that the design methods of Yixing Zisha teapot include imitation objects, bionics and antiques, extracting design elements from the original objects, and designing the shape of Zisha teapot according to the principle of "simplification". (Liu,2020) This is the process of transforming concrete objects into abstract forms to geometric elements. This is the process of shape evolution. After extracting the design elements. Combining the elements with the specific symbols of the Zisha teapot, according to the purpose of traditional Chinese creation, and integrating the aesthetics of Chinese design to produce the shape of Yixing Zisha teapot.

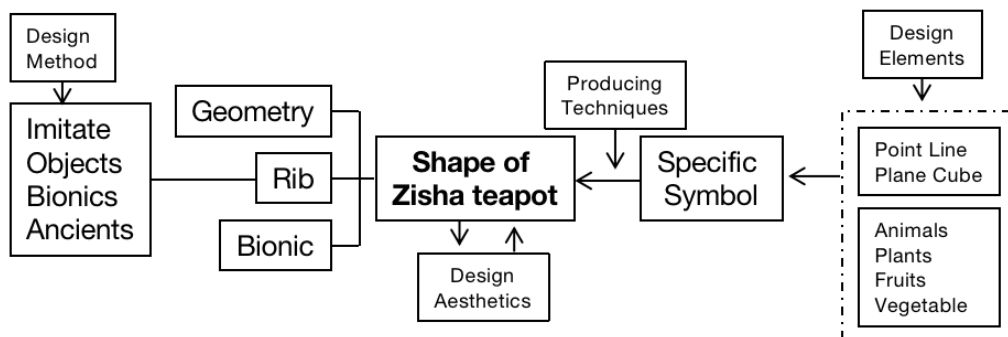


Figure 2:Yixing Zisha Teapot Shape design flow chart

3.3 Analysis of the evolution of representative Zisha teapots

3.3.1 The evolution of geometric Zisha teapot shape

According to the existing appreciation works of Yixing Zisha teapots, most types of Yixing Zisha teapots are geometric shapes, among which the circular ones are the main ones. The study selects the "Shipiao" and "Duoqiu" among the ten famous historical teapots. Both teapots were created in the Qing Dynasty, but they are completely different in design methods. (Wang et al,2017)"Shipiao" was first called "Shicho", and "Cho" was interpreted as "Diaozi, a small cooking utensil with a handle and flow". The key point of the shape of



the stone ladle is its strength. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to coordinate the proportion relationship of the triangle formed by the various lines of the "Shipiao" pot. Its unique strength and charm. Therefore, the triangle shape of the "Shipiao" pot was not determined at the beginning, but was designed through the technique of "imitating objects". In order to discover the changing trend of the shape, the researchers used the combination method of the composition to analyze. The study divides the evolution of "Shipiao" pots into three parts: Qing Dynasty, Republic of China, and contemporary times. The "Shipiao" pots selected in each era were made by celebrities or masters recognized by the government or society. The credibility of the research will be will improve, and the research results will be more accurate.

The shape of the "Shipiao" pot in the Qing Dynasty is mainly a triangle. The main change lies in the body of the pot. The body of the pot is a trapezoid cut out of the triangle. The outline of the body of the pot is a straight line. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the body of the pot changed from a straight line to an arc. , therefore, the shape of the "Shipiao" pot is close to half an ellipse. In the period of the Republic of China, the body of the pot still retained two types of straight lines and arc shape. It can be found that the spout of the pot in this period was straight and changed to a curved shape. In keeping with the oval outline, artisans are experimenting with straight lines and arcs as a way of combining elements. The shape of contemporary "Shipiao" pots tends to be more oval, and the contours of the pot body are basically arcs. Even if there is a triangle shape, the triangle has been rounded, and the three sides have also become curves, not as sharp as the original triangle. Much softer feel. The design of components is more diversified, and different design styles have emerged. The craftsmen changed the shape of the "Shipiao" pot by reorganizing the elements to achieve different design aesthetic purposes.

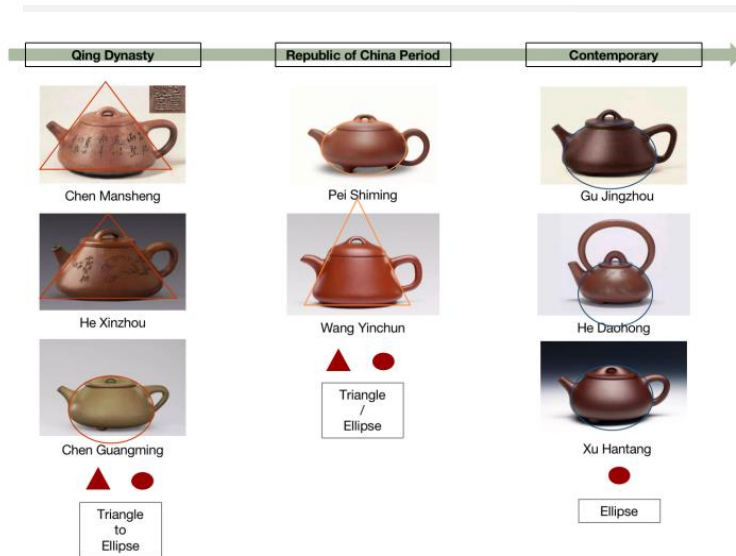


Figure 3: The design evolution of “Shipiao”teapot

Duoqiu pot is a kind of Zisha pot, which is a pot shape transformed from a large lotus seed pot. Select several spheroids and connect them according to certain rules and aesthetic principles. From the point of view of the overall shape, it doesn't seem like a ball, but the detailed decomposition is all based on the ball! The body of the pot is a big ball. Of course, some pots have their shape properly flattened, which is also for the sake of overall beauty. The pot lid is half a ball, and the lid is another ball, while the spout and handle are intercepted balls. However, if you just randomly piece together these kinds of globes, hemispheres, and a section of the ball, it will become a strange object again. The craftsmen will process, transform, and then carry out nice decoration elements.

The Duoqiu pot in the Qing Dynasty was created by Shao Daheng. Its shape is constructed of a standard circle. The body is round and full, the lid is tall and straight, and the outline is just combined into a circle. The arc of the pot handle is also intercepted by a section of the standard circle. Therefore, the design elements of the Qing Dynasty teapot are round. During the period of the Republic of China, although the overall shape of the Duoqiu pot did not change much, it can be seen from the geometric figure that it has changed from a standard circle to an ellipse, and the diameter is greater than the height. Craftsmen tried to achieve shape innovation by changing the size. Because craftsmen combined standard circles and ellipses subjectively based on experience when designing Duoqiu pots, contemporary Duoqiu pots can be expressed in various forms. The most obvious is that the height of the teapot is reduced, and the fullness of the lid is weakened. The fullness has not changed, so it can be found that reorganizing the standard circle and ellipse is the primary

element of the craftsmen, and the fullness of the pot body is the principle that cannot be changed. Therefore, when appreciating and analyzing the Duoqiu pot, researchers can quickly identify it according to the body of the pot.

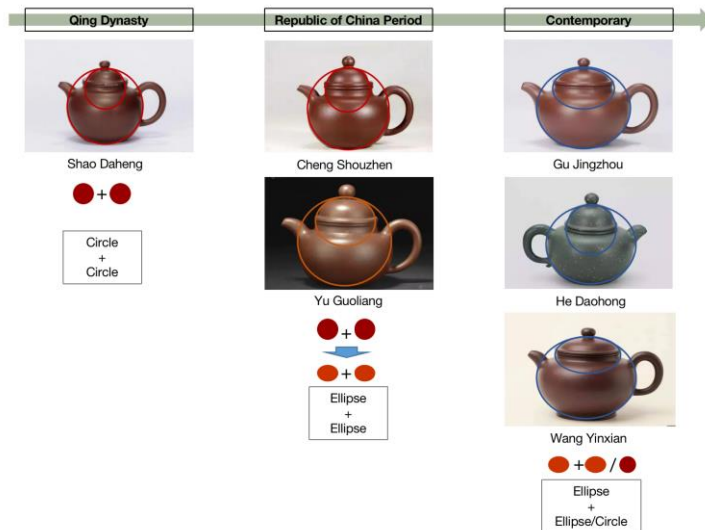


Figure 4: The design evolution of "Duoqiu" teapot

3.3.2 The evolution of the shape of the bionic teapot

The earliest record of Zisha teapot is a tree gall pot made by Gongchun in the Ming Dynasty. The literati at that time believed that "extremely ugly" was "extremely beautiful", and the tree gall for Gongchun became a representative of extremely beautiful. The appearance of the tree gall pot also marks the indissoluble bond between Zisha clay and nature, and this naturally forms a unique Zisha teapot bionic style. Craftsmen of all ages have integrated more national arts and traditional crafts into bionic goods in art, the study of bionic-style teapots is the greatest understanding of the charm of Zisha clay, and it is also one of the ways to discover the beauty of nature.

Fengjuankui is a typical bionic teapot among the top ten famous teapots in Yixing Zisha history. It takes plants as the theme of creation and demonstrates the exquisite craftsmanship of Zisha teapots. The shape of the body of the pot is a wind-blown sunflower, which is not only pictorial but also vivid. The style of this Fengjuan sunflower pot is imitated by Daheng. The pattern is regular, the workmanship is exquisite, the style is antique and sweet. It is worthy of being a masterpiece of a female artist in the art history of Zisha teapots. Put the small round seal of "Yang's" in the seal script under the handle.

The Fengjuankui teapot in the Qing Dynasty was popularized by Yang Fengnian. The

sunflowers on the body of the pot roll in the wind are lifelike, which requires craftsmen to have the basic ability of sculpture. The "Fengjuankui" in the Qing Dynasty is only different in the design of the spout and the handle of the pot. This is based on the subjective aesthetics and technical capabilities of the craftsmen. Usually, in order to express the nature of sunflowers, craftsmen will also use different tools and techniques. Therefore, it can be found that there was no great change in the shape of the wind-roll sunflower in the Qing Dynasty. Due to the short period of the Republic of China, it can be seen that the Fengjuankui of this period followed the style of the Qing Dynasty, but the height of the teapot has changed, and the structure of the pot body is more obvious. The body of the pot is like an olive shape, composed of two arcs. This has the same structure as the Zisha teapot "Acacia pot". The design of the pot lid has also changed significantly from that of the Qing Dynasty. The structure of the pot lid in the Qing Dynasty was composed of polygons, while the lid of the Republic of China period was circular. It can be found that the pot lid of the Republic of China period simplified some complicated elements. Contemporary Fengjuankui teapots mainly refer to the previous styles, and are mainly divided into two methods: "imitation" and "simplification". The Fengjuankui under the imitation method mainly shows the craftsman's technology, and the Fengjuankui under the simplified method mainly shows the concepts from the craftsman. The texture of the raised curve on the surface of the pot body is also the main design point of the craftsman's innovation. The design of the spout has not changed much during the evolution process. They are all curved, but the decoration on the surface of the spout is different. Due to the fixed design theme of the Fengjuankui Zisha teapot, craftsmen can only change the shape of "sunflower", but in order to show the craftsmanship, there is no major change in the shape for the time being.

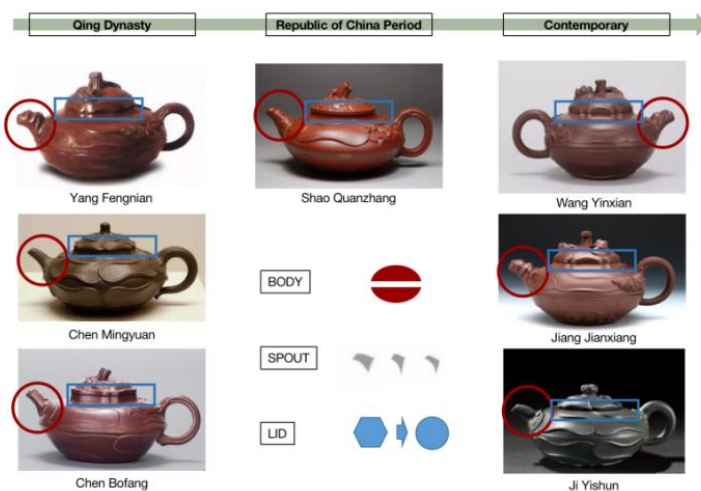


Figure 5: The design evolution of "Fengjuankui" teapot



3.3.3 The evolution of the shape of the rib-shaped teapot

The rib pattern refers to the "warp texture" that constitutes the shape of the Zisha teapots. Usually, the texture is refined and processed according to the shape of melons, fruits, and plant flowers in nature. Use geometric shapes to divide and overlap changes in equal proportions, such as melon edges, chrysanthemum petals, water chestnut flowers, narcissus petals, and sunflower petals. Ribs are well-proportioned, standardized, and neat, and the production difficulty is relatively high. It is required that the decoration should be consistent from the top of the button to the middle, neat, beautiful, lively and full of rhythm. There are usually three, six, eight, nine, twelve, eighteen, and thirty-six petals in the veins. It can be divided vertically and horizontally, and can also be processed by turning. The cover must be able to replace each other, be flat and seamed, and the inside and cover of the pot must be consistent with the ribs on the outside of the pot.

The "Longtou Bagua Yikun Zhu" is a typical Zisha teapot with a rib pattern, and the design of this item is very meaningful in traditional Chinese culture. The shape of the body is surrounded by 64 thin bamboo, neat and clean, with a natural artistic conception. The belt around the waist is decorated with round bamboos. The bottom of the pot is made of 8 bamboo protruding from the four abdomens. The lid of the pot is slightly convex with the azimuth of Fuxi's eight trigrams, and the lid button is in the pattern of Tai Chi. The flow and the handle of the pot are decorated with the image of a flying dragon, which is very interesting, and the philosophy of Yi Xue is cleverly conceived on the Zisha teapot. The craftsmanship is exquisite and the meaning is profound, which can be called the best of Zisha clay art. Because of this, due to the high difficulty of making this item, many craftsmen gave up trying or failed to make it. In the contemporary, it is mainly based on "imitation", which is also to show the craftsman's production skills. Due to the majestic shape of the shape, some craftsmen changed the shape of the handle in the Qing Dynasty to a handle beam. The design of the handle beam creates a virtual space by changing the height of the teapot, giving people a different aesthetic feeling. Of course, in the design of the pot body elements, there is also a change from a circular shape to a hexagonal shape. In order to retain the implication of Chinese elements such as "bamboo" and "dragon", there is no major change in the shaping of the theme.

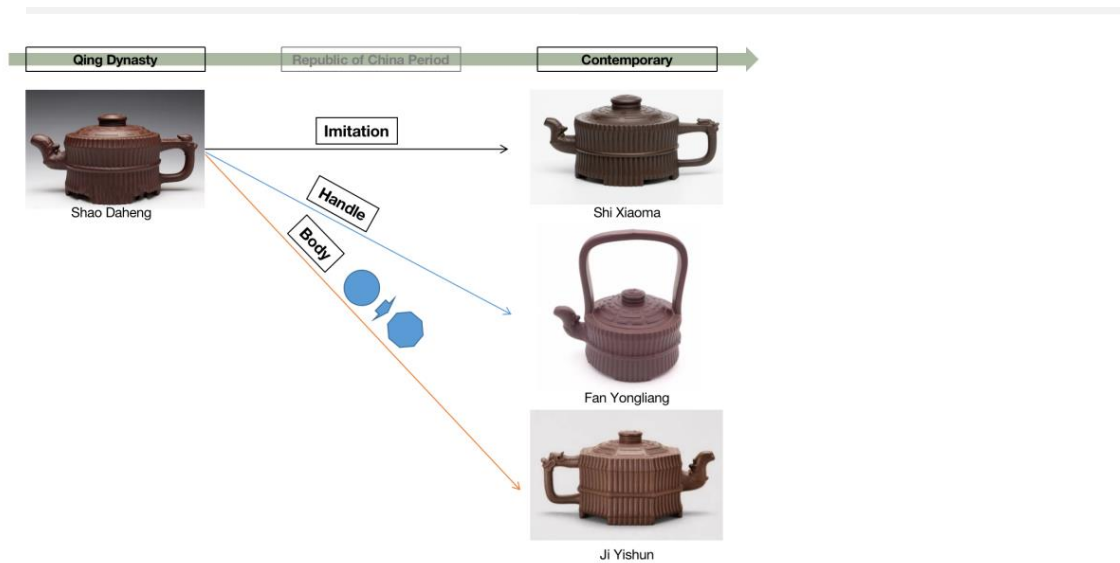


Figure 6: The design evolution of “Longtou Bagua Yikun Zhu” teapot

4 STUDY RESULT: The framework of Yixing Zisha teapot design concept

According to the analysis of the evolution of representative Yixing teapots, the main design elements and principles retained by different types of teapots can be drawn. The application of different elements in the design of the teapot will also change the design aesthetic. Based on the three part of syntactics, semantics and pragmatics of the Morris semiotics theory model, the design concept of the Yixing Zisha teapot is sorted out to form a framework.

From the perspective of syntactics, the material of Yixing Zisha teapot needs to use Zisha clay, and it is precisely because of the special structural characteristics of Zisha clay that the functional value of Zisha teapot is enhanced. This kind of clay is divided into three categories: red clay, purple clay and green clay. There are many types of clay that can be explained in detail. The design can choose different colors according to the color-matching requirements. In terms of technology, Yixing Zisha teapots are different from ceramic molding technology and have independent production techniques, which is also an aspect of becoming an intangible cultural heritage. The tools for producing Zisha teapots are mainly made by craftsmen themselves. Generally, there are three types of materials: metal, wood and bamboo. When producing Zisha teapots of different shapes, the tools also need to be adjusted by craftsmen. When designing the appearance of a Zisha teapot, it is necessary to determine the shape, which is usually classified according to geometric shape, rib shape and bionic shape, which is mainly for the body of the Zisha teapot. The design of the parts of the Zisha teapot will also have a great influence on the whole, such as the



proportional relationship between the spout and the handle, and the structural relationship between the lid, the knob and the body. In terms of the design method of the Zisha teapot, it is mainly divided into imitation, bionic and antique methods according to the previous research. According to the design method, the design elements are formed and transformed into special symbols. The design elements are divided into concrete elements and abstract elements. The concrete elements come from nature, including animals, plants, fruits and vegetables, etc. The important thing is that not all natural objects can be chosen. The abstract elements are mainly geometric elements, and some geometric elements are also simplified from nature to form points, lines, surfaces, and cubes, and form innovative shapes through the combination methods in the composition method.

From the perspective of semantics, it mainly analyzes the design aesthetics and design thoughts of Zisha teapot. As a traditional Chinese item, Yixing Zisha teapot, according to the choice of theme and cultural manifestation, can find that there are traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts in the design of Zisha teapot. For example, in the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the proposition of "nature" is more valuable than anything else. (Xu,2020) Therefore, it can be found that the source of the design of the Zisha teapot is nature, and it can also be found that the natural objects selected by the designer all have beautiful meanings. For example, the dragon is a symbol of power and strength in China, and bamboo has a continuous upward and tenacious spiritual quality. Mozi's proposition is "frugal use" and "benefit".(Li et al,2018) It can be found that this idea is biased towards functionalism, so there are many types of geometric shapes, especially round shapes, and simple design has become mainstream. Since the intangible cultural heritage techniques are all handmade, this increases the value of the Zisha teapot in cultural inheritance.

Like language, products have the characteristics of symbols, and they are all used to communicate, communicate and convey meaning. The design of product semantics is to use the method of language symbols to examine and think about design.(Gao,2010) From the perspective of pragmatics, Zisha teapot is not only a handicraft but also a product. The product needs sales and user feedback in the design process, which plays an important role in the establishment of the Zisha teapot brand. With the change of times, the sales channel has changed from face-to-face to online, so the influence of the Internet and new media on the sales and feedback of Zisha teapots is very fast. Designers should make reasonable use of modern materials to improve the brand value of Zisha teapot and spread the culture of Zisha teapot well.

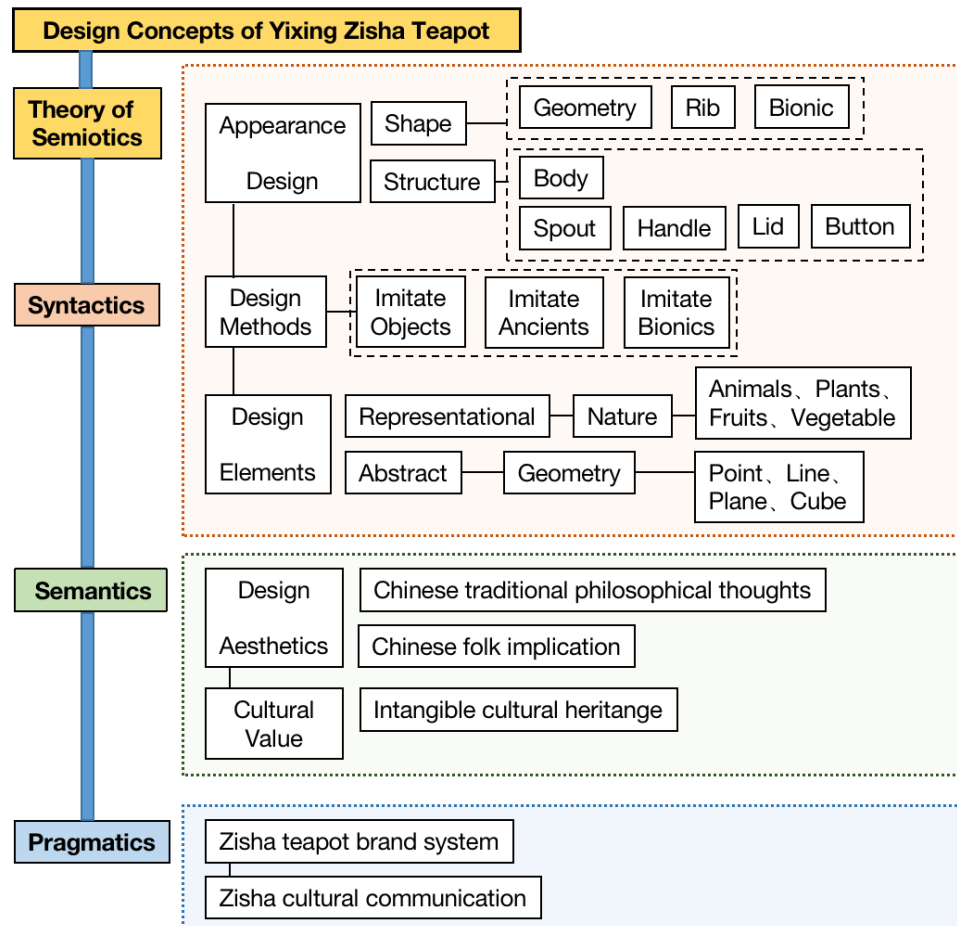


Figure 7: The framework of design concepts of Yixing Zisha teapot

5 CONCLUSION

From Morris' semiotics, we can see that looking at aesthetic issues from the perspective of semiotics helps artists see the essence and importance of their works in the era of science and technology, and helps artists see art clearly, science and technology, so that artists can more effectively develop their creativity. (Zhang et al, 2015) Through the analysis and discussion of this study, the design concepts in the design system of Yixing Zisha teapots are obtained, including design elements, design principles, design methods, design thoughts and design aesthetics. According to the design process of the Zisha teapot, the designer needs to choose the shape to achieve the design objective, and then choose the correct design method to design the shape of this item. Various design elements will be produced in the process of shape design, and the designer needs to base on the design elements combining and designing according to the principle of fusion of function and form in the design of Zisha teapots, design thoughts are also crucial in the process of it,



and the final design achievement can reflect the design aesthetics.

Based on the theoretical model of Morris semiotics, this study analyzes the design concept of Zisha teapot from three aspects: syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics, and draws the framework of the design concept of Zisha teapot under semiotic theory. From the aspect of syntactics, the design of Zisha teapot includes materials, crafts, design elements, and design methods. From the aspect of semantics, the design of Zisha teapot includes design aesthetics and cultural value. From the aspect of pragmatics, the design of Zisha teapot includes brand value and cultural spread. The design concept in the Zisha teapot system helps designers have better design thinking and can use the suitable elements and methods in the Zisha teapot design to carry out the standardized design so that the Zisha teapot design has better cultural value.

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