

Cultural and Philosophical Dimensions in the Creation of Chinese Ming-Style Furniture

Xiaochen LIU¹, Xinyou LIU^{2*}, Bing WANG³

Abstract: *Chinese Ming-style furniture represents the pinnacle of traditional craftsmanship, esteemed for its refined artistry, elegant simplicity, and profound cultural and philosophical significance. While previous studies have extensively documented its historical and technical aspects, the philosophical underpinnings of its design merit deeper exploration. This paper contends that Ming-style furniture was profoundly shaped by Daoism, reflecting its principles in tangible form. Moving beyond formal or technical analysis, this study examines the creative philosophy of Ming-style furniture through a cultural and Daoist lens. It demonstrates how core Daoist concepts—such as Yin-Yang dialectics, Wuwei (effortless action), and Ziran (naturalness)—are embodied in the furniture’s design, structure, and decoration. The harmony of rigid and soft forms and the use of mortise-and-tenon joinery exemplify Yin-Yang unity; techniques that highlight the innate qualities of wood reflect Wuwei; and the emphasis on natural texture and organic beauty expresses Ziran. Even decorative motifs carry symbolic meanings tied to Daoist ideals like longevity and harmony. This research contributes to the broader understanding of traditional creative thought by explicitly linking Daoist philosophy to material culture. It offers insights into how spiritual values influenced material life and provides a meaningful framework for sustainable innovation in contemporary design rooted in cultural heritage. Ming-style furniture thus transcends utility, serving as a profound cultural statement.*

Keywords: *Ming-Style Furniture, Daoist Philosophy, Creative thought, Yin and Yang, Wuwei (Non-Action), Ziran (Naturalness)*

1. Introduction

Chinese Ming-style furniture, a term that evokes images of elegant simplicity, sophisticated craftsmanship, and timeless beauty, is widely regarded as the pinnacle of traditional Chinese furniture making. Its enduring appeal lies not only in its functional excellence and aesthetic purity but also in its profound embodiment

¹ Nanjing Forestry University, xiaochenliu@njfu.edu.cn

² Nanjing Forestry University, liu.xinyou@njfu.edu.cn

³ Shenyang Jianzhu University, awangbing@outlook.com

of Chinese cultural and philosophical ideals. While existing scholarship has extensively documented its historical evolution, typology, and craftsmanship (Appiah-Kubi et al. 2021, Xue et al. 2024), a deeper interpretation of the philosophical underpinnings that guided its creation remains a fertile ground for research. This paper argues that the creation of Ming-style furniture was deeply influenced by the principles of Daoism, China's indigenous philosophical and religious system, and that these pieces can be read as tangible expressions of Daoist thought.

The purpose of this study is to move beyond a purely formal or technical analysis and to interpret the creative thought and inherent connotation of Ming-style furniture through a cultural and philosophical lens, specifically focusing on Daoist philosophy. We contend that concepts such as the dialectical unity of opposites (Yin and Yang), the principle of Wuwei (non-action or effortless action), and the pursuit of naturalness (Ziran) are not merely abstract ideas but are materially manifested in the furniture's design, structure, and decoration.

The significance of this research is threefold. First, it enriches the macroscopic ancient thought system of creation by explicitly linking classical philosophy to material culture (Lu 2022; Ely 2009). Second, it provides a deeper understanding of the ancients' wisdom, allowing us to comprehend an era through its artifacts and to appreciate how spiritual and philosophical pursuits shaped material life. Finally, from a modern perspective, this exploration offers valuable guidance for the future development of traditional furniture design. It suggests that innovation should be rooted in a respectful understanding of cultural heritage—an approach that is both “reverent and courteous” to tradition and conducive to sustainable and meaningful progress (Dong and binti Jamali 2024; Xue et al. 2025; Su 2020). By examining specific examples of Ming-style furniture through the theoretical frameworks found in core texts like the Tao Te Ching (Laozi, 6th century BCE/1963) and the Book of Changes (I Ching), this study aims to illuminate the profound dialogue between form and spirit, matter and mind, that defines this celebrated cultural legacy.

2. Ming-Style Furniture and Taoist Philosophy: Historical and Conceptual Foundations

2.1. The Socio-Cultural background of Ming-Style Furniture

The rise of Ming-style furniture was the product of a unique convergence of economic prosperity, material innovation, and cultural refinement during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Economic revival following Mongol rule stimulated advances

in agriculture, commerce, and urbanization, particularly in the Jiangnan region. Cities such as Suzhou and Yangzhou became vibrant commercial centers, nurturing a class of wealthy merchants and landowners who patronized the arts and sought refined furnishings for their homes (Clunas 1991; Brook 1998). This burgeoning consumer culture, characterized by widespread appreciation for aesthetic refinement, generated strong demand for high-quality furniture (Clunas 2004).

This demand was met with exceptional advancements in craftsmanship. The Ming era is celebrated for its achievements in decorative arts such as lacquerware, ceramics, and metalworking. Skilled artisans, often trained within guild systems, were capable of executing intricate designs with remarkable precision (Handler 2001). Their expertise was essential for translating conceptual designs into objects of beauty and structural integrity.

A critical material development was the introduction of precious hardwoods—particularly *huanghuali* and *zitan*—from Southeast Asia and beyond. Admiral Zheng He’s maritime expeditions in the early 15th century expanded trade networks, and these dense, fine-grained woods were often used as ballast on return voyages (Dreyer 2007). Valued for their durability, rich texture, and aesthetic appeal, they enabled the creation of slender, elegant forms that came to define Ming furniture (Ecke 2013).



Figure 1. *Huanghuali wood*

Equally significant was the influence of the scholar-official class (*wenren*), who increasingly turned to cultural pursuits amid political disenchantment. Figures such as Li Yu and Wen Zhenheng articulated artistic standards in texts like *Treatise on Superfluous Things* (Changwuzhi), promoting ideals such as simplicity (*jian*), naturalness (*ziran*), and understated elegance (*gu ya*) (Wei 2021). Their philosophies elevated furniture from utilitarian object to medium of scholarly expression and spiritual cultivation, giving rise to “literati furniture” (*wenren jiaju*) that harmonized form, structure, and cultural meaning (Liu 2020).

In summary, Ming-style furniture emerged from a synergistic interplay of economic demand, technical craftsmanship, material availability, and intellectual guidance—a fusion that produced one of China’s most enduring art forms.

2.2. The Rise of Taoism as a Philosophical Undercurrent

While socio-economic factors provided the foundation, Taoism served as a profound philosophical influence permeating Ming society. Unlike the more institutionalized Buddhism, Taoism functioned as a cultural undercurrent shaping aesthetics, lifestyle, and worldview across social strata. Its prominence was reinforced by imperial patronage; the Ming court, claiming descent from the Taoist sage Zhenwu, actively promoted Taoism to bolster political legitimacy (Wang 2012; Brook 1993). The reconstruction of the Chaotian Palace in Nanjing in 1384 exemplifies this patronage, serving both as a state ritual center and a symbol of Taoist integration into imperial ideology (He 2020).

Beyond the court, Taoism underwent a process of secularization, permeating the cultural discourse of the literati. Neo-Confucianism, which incorporated Taoist metaphysical concepts like *qi* and *li*, further facilitated this integration (Liu 2017; Tan 2008). For scholars, Taoism offered a framework reconciling public service with private contemplation, emphasizing values such as naturalness (*ziran*), effortless action (*wuwei*), and cosmic harmony (Khvoinytska-Pereima 2024; Slingerland 2007).

This philosophical shift informed a cultural aesthetic privileging simplicity, authenticity, and the unadorned beauty of nature. The literati’s appreciation for scholar’s rocks, ink-wash painting, and ancient bronzes reflected a Taoist-inspired preference for inner spirit over external decoration (Jia 2021). Applied to material culture, this ethos favored objects that embodied quietude, harmony, and natural expression—qualities manifest in the minimalist forms and organic materiality of Ming-style furniture (Enqin 2015; Wang 2019). Thus, Taoism provided not just a religious framework but a pervasive philosophical language that shaped the spiritual and aesthetic foundations of Ming design.

2.3. Core Taoist Concepts relevant to Creation

To establish a theoretical framework for analyzing Ming-style furniture, it is essential to elucidate the core Taoist concepts pertaining to creation (zaowu 造物) as articulated in foundational texts like the *Tao Te Ching* (《道德经》) and the *Book of Changes* (《周易》). These principles provided a metaphysical and aesthetic foundation that profoundly influenced Chinese artistic and craft traditions.

2.3.1. *The Tao (道)*

The supreme concept in Taoism is the Tao, the ineffable, primordial source and underlying principle of the entire universe. It is the natural, spontaneous process through which all things come into being and function. Chapter 25 of the *Tao Te Ching* states, “Man models himself on Earth, Earth on Heaven, Heaven on the Tao, and the Tao on what is natural (*ziran*)” (Laozi 1985). For creation, this implies that the ultimate design principle is not human artifice but alignment with this cosmic, natural order. The ideal object should appear as if it naturally emerged from the Tao, possessing an innate rightness and harmony.

2.3.2. *The Dialectic of Being and Non-Being (You-Wu 有无)*

Chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching* offers a classic exposition on the relationship between substance (you 有, being) and void (wu 无, non-being), which is fundamental to design and spatial composition:

“Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore, benefit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.” (Laozi and Feng 1972)

This teaches that the utility of any object is dependent on the harmonious interplay between its solid form (the “being”) and its empty space (the “non-being”). This concept directly informs the appreciation of negative space, openness, and structural lightness in Ming-style furniture.

2.3.3. *Yin and Yang* (阴阳)

Originating in the *Book of Changes* and developed in Taoist philosophy, Yin and Yang represent the complementary, interdependent, and dynamic dualities that constitute all phenomena in the universe—such as dark and light, soft and hard, receptive and active. The *Xici Zhuan* (Commentary on the Appended Judgments) states, “One Yin, one Yang, that is the Tao” (Baynes 1967). In creation, this manifests as a pursuit of balance and dynamic harmony between opposites, such as the integration of straight and curved lines, the robust jointure and slender members, and the contrast between hard wood and soft textures.

2.3.4. *Wuwei* (无为 - Non-Action)

Wuwei is a cornerstone Taoist concept often misunderstood as passivity. It does not mean doing nothing but rather signifies “effortless action” or acting in perfect accordance with the natural flow of the Tao. It is the elimination of forceful, ego-driven, or unnecessarily complex interference. Chapter 48 advises, “In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired. In the pursuit of the Tao, every day something is dropped” (Laozi and Feng 1972). Applied to craftsmanship, *wuwei* advocates for simplicity, efficiency, and respecting the innate nature of the material. The design should feel inevitable, not forced, achieving maximum effect with minimal intervention.

2.3.5. *Ziran* (自然 - Self-So, Naturalness)

Closely related to *wuwei*, *ziran* translates to “self-so” or “naturalness”. It describes the state of something being authentic, spontaneous, and true to its own essence. It is the ideal state of existence that the Tao itself follows. The highest praise for a created object is that it appears *ziran*—as if it grew that way naturally. This principle champions the expression of the natural beauty of materials (e.g., wood grain) and forms that echo organic structures, opposing excessive ornamentation that obscures the object's inherent character (Ghilardi and Moeller 2021).

These five interconnected concepts—Tao, You-Wu, Yin-Yang, Wuwei, and Ziran—form a coherent philosophical system for creation. They guided the Ming literati and craftsmen beyond mere technical execution towards imbuing objects with a profound spiritual and aesthetic dimension rooted in the cosmic order. This framework will now be used to decipher the deeper connotation of Ming-style furniture's form, structure, and decoration.

3. The Embodiment of Taoist Philosophy in Ming-Style Furniture

3.1. Dialectical Duality: The Harmony of Hardness and Softness (刚柔并济)

The Taoist concept of dialectical duality, which emphasizes the mutual complementarity and transformation of opposites, is vividly embodied in the structural and aesthetic principles of Ming-style furniture. This is particularly evident in the harmonious interplay between hardness (*gang* 刚) and softness (*rou* 柔) - a relationship that transcends mere physical properties to convey a deeper philosophical unity.

As articulated in the *Tao Te Ching*:

The soft and weak overcome the hard and strong. (Laozi and Feng 1972)

and

In the world, nothing is softer or weaker than water, yet nothing can surpass it for attacking what is hard and strong. (Laozi 1985)

These passages extol the power of the soft, not as fragility, but as resilience and latent strength. This philosophy is materially expressed in Ming furniture through the nuanced balance of straight lines and curved forms, square frames and round details. For example, the iconic *Ming-style round-backed armchair* (圈椅, *quanyi*) combines a rigid, rectangular frame—symbolizing stability and “hardness”—with gracefully curved armrests and a rounded backrest that embodies “softness” and fluidity (Figure 2). This design illustrates how opposing forces are integrated into a coherent and dynamic whole, reflecting the Taoist belief that true strength lies in flexibility and adaptation.



Figure 2. *Huanghuali Wooden Circular Armchair with Chi Dragon Carvings*

Another manifestation of this duality is found in the joinery techniques (Zhang 2015). The mortise-and-tenon structure—a hallmark of Ming furniture—relies on the interplay of solid (“hard”) and void (“soft”). The tenon (阳, *yang*, male) inserts into the mortise (阴, *yin*, female), creating a joint that is both firm and flexible, able to withstand pressure through yielding rather than resisting rigidly. This reflects the Taoist idea that opposites are interdependent and mutually sustaining.

Moreover, the treatment of edges and surfaces further articulates this philosophy. While the overall structure may be geometrically strict, craftsmen often softened sharp edges with subtle chamfers or rounded profiles, creating tactile gentleness without compromising structural integrity (Figure 3). This approach echoes the principle that:

“Straightness seems bent; great skill seems clumsy” (Laozi and Feng 1972).

Such refined detailing transforms rigid material into a living form that appeals to both the eye and the hand, embodying the Taoist ideal of softness overcoming hardness through subtlety and enduring grace.



Figure 3. *Huanghuali Square Stool with Dragon-Shaped Stretchers and Curved Legs*

In summary, the dialectical harmony of hardness and softness in Ming-style furniture is not merely an aesthetic preference but a profound materialization of Taoist cosmology. Through the balanced use of form, line, and structure, Ming craftsmen infused their work with a philosophical depth that continues to resonate with contemporary understandings of design and harmony (Komjathy 2013).

3.2. Structural Yin and Yang: The Unity of Form and Function (阴阳相成)

The Taoist concept of Yin and Yang, representing complementary and interdependent opposites, finds profound expression in the structural and decorative elements of Ming-style furniture. This philosophy is embodied not only in abstract principles but also in tangible techniques such as joinery and line design, where seemingly contrary elements unite to form a cohesive and functional whole.

The mortise-and-tenon joint (榫卯, *sunǎo*) is the most explicit example of Yin-Yang principles applied to furniture construction. The tenon (榫, *sǔn*), a protruding element, embodies Yang (masculine, active, solid), while the mortise (卯, *mǎo*), a cavity or recess, represents Yin (feminine, receptive, void). Their union creates a structure that is both stable and resilient, illustrating the Taoist idea that:

“All things carry Yin and embrace Yang. They achieve harmony by blending these vital energies” (Laozi and Feng 1972).

This joint does not rely on nails or glue but on the precise interaction of form and space—a physical manifestation of how “being” (*you*) and “non-being” (*wu*) mutually define one another. The result is a system that allows for natural expansion and contraction of wood, responding to environmental changes without compromising integrity, echoing the dynamic balance central to Taoist thought (Liang and Segalas 2024).

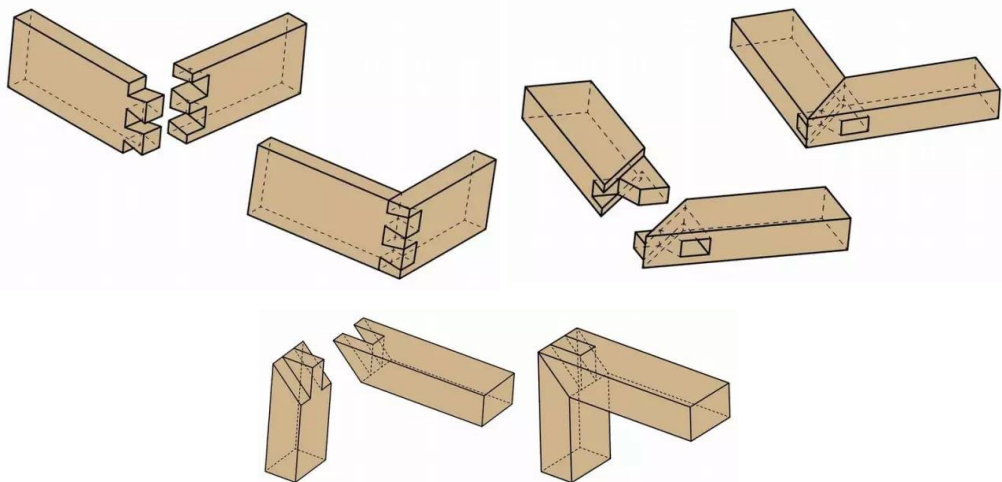


Figure 4. The mortise-and-tenon joinery at the angled juncture

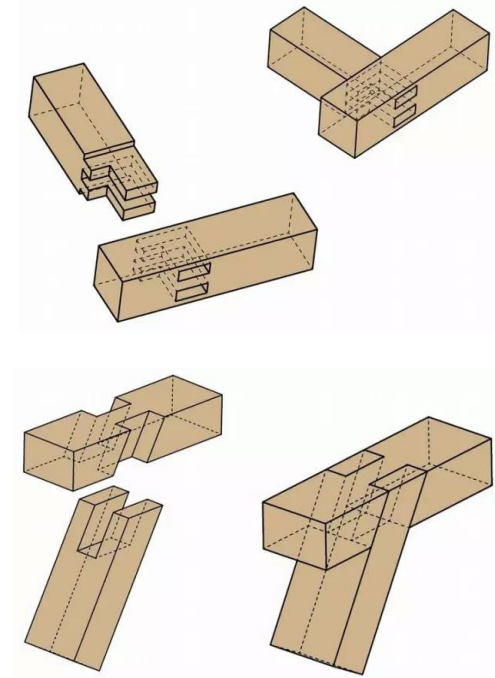


Figure 5. *The mortise-and-tenon joinery used for connection in the middle section*

Beyond structural joints, the Yin-Yang dialogue extends to decorative elements, particularly in the treatment of lines and profiles known as *xianjiao* (线脚). Ming furniture often features contrasting convex and concave moldings—referred to as *yangxian* (阳线, Yang lines) and *yinxian* (阴线, Yin lines)—that create subtle plays of light and shadow (Figure 5). These are not merely ornamental but articulate structural logic and visual rhythm, transforming flat surfaces into dynamic fields that engage both sight and touch (Littlejohn 2009).

For instance, a cabinet door might be outlined with a raised convex edge (Yang) framing a recessed panel (Yin), embodying the idea that emptiness gives meaning to substance. This treatment reflects a key insight from the *Tao Te Ching*:

“We mold clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that makes the vessel useful” (Laozi and Feng 1972).

Such designs demonstrate how utility and beauty arise from the thoughtful integration of form and void, substance and space.



Figure 6. *The Application of Mortise-and-Tenon Joinery in Huanghuali Furniture*

Furthermore, the overall construction of pieces like the piece table (画案, *hua'an*) or canopy bed (架子床, *jiazi chuang*) often uses visibly dense and solid frameworks (Yang) alongside elegantly open and perforated panels (Yin), achieving both structural strength and spatial lightness. This balance exemplifies the Taoist pursuit of harmony between weight and grace, mass and airiness—a unity that serves both practical and spiritual purposes.

In conclusion, the Yin-Yang principle in Ming-style furniture is realized through an intelligent synthesis of structure and decoration, where opposites are harmonized into a functional and aesthetic whole. This approach transforms furniture into more than utilitarian objects; they become microcosms of cosmic order, embodying a worldview where unity arises from the balance of complementary forces (Littlejohn 2009).

3.3 The Concept of Wuwei (Non-Action) and Natural Expression (无为自然)

The Daoist principle of *Wuwei* (无为), often translated as "non-action" or "effortless action", is profoundly embodied in the material practices and aesthetic philosophy of Ming-style furniture. Rather than implying passivity, *Wuwei* refers to action that is in spontaneous alignment with the natural order—an approach that minimizes ego-driven intervention and allows the innate qualities of materials and forms to express themselves. This concept is central to understanding the Ming craftsman's respect for materiality, emphasis on natural texture, and rejection of superfluous ornamentation.

A primary manifestation of *Wuwei* is found in the principle of "following the material" (*yin cai shi yi* 因材施艺). Ming furniture makers selected woods such as *huanghuali* and *zitan* not only for their durability but also for their inherent aesthetic qualities: subtle fragrance, varied grain patterns, and rich color tones.

Instead of concealing these features under opaque finishes or carvings, artisans employed techniques that enhanced the wood's natural beauty. The use of hot wax polishing (*tangla* 烫蜡) is a quintessential example. This technique involved applying beeswax to the surface and melting it with heat, allowing it to penetrate the wood fibers. The result was a soft, durable finish that protected the material while revealing—rather than obscuring—its natural luster and texture (Hasluck 1903).

As Chapter 64 of the *Tao Te Ching* advises:

“Deal with things before they arise. Put things in order before disorder appears.” (Laozi and Feng 1972)

This can be interpreted as working preemptively with the nature of the material to prevent future decay or visual disharmony, a form of subtle intervention that aligns with the natural properties of wood.

The intentional restraint in decoration further reflects *Wuwei*. Unlike later Qing furniture, which often featured elaborate carvings and dense ornamentation, Ming pieces prioritize purity of form and the inherent beauty of the material. This echoes the Daoist ideal that:

“The five colors make one blind; the five sounds make one deaf.” (Laozi and Feng 1972).

True elegance is achieved not through addition, but through simplification and emphasis on essence. Structural members are carefully proportioned; decorative elements, when present, are often derived from organic patterns or geometric abstractions that complement—rather than dominate—the overall form (Slingerland 2007). The goal was to create furniture that felt “of itself” (*ziran*), as if it had emerged naturally rather than been manufactured through forceful effort.

Moreover, the concept of *Wuwei* can be seen in the adaptation to the natural behavior of wood. Craftsmen designed joints that accommodated wood's movement in response to humidity and temperature, avoiding rigid resistance that could lead to cracking or deformation (Cheng 2020). This technical humility—working with the material's nature rather than against it—epitomizes the spirit of *Wuwei*: achieving durability and functionality through understanding and cooperation with natural processes.

In summary, the concept of *Wuwei* in Ming-style furniture is realized through a respectful and minimalistic approach to crafting. By highlighting rather than altering the natural characteristics of wood, and by valuing structural honesty over decorative excess, Ming artisans created works that are both timeless and deeply expressive of the Daoist ideal of harmonious, effortless action in accordance with nature (Komjathy 2021; Littlejohn 2022).



Figure 7. Huanghuali Official's Hat Armchair

3.4. Symbolic Decoration and the Pursuit of Meaning (饰有其意)

While Ming-style furniture is celebrated for its minimalist aesthetics, it is not devoid of decoration. When present, however, ornamental motifs are seldom merely ornamental; they are deeply symbolic, encoding Daoist values, auspicious wishes, and a profound yearning for harmony with the natural world. This principle of meaningful decoration (*shi you qi yi*) transforms functional objects into carriers of cultural narrative and spiritual aspiration.

A dominant theme in Ming decorative schemes is the pursuit of longevity (*changshou* 长寿) and immortality, core tenets of Daoist practice. Motifs such as the Eight Immortals (八仙, *Baxian*) and their respective Eight Treasures (八宝, *Babao*) are frequently encountered, either carved in low relief or inlaid on surfaces like chair splats or cabinet panels (Figure 7). Each immortal and their emblem—such as Lü Dongbin's sword or He Xiangyu's lotus—symbolizes a different path to transcending mortal limitations and achieving harmony with the Dao (Li 2021; Miller 2023). Their presence on household furniture served as a constant reminder of the Daoist ideal of self-cultivation and eternal life.



Figure 8. *Zitan Wooden Wardrobe with Carved Eight Immortals and Eight Treasures Motifs*

The natural world provided another rich source of symbolism. Animals and plants were chosen for their homophonic or associative meanings, creating a visual language of blessing. The bat (*fu* 蝠), for instance, is a ubiquitous motif not for its appearance but because its name is a homophone for “good fortune” (*fu* 福). Often depicted in groups of five, it represents the “Five Blessings” (*wufu* 五福), which include longevity, wealth, health, love of virtue, and a natural death (Davis 2022). Similarly, the deer (*lu* 鹿), whose name sounds like “emolument” or official salary (*lu* 禄), symbolizes prosperity and status, while also being a mythical mount of immortals, thus bridging worldly and spiritual desires (Wang 2023).



Figure 9. *Large Red Sandalwood (Dalbergia cochinchinensis) Everted-End Table with Cloud and Bat Motifs*

Botanical motifs further reinforce the connection to nature and longevity. The pine tree (*song* 松), crane (*he* 鹤), peach (*tao* 桃), and fungus (*lingzhi* 灵芝) are the "Four Plants of Longevity," each embodying endurance, purity, immortality, and vitality, respectively (Figure 9). Their depiction is never literal or overly realistic but is often stylized into elegant, rhythmic patterns that integrate seamlessly with the furniture's structure. This reflects the Daoist belief in observing and learning from nature's essence, as stated in the *Tao Te Ching*:

"Man follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Dao, the Dao follows what is natural" (Laozi 1985).

The decoration itself thus becomes an act of aligning human creation with natural principles.



Figure 10. *Huanghuali Luohan Bed with Single-Plank Surrounds*

Crucially, this symbolic decoration is applied with the same restraint and sensibility that governs the overall form. The carvings are typically shallow and integrated into the structural elements, never compromising the integrity or simplicity of the piece. This practice aligns with the concept of *Wuwei*—the decoration does not feel forced or excessive but emerges as a natural and necessary expression of meaning (Slingerland 2007; Littlejohn 2009).

In conclusion, the decorative language of Ming-style furniture is a sophisticated visual lexicon rooted in Daoist philosophy. Through a repertoire of auspicious symbols derived from mythology and nature, craftsmen imbued their work with layers of meaning, expressing deep cultural desires for longevity, harmony, and a blessed life. This transforms furniture from utilitarian objects into profound cultural statements, where every motif serves a purpose far beyond the aesthetic.

4. Conclusions

This study has endeavored to move beyond a purely formal or technical analysis of Chinese Ming-style furniture to interpret its creation through the cultural and philosophical lens of Daoism. The findings robustly support the central argument that the principles of Daoist thought served as a profound guiding force, materially manifested in the furniture's design, structure, and decoration. Ming-style furniture, therefore, is far more than a pinnacle of craftsmanship; it is a tangible expression of a cosmic worldview, where objects are conceived as microcosms of the natural order.

The research demonstrates that core Daoist concepts provided a coherent philosophical framework for creation (*zaowu*). The socio-cultural milieu of the Ming Dynasty, particularly the influence of the literati class, facilitated the fusion of this philosophy with exceptional craftsmanship and material innovation. The analysis confirms that the dialectical unity of opposites—the harmonious interplay of Yin and Yang—is evident in the balance of straight and curved lines, the robust yet yielding nature of mortise-and-tenon joinery, and the dynamic relationship between solid form (*you*) and void space (*wu*). Furthermore, the principle of *Wuwei* (effortless action) is embodied in the respectful treatment of precious hardwoods, where techniques like hot wax polishing revealed the innate beauty of the material's grain and texture, advocating for minimal, non-forceful intervention. The pursuit of *Ziran* (naturalness) ensured that the finished objects conveyed a

sense of spontaneous emergence and inherent rightness, opposing superfluous ornamentation. Even when present, symbolic decoration was never merely aesthetic but served to encode Daoist aspirations for longevity, harmony, and immortality, integrating meaning seamlessly into form.

The significance of this research is threefold, as initially proposed. First, it enriches the macroscopic ancient thought system of creation by explicitly linking classical Daoist philosophy to the domain of material culture. It shows that philosophy was not an abstract pursuit but a practical guide that shaped the most intimate aspects of daily life. Second, it provides a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the ancients' wisdom. By reading furniture as a text, we can comprehend the Ming era's spiritual and aesthetic priorities -a worldview that valued harmony, restraint, and a deep reverence for nature. Finally, from a modern perspective, this exploration offers invaluable guidance for the future development of design. In an age of mass production and often meaningless ornamentation, the Ming philosophy of creation presents a powerful alternative: that innovation and sustainability can be achieved through a respectful understanding of cultural heritage, material integrity, and human-scale design. It champions an approach that is both "reverent and courteous" to tradition and conducive to meaningful progress, suggesting that the most forward-looking designs are often those most deeply rooted in timeless principles.

This study, while focused on historical interpretation, opens several avenues for future research. A comparative analysis with other craft traditions influenced by different philosophical systems (e.g., Japanese Zen aesthetics, Western modernism) could further illuminate the unique characteristics of the Daoist approach to design. Additionally, ethnographic studies on contemporary artisans who seek to revive these principles could explore the challenges and adaptations involved in applying ancient wisdom to modern contexts.

In conclusion, Ming-style furniture endures not solely because of its beauty or durability, but because it embodies a way of being in the world. It is the material incarnation of a philosophy that seeks harmony between humanity and nature, between form and spirit, and between action and non-action. To engage with these objects is to engage with a profound cultural legacy that continues to speak to the enduring human desire for meaning, balance, and tranquility in our built environment.

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