







I got in touch with the brand's HR by way of email, added his contact details through Mr Gao Guqi's permission.

**Interviewee:** Gao Guqi, Founder of the Funeral Brand Gui Cong(归从)

**Interviewer:** Mingwei (Me)

**Date:** November 6, 2024

The following is a summary in English:

**-Mingwei:** Mr. Gao, thank you for taking the time for this interview. You were once the founder of the furniture design brand Fanji, and now you've transitioned into the funeral supplies field with the creation of Gui Cong. What prompted this change?

**Gao Guqi:** Thank you for your attention. After leaving Fanji, I experienced the loss of my parents, which made me reflect deeply on life and death. While preparing their funerals, I realized that most funeral products on the market lack aesthetic appeal and fail to reflect the deceased's individuality or contemporary design. This led me to think about whether design could provide a more heartfelt and beautiful farewell for the deceased while offering emotional solace to the living.

**-Mingwei:** In designing Gui Cong's products, how do you balance tradition with modern aesthetics?

**Gao Guqi:** We hold great respect for traditional culture, as it carries profound history and emotions. At the same time, we understand that traditions need to connect with modern life to be widely accepted. For example, our spirit tablets draw inspiration from the forms of ancient Chinese architecture but are simplified to fit modern home aesthetics. Additionally, our candles and ceramics retain Chinese aesthetic elements while serving multifunctional purposes, such as being used for worship or as home decor, aligning with younger generations' preferences.

**-Mingwei:** Has Gui Cong worked with clients to design more personalized funeral products?

**Gao Guqi:** Yes, we've received customized requests, such as designing exclusive spirit tablets or urns for the deceased. Every piece has a unique story behind it. We engage in deep conversations with clients to learn about the deceased's life and preferences, incorporating those elements into the design. This personalized service not only makes the funeral items more meaningful but also helps the living express their memories and emotions.

**-Mingwei:** Many traditional rituals, such as burning paper offerings and incense, are deeply rooted in funeral culture. What is your perspective on these customs?

**Gao Guqi:** Traditional rituals are an essential part of culture and a way to channel emotions. We don't aim to eliminate these practices but rather to adapt them to modern needs through design. For instance, burning paper is a form of expressing grief, but it has environmental

implications. We are exploring the development of more eco-friendly “paper money” to preserve the tradition while addressing contemporary concerns.

**-Mingwei:** Discussions about death are often seen as taboo in contemporary society. What efforts has Gui Cong made to encourage people to face this topic?

**Gao Guqi:** It's true that death is often avoided in conversations, but death education is essential. It helps people handle and accept loss more calmly. Gui Cong provides products and services as gentle entry points for engaging with the topic of death. For example, we've published guides on writing wills and planning funerals to prepare individuals for these inevitable events. We also plan to initiate exhibitions and workshops to explore the meaning of life and death with the public.

**-Mingwei:** You mentioned that Gui Cong's designs focus on using natural materials like wood, ceramics, and stone. Is there a specific reason behind choosing these materials?

**Gao Guqi:** We select these natural materials because we want our products to convey a sense of peace and permanence. Funeral items are about marking the end of life, but they also serve as a continuation of memories. The texture and feel of natural materials can provide a comforting sense of stability and create a deeper connection with the deceased's life. Additionally, these materials align with sustainability principles, meeting the modern demand for eco-friendly solutions.

**-Mingwei:** Traditional Chinese funeral ceremonies often have strict rules regarding timing and steps. Do you think Gui Cong's product designs can find space for innovation within these rituals?

**Gao Guqi:** Traditional rituals indeed have significant cultural and historical meaning, but I believe product design can focus on the emotional aspect. For instance, the form, color, and use of offerings don't have to strictly follow past conventions. They can instead adopt modern approaches to better align with the emotional needs and preferences of the family. Gui Cong aims to enrich the experience of the ritual through design rather than altering the ritual itself.

**-Mingwei:** Gui Cong's products are quite unique in concept and design, but do you think they might be challenging for families with strong traditional beliefs to accept?

**Gao Guqi:** That's a valid concern, and we've thought about it as well. When promoting our products, we don't try to challenge traditional beliefs. Instead, we emphasize how our designs can better help families express their remembrance for the deceased. For instance, we invite families to share stories about their loved ones and incorporate these narratives into the product design. This personalized approach not only reduces resistance from traditional perspectives but also makes the products more heartfelt and easier for families to embrace.

**-Mingwei:** Does Gui Cong plan to expand its range of services in the future, such as offering funeral planning or psychological support in addition to funeral items?

**Gao Guqi:** Yes, we are exploring these possibilities. The funeral industry is highly comprehensive, and it involves more than just items. The planning of the ceremony and emotional support for families are also crucial aspects. In the future, we hope to establish a more holistic service system, either through partnerships or our own offerings, such as educational courses on funerals, personalized funeral planning, and psychological counseling for grieving families. These will be key directions for our brand's growth.

**-Mingwei:** Do you believe Gui Cong's designs and philosophy could have a broader cultural impact, such as influencing how people perceive death itself?

**Gao Guqi:** That's something we're actively trying to achieve. I hope Gui Cong is not just a brand that provides funeral items but also becomes a new form of cultural expression. By blending aesthetics and emotion, we aim to encourage people to rethink the meaning of death—not just as an end but as a form of return. I believe that when people adopt a more open attitude toward death, they will also gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of life.

The following is in Chinese from the interview:

Mingwei: 高先生,感谢您接受我的采访。您曾是家具设计品牌梵几的创始人,如今转向丧葬用品领域,创立了归丛。是什么促使您做出这样的转变?高古奇:感谢您的关注。在离开梵几后,我经历了父母的离世,这让我对生死有了更深的思考。在为他们筹备葬礼时,我发现市面上的丧葬用品大多缺乏美感,与逝者的个性和当代审美不符。这促使我思考,是否可以通过设计,为逝者提供更有温度和美感的告别仪式,也为生者带来情感上的慰藉。

Mingwei: 您提到希望通过设计改变传统丧葬用品的审美。具体而言,归丛在产品设计上有哪些独特之处?高古奇:我们在设计中注重融合当代中式美学,选用原木、陶瓷、天然石材等材质,保留其自然的色泽和肌理。例如,我们设计的灵龕参考了中国古代建筑的造型,旨在让其融入现代家居环境,成为日常生活的一部分,而非仅在特定场合使用。此外,我们还设计了香烛和线香,既可用于祭拜,也可作为家居香薰,使缅怀逝者的仪式更自然地融入日常生活。

Mingwei: 在一个对死亡话题较为避讳的社会环境中,您如何看待归丛的角色?高古奇:确实,许多人对谈论死亡感到不适,但这是每个人都无法回避的自然规律。我们希望通过归丛,引导大家正视死亡,建立自己的生死观。为此,我们发布了遗嘱指南和葬礼指南,帮助人们在面对亲人离世时有所准备。此外,我们还计划通过播客和微电影等形式,探讨生死议题,承担一定的死亡教育责任。

Mingwei: 您希望归丛在未来发展成什么样的品牌? 高古奇: 我希望归丛不仅是一个提供丧葬用品的品牌, 更是一个引导人们思考生命意义的平台。我们期待通过对死亡的讨论, 启发大家反思当下的生活, 找到属于自己的生命价值。就像我喜欢的品牌皮克斯和 Patagonia 一样, 虽然不是商业巨头, 但始终坚持表达自己的理念和价值观, 带来更大的影响。

Mingwei: 高先生, 感谢您接受我的采访。您曾是家具设计品牌梵几的创始人, 如今转向丧葬用品领域, 创立了归丛。是什么促使您做出这样的转变? 高古奇: 谢谢您的关注。在离开梵几后, 我经历了父母的离世, 这让我对生死有了更深的思考。在为他们筹备葬礼时, 我发现市面上的丧葬用品大多缺乏美感, 与逝者的个性和当代审美不符。这促使我思考, 是否可以通过设计, 为逝者提供更有温度和美感的告别仪式, 也为生者带来情感上的慰藉。

Mingwei: 在设计归丛的产品时, 您是如何平衡传统与现代审美的?

\*\*高古奇:\*\* 我们非常尊重传统文化, 它承载了深厚的历史和情感。但同时, 我们也意识到, 传统需要与当代生活产生关联才能被更多人接受。比如, 我们设计的灵龕借鉴了中国传统建筑的形态, 但简化了结构, 使其更适合现代家庭的审美习惯。同时, 我们的香烛和陶器也延续了中式美学, 但功能上更贴近年轻人的生活方式, 比如既可用于祭祀, 也可作为家居装饰。



Mingwei: 归丛是否尝试过与客户合作, 设计更为个性化的丧葬用品? 高古奇: 有的。

我们接到过一些定制需求, 比如为逝者设计专属的灵龕或骨灰盒。每件作品背后都有一个独特的故事, 我们会与客户深入交流, 了解逝者的生前经历和喜好, 再将这些元素融入设计中。这种个性化的服务不仅让丧葬用品更有意义, 也帮助生者更好地表达对逝者的怀念。

Mingwei: 丧葬文化中有许多传统仪式, 比如烧纸、敬香等。您怎么看待这些传统习俗?

高古奇: 传统习俗是文化的重要组成部分, 也是一种情感寄托的方式。我们不希望彻底改变这些习俗, 而是希望通过设计让它们更符合当代人的需求。比如, 烧纸是一种寄托哀思的方式, 但它对环境有一定影响。我们正在尝试研发更环保的“纸钱”, 既保留传统习俗, 也关注现代社会的问题。

Mingwei: 在当代社会, 对死亡的讨论往往被认为是禁忌。归丛在推动公众正视死亡方面有哪些尝试?

高古奇: 确实, 对死亡的回避是许多文化中的共性。但死亡教育是重要的, 特别是在面对亲人离世时, 能帮助我们更平静地接受和处理这种经历。归丛通过产品和服务, 为用户提供一种温和的方式接触死亡, 比如发布遗嘱指南和丧葬手册, 让大家对生死议题有更多了解。我们也计划通过举办展览和工作坊, 与公众共同探讨生命的意义。