

The Unique Role of Ceramic Art in the Inheritance of Chinese Culture

Siyi Zou¹, Siying Zeng²

¹School of Cultural Communication, Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, 333000, China

²Jingdezhen Leping Middle School Branch (Junior High School Section) , Yuezhong Branch School, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, 333300, China

ABSTRACT

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, ceramic art has a long history and profound cultural connotation. Since the Neolithic Age, ceramic art has not only played an important practical role in Chinese history but has also become an important form of cultural expression and artistic creation. The aesthetic value, cultural symbol, and social function of ceramics make it occupy a unique position in Chinese traditional culture. With the advancement of modernization and the expansion of the influence of globalization, ceramic art is facing a series of challenges, such as the conflict between tradition and modernization, the pressure of marketization, and the lack of educational personnel training. Therefore, this paper discusses the historical background of ceramic art and its unique value in the inheritance of Chinese culture, analyzes the difficulties faced in the inheritance of ceramic art at present, proposes the protection of traditional craft, promotes the cultural globalization exchange, as well as impels in the ceramic art the modernized process the feasible strategy.

KEYWORDS

Ceramic art; Chinese culture; Cultural heritage; Historical development

1 Introduction

As the treasure of Chinese traditional culture, ceramic art bears the historical memory and cultural accumulation of thousands of years. From the primitive pottery of the Neolithic age to the fine porcelain of the Tang and Song dynasties, to the Jingdezhen porcelain of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the development of ceramic art not only reflects the continuous progress of technology, it also demonstrates the level of productivity, aesthetic taste and philosophy of ancient Chinese society. Ceramic art is not only a manifestation of material culture, it is also a profound symbol of Chinese culture, bearing the dual mission of cultural heritage and expression. The aesthetic value, cultural symbolic significance, and social function of ceramics are some of the reasons why they occupy an important position in Chinese traditional culture. However, in the context of globalization and modernization, the inheritance of ceramic art is facing many challenges. The conflict between traditional handicrafts and modern modes of production, cultural identity, and market-oriented pressure, all make the future of ceramic art face no small test. Especially in education and personnel training, how to make the new generation inherit and innovate the traditional ceramic technology has become an urgent problem to be solved. This article will start with the historical development of ceramic art, its cultural value, and its role in contemporary cultural heritage, in-depth analysis of the unique role of ceramic art in Chinese culture, to provide a theoretical basis and practical direction for the inheritance and innovation of ceramic art.

2 The historical and cultural background of ceramic art

The development history of Chinese ceramic art is a technical epic and aesthetic evolution history throughout Chinese civilization. As early as the Neolithic Yangshao culture, ancient people engraved primitive beliefs on painted pottery. The painted pottery basin with human faces and fish patterns at the Banpo site depicts totem worship of natural beings with simple lines, the wavy patterns and woven patterns reflect the observation and imitation of the living environment by early human beings. During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the emergence of incised white pottery marked a qualitative change in pottery-making techniques. The elegant vessels made from kaolin refined by kiln fires of over a thousand degrees, with their Taotie patterns, together with bronze ritual vessels, formed symbols of power and became the material carriers of the ritual and music system. In the Qin and Han dynasties, pottery broke through the category of daily use. The terracotta army in the mausoleum of the first emperor of the Qin dynasty set up pottery sculptures in a grand and realistic style. The emerald green lead glaze of glazed pottery in the Han dynasty started a color revolution in ceramic decoration^[1].

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the pattern of green in the south and white in the north established the aesthetic tone of Chinese ceramics. The "Thousand-peak green" color of the Yue kiln's secret color porcelain carried the Taoist philosophy of "Learning from nature", the purity of snow-white porcelain in Xing kilns coincides with the ethical pursuit of Confucian self-restraint, and the colorful glaze of tri-colored pottery reflects the inclusive cultural atmosphere of the prosperous Tang dynasty. During the transition from the Song to the Yuan Dynasty, ceramic art reached a state of perfection. The sky-blue glaze of Ru kiln, reminiscent of the sky after rain, and the rosy purple hues of Jun kiln's firing variations elevated ceramics to a philosophical medium of "Vessels carrying the Dao"; The blue and white of the Yuan dynasty, with cobalt as ink and porcelain as paper, fused the artistic conception of Chinese ink and Islamic geometric patterns, and became the oriental cultural card through the sea route of Silk Road in the era of globalization. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the establishment of the Imperial Kiln Factory in Jingdezhen promoted the systematization of porcelain-making techniques. The soft white porcelain of Yongle is as lustrous as jade, the colorful porcelain of Chenghua is vibrant and brilliant, and the enamel and pastel colors of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong periods both showcase the aesthetic authority of the empire and give rise to dowry porcelain and ritual vessels in the folk kiln system, woven together with auspicious patterns such as bats (fu) and deer (lu) that create a spiritual map of the common people's lives. The 8,000-year-old Kiln Fire has made ceramics go beyond the realm of practical utensils and become the key to decoding the spiritual gene of Chinese civilization.

3 The cultural value of ceramic art in the inheritance of Chinese culture

3.1 Aesthetic value

Chinese ceramic art constructs a unique oriental aesthetic paradigm with the aesthetic system of "Form, color, and quality". The shape of the utensils implies the cognition of the universe—the tall and straight lines of plum vases in the Song dynasty imitated the growth posture of bamboo, which not only showed the elegant style pursued by scholars but also met the practical needs of serving wine. The streamlined abdomen of the Yuhuchun bottle in the Yuan dynasty is a metaphor for the philosophy of life in which yin and yang are in harmony. The color of the glaze also carries a profound cultural code: The "sky blue after the rain" of Ru kiln celadon transforms the Daoist reverence for nature into a tangible visual language^[2]. The rosy purple hues of Jun kiln's firing variations, through the blend of contingency and necessity, the ultimate pursuit of "Harmony between man and nature" is interpreted. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the blue-and-white contrast of blue and white porcelain broke through the limitation of monochrome, and the continuity and blank composition of the twisted branch and lotus pattern interpreted the virtual and real artistic conception of Chinese painting in the balance between dynamic and static. Modern ceramic artists continue this aesthetic heritage through material experiments, such as combining ice crackle glaze with stainless steel and exploring the new expression of Oriental aesthetics in contemporary art in the collision of traditional texture and modern texture.

3.2 Cultural transmission

As a messenger of civilization across time and space, ceramic decoration constitutes a silent cultural transmission system. The fish and frog patterns on painted pottery of the Neolithic age record the primitive beliefs of our ancestors in the worship of reproduction; the pictures of chariots and horses on the pictorial bricks of the Han dynasty vividly reproduce the scenes of aristocratic life; and the Arabic inscriptions on the porcelain pots of the Changsha kiln of the Tang dynasty, bear witness to the dialogue between civilizations on the Silk Road. The most representative is the cultural integration of blue and white porcelain in the Yuan dynasty—painting the artistic conception of Chinese ink painting with Islamic cobalt, carrying the auspicious patterns of the Han nationality in Persian style, this cross-cultural integration made blue-and-white porcelain the calling card of the early Oriental culture of globalization^[3]. Modern digital technology has given new life to traditional patterns: the palace museum's "Wen Zang" APP, which allows users to scan porcelain to recreate the history behind the patterns; The young creators of Jingdezhen's Taoxichuan have deconstructed the bronzes' Taotie pattern into cyberpunk-style ceramic trendy toys. From the swirl pattern of Majiayao painted pottery to the abstract symbol of modern ceramic art, ceramics have always been the visual archives of National Collective Memory.

3.3 Social functions

Ceramics undertakes the dual mission of material utility and spiritual construction in traditional society. Ritual ceramics regulated the social order: the Shang and Zhou bronzes were accompanied by pottery gu and pottery jue, which

strengthened the concept of hierarchy through shape and pattern; the Ming dynasty sacrificial red glaze porcelain was dedicated to imperial sacrifices, and the bright red color was the peak of technology, as well as a symbol of power. Folk ceramics weave the secular belief network: the double lotus pattern on the dowry porcelain conveys the happiness of marriage, the pine and crane pattern on the birthday bowl conveys the wish for longevity, and these daily utensils constitute the spiritual totem of People's life. The social function of contemporary ceramics has undergone a creative transformation: Jingdezhen potters transform waste kiln bricks into community art walls, preserving industrial memory and beautifying public spaces; Yunnan Jianshui purple potters develop tea ceremony utensils, the traditional steamer chicken cookware was transformed into literati tea ceremony utensils. In the process of rural revitalization, ceramics have become a culturally productive force—the ceramic art village of Fuping in Shaanxi province has revitalized the old kiln site through the experience of pottery bars and the operation of Bed and Breakfast, and the villagers have changed from migrant workers to local employment, traditional Arts and crafts revitalize the economy while rebuilding cultural confidence.

4 Challenges in the inheritance of ceramic art

4.1 Conflict between tradition and modernity

The mechanized production forms a huge impact on the traditional ceramic handicraft, causing the cultural connotation to drain gradually. Traditional porcelain production needs to go through 72 processes, from selecting clay and casting to painting blue and white, and firing a kiln, each link embodies the craftsman's experience and ingenuity. Today's slip-forming technology simplifies the complex process into a mold press, and objects that used to take months to complete can now be mass-produced in just a few days. Young apprentices are reluctant to invest years in learning hand-blanking, and the monthly income of Old Masters is even less than that of factory operators, which poses a risk of discontinuity in the transmission of skills^[4]. The deeper crisis lies in the alienation of cultural symbols. The Lotus carp pattern, which used to mean "More than enough", has been mechanically copied into a standardized applique pattern. The sanctity of sacrificial porcelain has been replaced by the commercial attributes of tourist souvenirs, and the traditional decoration has lost its spiritual core and become an empty decorative element.

4.2 Cultural identity and market pressure

In the wave of globalization, ceramic art is facing the dual dilemma of cultural identity ambiguity and commercial value squeeze. On the international market, Japan's ARITA Porcelain Lab through the brand packaging to occupy the high-end ceramic market, Germany's Meissen Porcelain Royal uses the story to raise the premium, while Chinese ceramics are still labeled "Cheap crafts" label. To cater to overseas markets, some companies overproduce "Chinese-style" branded products: blue-and-white porcelain vases are forced to carry English trademarks, and traditional landscape paintings become foreign symbols in the eyes of Westerners. This kind of cultural compromise leads to the dissolution of the spiritual core. For example, a foreign trade enterprise combines the Buddhist eight treasures decoration with Christmas elements, which seems to be innovative but separates the cultural context. What is more serious is the local market's misunderstanding of the tradition. Most of the "Antique porcelain" sold on e-commerce platforms are fast-made products with chemical glazes. It is difficult for consumers to distinguish the essential difference between mechanical printing and hand-painted blue and white, the aesthetic value of traditional craftsmanship has been destroyed by price wars.

4.3 Lack of education and talent training

The fault of the ceramic education system leads to a shortage of talent. The traditional master-apprentice system emphasizes the immersive inheritance of "Three years of learning and five years of training", and the old master makes the apprentice understand the delicate experience of "Madness" through words and deeds. However, modern vocational education pursues rapid development. In a ceramic vocational school, the course of ancient glaze preparation is compressed into two-week experimental courses. Students only know the proportion of chemical formulas and do not understand the active reaction of natural minerals in kiln transformation. The younger generation is more likely to learn new technologies such as 3D ceramic printing and consider a hand drawing an "Outdated physical activity". The Aging Problem of the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage is prominent. Octogenarian masters are still sticking to firewood kiln firing, while there are few practitioners of traditional skills under the age of 30.

5 Opportunities and strategies of ceramic art inheritance

5.1 Protection of traditional crafts and innovative development

The living inheritance of traditional crafts requires the establishment of a dual-track mechanism of "Integrity and innovation". Jingdezhen ancient kiln folk exhibition area restores the Song dynasty dragon kiln. Visitors can participate in the whole process from kneading clay to firing. This immersive experience not only retains traditional techniques but also gives it an educational communication function. Digital technology provides new tools for decoding cultural genes—the Palace Museum has developed a "Digital Pattern Generator" that digitizes and stores classic patterns from various dynasties. Designers can intelligently deconstruct and reorganize the Yuan dynasty's blue-and-white floral patterns to create tableware designs that align with modern aesthetics. Breakthroughs in materials science have opened up new tracks: Ceramic Bone Powder developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences has been applied to artificial joints, giving traditional kaolin a medical value^[5]; high-temperature resistant ceramic coatings have been introduced in the aerospace field, making ancient technology work for cutting-edge technology. Rather than subverting tradition, this innovation is enabled by technology to find the connection between traditional crafts and modern needs. For example, Longquan celadon artisans used 3D scanning technology for ancient porcelain restoration, both improving accuracy and inheriting the core skills of manual blanking.

5.2 Cultural globalization and cross-cultural communication of ceramic art

Chinese ceramics need to establish cultural interpretative rights within the context of globalization. The installation "Blue and White Narrative" at the Venice Biennale uses hundreds of pieces of broken porcelain to piece together a map of the Maritime Silk Road. The cobalt stains and cracks on the fragments create a dialogue across time and space, allowing the audience to sense the power of cultural collisions through the fragments. Cross-border cooperation should go beyond symbol handling. The ceramic scarf buckle jointly developed by Hermes and Jingdezhen craftsmen integrates French geometric aesthetics with Chinese underglaze red technology, and shows the equal dialogue between Eastern and Western technological wisdom in square inches. Cultural output needs to focus on narrative innovation: the Dunhuang Academy launched a "Digital flying" ceramic blind box, where users can watch the restoration process of murals by scanning a QR code so that cultural communication can be transformed from a one-way display to an interactive experience. What is more important is to establish an international discourse system and promote the "Fire Earth Art" of Chinese ceramics as the common cultural heritage of mankind through platforms such as the World Ceramic Biennale and the International Ceramic Art Summit Forum, avoid falling into the stereotype of "Oriental wonders" in cultural exchanges.

5.3 The modernization of ceramic art and the reconstruction of social functions

Ceramic art is breaking through the inherent boundary of "Handicraft" and creating new social value. In the field of science and technology, BYD (Build Your Dreams) has developed ceramic battery separators that integrate traditional materials into new energy vehicles, enabling the cross-border integration of millennium technology and modern industry. In the process of community building, Taoxichuan in Jingdezhen transformed an abandoned kiln factory into an art community. The installation "Memories of Kiln Fire", made by young creators with porcelain tiles, not only retains the historical traces of the industrial site but also becomes a cultural and leisure landmark for citizens. Social function innovation is also reflected in public services: the Hangzhou community set up ceramic art healing workshops, autistic children practice hand-brain coordination through kneading, and the elderly regain their enthusiasm for life in the process of casting. Under the strategy of rural revitalization, Zitao village in Jianshui County, Yunnan province has developed the "Front shop and back yard" model. Tourists can experience pottery making, stay in homestays, and taste the pot banquet. Villagers have changed from migrant workers to local entrepreneurs, making traditional arts and crafts become the cultural engine of economic development.

6 Conclusion

Ceramic art is a symbol of China's long history and profound culture. Through the review and analysis of ceramic art, we can see its evolution process and technological innovation in different historical periods, as well as its unique role in cultural inheritance. From the painted pottery of the Neolithic age to the fine porcelain of the Song dynasty, and then to

the innovation of modern ceramic art, ceramic art has played an important role as a cultural carrier in Chinese history. It is not only the production process of daily utensils, but also carries a wealth of social, religious, philosophical, and aesthetic concepts, and becomes a cultural bridge connecting the past and the future. In today's increasingly deepening globalization, ceramic art is still showing a strong vitality and a wide range of international influence.

About the Author

Siyi Zou, master, associate professor, research interests: English language; cultural communication.

References

- [1] Zebin Lin. Research on the cultivation of Chinese core literacy in middle school from the perspective of Chinese ceramic culture inheritance[J]. Ceramic Science and Art, 2024,58(12):62-63.
- [2] Yuting Xie. Research on the optimization of ceramic art education policy in vocational colleges based on text analysis [D]. Hunan University of Technology, 2024.
- [3] Wanying Gong, Hongxi Tian, Yi Chen, et al.. Review and prospect of environmental design education at Jingdezhen Ceramics University [J]. Furniture and interior decoration, 2024,31(12):138-143.
- [4] Fuhong Zhong. Discussion on the inheritance relationship between ceramic art education and traditional culture——taking ceramic sculpture teaching as an example[J]. Chinese Journal of Education, 2020, (1):136-137.
- [5] Junjian Guo. Research on the protection of ceramic firing techniques of historically famous kilns in the central plains from the perspective of cultural inheritance [J]. Qinghai ethnic studies, 2020,31(2):69-75.