On Applying the Beauty of Traditional Culture to Modern Ceramic Ornamental Design

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Abstract. According to the analysis of the status quo about applying the beauty of traditional culture to ceramic design, this paper explores the development of ceramic ornamentation, as well as the value shown by traditional culture in modern ceramic ornamental design. This paper attaches importance to the application and methods employed for the application of traditional culture to modern ceramic ornamental design.

1 The status quo of applying the beauty of traditional culture to ceramic design

When it comes to Chinese traditional culture, it not only reflects the most profound spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation, but also carries the cultural beauty of the Chinese nation for thousands of years. The beauty of traditional culture lies in its feasting our eyes, the expectation from the bottom of our hearts and the cultural heritage. From the cave murals during the early period to the ceramic ornamentation in the new era, they are still telling us the indispensable beauty shown by traditional culture during the times of industrial civilization. There is no denying the fact that the beauty of traditional culture coincides well with our aesthetics in modern times, in addition to directly touching the deepest part of our hearts, and it not only embodies our national spirit, but also inherits the cultural heritage of the Chinese nation with a history of five thousand years.

The beauty which implies the wisdom of the Chinese labouring people for thousands of years still gives out its unique charm nowadays. It is highly required that designers should be equipped with certain design measures for the purpose of applying the beauty of traditional culture to modern design. The situation is also the same in the design of modern ceramic ornamentation. Nowadays, contemporary designers start to lay emphasis on the value shown by traditional culture and they are taking an active part in applying traditional culture to modern ceramic

ornamental design. It is common to see that ceramic ornamental design is widely applying whether traditional patterns or traditional calligraphy or traditional wash painting in modern times. Despite the fact that many people have been aware of decorating the beauty of modern ceramic ornamentation with the beauty of traditional culture, some deficiencies are still available in the process of its application. They can be summarized as follows:

1.1. Neglect of classic patterns

Beautiful meaning can be implied by employing homophones, and patterns can also be used to embody people's wonderful hopes towards life. From experience, we used the measures of contrast, balance and harmony called by us unconsciously to create numerous classic patterns that are still highly thought of by people nowadays. It is the fact that fish pattern, phoenix pattern, dragon pattern, yin-yang symbol from Tai Chi, tripod or quadripod pattern and swastika pattern themselves contain high artistic connotation and meaning to life. Moreover, they are also of high use value in ceramic ornamental design in modern times. However, these classical patterns are still being neglected by us to a certain extent.

1.2. Deficiency in re-innovation

With traditional cultural elements applied to ceramic ornamental design in large amount in modern times, it indeed plays a significant role in giving full play to the artistic value possessed by traditional patterns themselves, however, it is of equal importance to be

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not limited rigidly to the simulation and copy of the traditional patterns. It is known that only innovation can extend the art life of traditional culture, and we should not deem traditional culture as “museum art” or protecting it blindly. Now the top priority should go to further extending the life value of traditional culture and applying re-innovation to our design.

1.3. Inconsistence with contemporary aesthetics

Under the influence of modern environment, people nowadays are eager to pursue a concise style of the times. For the reason that traditional culture was responsible for recording the daily life and entertainment of the ancient labouring people, and therefore the characteristic of chaos and complexity is available. Thus, it is of great necessity to cater to the aesthetic consciousness in modern times, integrate it with the modern concept, and then apply traditional culture to the modern ceramic ornamental design. With regard to the integration of contemporary aesthetics and it, it is still deficient in design nowadays, and only the culture which conforms well to contemporary aesthetics can be our design welcomed by the masses.

1.4. Oblivion of cultural implication

Concerning the inheritance about the beauty of traditional culture, it is more than the “Chinese style” in the form of designed elements, the ideal condition and spirit of traditional culture also play an important part in appreciating the beauty of traditional culture. Among the poems, literary works and artworks inherited from Chinese history, the word “implication” is of great significance. Design refers to the extension of cultural connotation, and thus the cultural implication is an element that should not be forgotten by us.

China’s history of ceramics development is also known as the development history of traditional culture, and the beauty reflected by traditional culture is also appreciated by more people than ever before. Despite the fact that we are not mature enough in applying traditional culture to modern ceramic ornamental design and some deficiencies are available in the process, we are indeed probing and perfecting the measures of applying traditional culture to ceramic ornamental design constantly through the development of ceramic ornamentation and recognizing the significance of traditional culture to ceramic ornamental design in modern times.

2 The development of ceramic ornamentation

Ornamentation actually refers to demonstrating the effect of material in the aspects of vision, touch, and appearance etc. Ever since ancient times, ceramic art, which is regarded as the carrier of human civilization, has obtained much attention from the world, and decorative ornamentation has been deemed as an important means through which ceramics is ornamented. The ornamentation, known as the main means for the decoration of ceramics, is one of the key elements influencing the aesthetics of ceramic wares, and it, which can reflect people’s spiritual world better than modelling, has been highly thought of by designers ever since the emergence of ceramics.

The ancestors would paint their own voices in their hearts when they made pottery, from the imprinting and embossing ornamentation left intentionally by them to the image ornamentations in Yangshao Culture, which were mainly animal ornamentations, plant ornamentations and character ornamentations. All of them were used to record the fresh and living state of lovely creatures, and depict fish’s swimming at the shallow bottom, eagles’ soaring in the sky, and living states of all the creatures leisurely. The ornamentations covered almost all the creatures in the sky and on the earth, including nearly all the species. After the evolution of pottery culture for a long time, Chinese porcelain, which was also known as primitive celadon, sprouted during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties. The development of both the craftsmanship and ornamental styles adopted by the ornamentation of primitive porcelain was really intriguing in a period as long as 1500 years. The role played by ceramic ornamentation is comprehensive in the creation of ceramic art. Through the aesthetics shown by the effect of ceramic ornamentation, both the inner emotion and spiritual world of ceramic artists both at home and abroad can be demonstrated and interpreted no matter they are from ancient or modern times.

Our country are rich in decorative ornamentations, and the advancement of ceramic ornamentation art has never stopped till now since the development of ceramic ornamentation art patterns. The patterns of ornamentation in China can be approximately divided into three categories, including the geometric ornamentations abstracted and generalized from concrete forms such as fish, birds, frogs and so on in Yangshao culture, the picture of life which shows the themes of objective reality such as life scenes with characters, animal ornamentations, plant ornamentations and so on, and the ornamentations created according to the themes of ideological and religious beliefs. In such circumstances, the art of

ornamentation is adopted for the purpose of reflecting the view of life possessed by the ordinary labouring people at that time, and conveying the aesthetic taste and the pursuit of life in contemporary times. Moreover, the ornamentations are deemed as symbol which can be used to arouse the resonance in the hearts of the appreciators and then further stimulate the deep thinking under the bottom of their hearts. Ceramic ornamentation is not related to beauty as “emblazonry”, and it performs better in expressing certain emotion and the wishes of people.

3 The value shown by traditional culture in ceramic ornamental design

Traditional culture is deemed as colourful national features formed by the time-worn elements of characters, colours, patterns and so on. With connotation and uniqueness of the times, as well as its own unique charm, traditional culture in China is the sedimentary deposits of historical progress, and it can provide the advancement of human history with accumulated strength and nutrition, as the culture with vitality. Tradition is more than a sort of symbol, and it more exactly refers to a kind of background of the times and a sort of cultural heritage. After going through the baptism during the industrial age, people pay increasingly higher attention to the cultural value of products, as well as the cultural attributes brought by the products. It is shown that ceramic ornamentation in contemporary times also attaches more importance to the connotation of traditional culture.

Now, more and more people keep a watchful eye on the artworks with rich national culture. Through knowing about the change of people’s aesthetic and aesthetic consciousness during the present stage, the advocacy of folkloric design has turned out to be an indisputable fact. The folkloric trend of ceramic ornamentation is deemed as an inevitable choice made by the development of ceramic art in China in its long history. Traditional cultural values enable the ornamentation of ceramic art to satisfy the demands of social ethical value system, and it is deeply favoured by all ranks and classes in our country. In the developing process of ceramic ornamentation art, traditional culture in China not only bred but also derived the good reputation of “Qin Bricks and Han Tiles”, the fame for the peak of celadon art which was known for “thousand peaks in emerald colour” and the aesthetic realm of “jade spirit”. In the contemporary times, there is no doubt that traditional culture is regarded as the origin of the inspiration for the art of ceramic ornamentation in modern times.

In the ceramic ornamental design, it is quite obvious that the integration of the ethnic elements including traditional patterns, wash painting, calligraphy, and traditional ideas etc. would widen the designer’s thoughts of design and inject the connotation of ethnic culture into the modern civilization, which is not only the innovation of modern design but also the inheritance of traditional culture. The assistance offered by traditional culture will also enable ceramic ornamental design of China to go further in modern times.

Traditional culture is a complete scroll painting in which human beings fly in the space of beauty. Known for its “long-lasting charm”, traditional culture provides mankind with pure inspiration and the happiness of life, and it is also regarded as an “untouchable model” in aesthetics at the same time of guiding and nourishing the development of ceramic art in modern times. Known for its long history, what is required by Chinese traditional culture is its in-depth awakening again in the present times when cultures around the world are deeply integrated with each other. Moreover, the beauty shown by traditional culture should be applied to the design of ceramic ornamentation in modern times, so as to carve the image of modern ceramic art in the era by using the axe and chisel of traditional beauty.

4 The method employed in applying traditional culture to modern ceramic ornamental design

With the idea of transforming from “made in China” to “China creation” and the strategy of cultural revitalization proposed, we realize the precious value of traditional culture and the significance of the protection over traditional culture. Therefore, it is quite necessary to inject traditional culture into ceramic ornamental design in modern times and spread the beauty of traditional culture design. Moreover, it is also of great significance to inject new connotation into ceramic art and provide the development of design in the future with new possibility. Known for its unique ethnic characteristics of our country, traditional culture is deemed as the crystallization of the wisdom of labouring people in China. The treasure house of Chinese traditional art has the unique characteristics of multiple forms and rich themes, and it is able to provide the design of ceramic ornamentation in modern times with innovative design materials in large amount. The masses are also in the process of learning and exploration, for the purpose of seeking for more effective measures through which traditional

culture can be then applied to modern ceramic ornamental design.

The materials with traditional culture employed in modern ornamental design are rich, and they usually include elements in many aspects. For instance, direct reference of traditional pattern styles, abstract application, and the inheritance of cultural artistic conception etc. can be adopted so as to deepen the meaning of ceramic works and enrich the connotation shown by ceramic ornamental design in modern times.

4.1 Direct reference

The traditional patterns were the tools through which the ancient people prayed for peace in their era and wished for wonderful outcome, and the laws of beauty summarized by ancient people in their labour

Figure 1 tripod pattern

process. For instance, the traditional pattern of “peony” represents wealth, “goldfish” indicates abundant wealth or many children in the family, and “bat pattern” denotes wealth and auspiciousness. With regard to modern design, many designers draw lessons from traditional patterns and employ them to their own designs directly so as to express the beautiful expectation of life under the bottom of people’s hearts. For instance, the series of distinguished porcelain ware designed by Guangdong Bening Ceramics (Figure 2), which was used as special tableware for the state banquet of the Boao Forum for Asia, directly employed the tripod pattern (Figure 1) symbolizing prominent status in the porcelain ware designed by it in the traditional pattern, which stands for the good meaning and the inheritance of traditional culture and national spirit.

Figure 2 the series of distinguished porcelain ware

4.2 Abstract application

During the process of creating ceramic art in modern times, we should not be restricted to the simulation and copy of traditional patterns, but we should recreate traditional patterns through the measures of observation, abstraction, generalization and refinement and then apply them to the design of contemporary ceramic ornamentation for the purpose of being in line with the aesthetics of people in contemporary times. Mashao facial makeup was originated from Shaanxi Province, China and it was

Figure 3 tableware

developed from the traditional facial makeup during fire performance in folk festival. The face of Masao is changeable in shape, and the pattern is unique and exquisite. Mashao facial makeup is known for its changeable modelling, as well as unique and delicate patterns. People have already applied Mashao facial makeup to wine bottles (Figure 4) and tableware (Figure 3) creatively through the technique of abstraction, and thus the fresh sense of mystery is produced through the collision between oriental and western cultures, as well as the combination of modernity and tradition.

Figure 4 wine bottles

4.3 The transformation from complexity to simplicity

Traditional patterns have a variety of types, and most of them are disordered and complicated. In the process of integrating different types of traditional

patterns into the modern ceramic ornamental design, designers simplify the complicated types of traditional patterns for the purpose of adapting to the pursuit of concise aesthetic consciousness and taste in modern times. During the transformation from complexity to simplicity, the ancient meaning of the traditional patterns is retained when they are simplified, and the complexity of traditional patterns are reduced to a certain extent at the same time of enhancing the simplicity and generosity of the modern ceramic ornamentation based on modern aesthetic concepts. Thus, it allows the traditional

patterns to be a new point of creation and enlightenment for the creation of modern ceramic ornamentation, so as to create a modern ceramic art which is filled with vitality. Shi Yuren, a famous ceramic artist, interprets the flavour of the times of the traditional patterns representatively through simplifying the traditional patterns of twining branches in his work *Continuity* (Figure 5). Lu Bin's work *Fossil* selects a segment of the traditional pattern so as to interpret the national memory in the art of ceramic ornamentation in the contemporary times.

Figure 5 《Continuity》

4.4 Drawing lessons from cultural artistic conception

The cultural artistic conception is shown in the outline of line drawing, the paint-splashing style of freehand brushwork, the poetic traditional Chinese wash painting, the spiritual realm of “I co-exist with Heaven and Earth, and I am also united with everything”, and the moving folk stories of “Herd-boy and Weaving-Girl”, the “Goddess Chang’s Flying to the Moon”, and so on. Chinese traditional culture is known for its long history, and the wash painting which is deemed as of the national heritage often chooses the natural landscape of mountains and waters as the main object for description, so as to

Figure 6 works of Huo Boyang

express the author's feelings through his/her affection with landscapes. Through the depiction of landscapes, Huo Boyang embodies his own feelings towards nature, transcendence, and the spiritual realm of being plain and neutral in his works (Figure 6). Designers would always draw lessons from the artistic conception of Chinese traditional culture and then apply them in their own designs. In the “Landscape Mirror” (Figure 7), Zhu Legeng integrates the landscape of mountains and waters into the mirror image of people's mind in a romantic manner through the recreation of the soul, for the purpose of expressing the artistic conception of “both subject and object are dissolved” in eastern philosophy.

Figure 7 《Landscape Mirror》

5 Conclusion

Ornamentation sprouted during the process of tools creation, took shape through the observation carried out by the ancestors during their daily life in the agricultural society in which the ancestors settled, and then developed through the baptism of civilization. Tradition and modernity are opposite to each other in terms of time, and they are in harmony in the aspect of history and continuity. This paper mainly analyses the deficiency available in applying traditional culture to modern ceramic ornamentation, and then improves and develops the methods employed for applying traditional culture to ceramic ornamental design in modern times. By adopting the measures including direct reference, abstract application, and the transformation from complexity to simplicity, there is no doubt that the application of beauty shown by traditional culture to the ceramic ornamental design in the modern times through drawing lessons from traditional pattern styles and cultural artistic conception can not only show and inherit the beauty of traditional culture, and enrich the cultural connotation of modern design, but also improve the cultural value of relevant products.

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