

# Research on the Current Situation of the Conservation of Ceramic Firing Techniques in Zibo(Shandong, China) from the Perspective of Holistic Conservation

Lv Huina

School of Humanities, Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Xi'an, China

1697951747@qq.com

**Keywords:** Holistic conservation perspective; Zibo ceramic firing techniques; Current situation of conservation

**Abstract:** With a long history, Zibo ceramic firing techniques have been of significant historical value and brilliant achievements since ancient times, playing an important role in the history of ceramics in China. Zibo ceramic firing techniques are regarded as an indispensable and important part of the ceramics industry as a way of inheritance and development. Based on the well-developed kiln industry in Zibo City, the ceramic products adopt local materials and mature firing technique, and are made according to the actual needs of the people, which is the uniqueness of Zibo area and the best reflect of its local cultural characteristics of ceramic art products. It can also be said that the ceramic firing techniques are excellent examples of Zibo's "art creation based on material on hand" and "ware production based on its purpose of use", showing its particular artistic charm.

## 1. Introduction

As one of the five major ceramic production areas in China, Zibo, located in Shandong Province, China, has been renowned as the China's ceramic capital. The ceramic firing technique has been a valuable cultural and historical heritage of China and playing an indispensable role in the development history of China's ceramic industry. Zibo ceramic firing techniques are also getting well-known to the public with its unique charm, distinctively featured and filled with vivid life atmosphere. Zibo's ceramic starts from the life demands of the common people, and has gradually formed the natural, simple, elegant, and frank style of art.

Holistic conservation is the basic principle for the conservation of ceramic firing techniques. The inheritance of ceramic firing skills is the result of intangible cultural heritage conservation and the beginning of ceramic firing techniques conservation, so it is reasonable to take the principle of holistic conservation as one of the fundamental principles of ceramic firing techniques conservation.

The first Chinese who proposed the conservation of ceramic firing techniques from a holistic perspective was Mr. Liu Kui. In 2004, Liu suggested that the conservation of ceramic firing techniques should include not only the techniques itself, but also its origin of development. He emphasized both the "past tense" form of ceramic firing technique and "present tense" form of its development, not only paying attention to the cultural values and background of ceramics, but also coordinating the relationships and economic interests of all parties, as well as respecting the cultural identity shared by ceramic firing techniques, which is an important guarantee for the good conservation of Zibo ceramic firing techniques.

In 2005, General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China promulgated the Opinions on Enhancing the Protection of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage, in which it was clearly proposed that the authenticity and integrity of the conservation of ceramic firing techniques should be adhered to.

In 2011, the principle of holistic conservation of ceramic firing techniques was included in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China, in which it stated clearly in Article 4 of Chapter 1 that the conservation of ceramic firing techniques should focus on their

authenticity, integrity and inheritance. At the same time, the specific conservation methods of ceramic firing techniques under the perspective of holistic conservation are also clearly proposed in Article 26 of Chapter 3. For specific areas with distinctive ceramic firing characteristics and completed forms, the local relevant departments can formulate special conservation plans and implement regional conservation upon the consent of the people's government departments at the corresponding level. It is also important to respect the wishes of local residents and to protect the physical properties and sites of ceramic firing from destruction.

## **2. Origin and Development, Inscription and Conservation of Zibo Ceramics**

### **2.1 The Origin and Development of Ceramics**

Ceramics is a cultural product, of which the invention is one of the most important achievements in the history of human development. It is one of China's major contributions to the World's Material Cultural Heritage, and one of the reasons that China has been known as the country of ceramics since ancient times. According to records, China's ceramic firing skills have a history of nearly 10,000 years. Due to the close relationship between ceramics and people's daily life, as well as its long history, ceramics has become an important source of testimony and research, and also an essential symbol of a city's civilization.

Zibo is known as one of the five porcelain capitals of China, with perfect firing techniques and fine products, which can serve not only the Chinese market, but also be exported worldwide, becoming one of the traditional and unique industries of Zibo. Among them, ceramic firing techniques have a history of more than 1300 years, which is gradually derived on the basis of ceramic production, making it an important and integral part of Zibo's history, culture and civilization.

Zibo is located in the central region of Shandong Province, covering an area of about 5938 square kilometers, rich in natural products and splendid in culture, with mountainous areas in the south, hilly basins in the middle and plains in the north, intersected by rivers, fertile land and pleasant climate, providing extremely favorable conditions for the living environment and flourishing of primitive humans. According to the archaeological investigation, the fossilized skull of an apeman about 400,000 years old was found in Yiyuan Tumen Cave in the south of Zibo, which is the only excavation site where the fossilized skull of an apeman was found in Zibo, thus proving that there were traces of frequent activities of primitive man in Zibo as early as 400,000 years ago.

The emergence of ceramics is inevitably inseparable from primitive humans, and is the product of human advancement and social productivity enhancement. There are traces of apeman in Zibo from as early as the Paleolithic era. Over 400,000 years of development, humans learned more and more about the firability of clay through long-time practice, and gradually produced ceramic products. With a wide distribution of clay resources in Zibo and easy access to raw materials, ceramics have been gradually applied and become an important part in people's daily lives since their appearance. The formation of ceramic firing techniques played a vital role in the gradual transition of mankind from barbarism to civilization and from nomadism to settlement [1].

The ceramics excavated from the sites of Fushan Yi (Zhangdian District), Huangjia (Zhangdian District) and Houli (Linzi District) in Zibo belong to the Neolithic culture, with a history of more than 7000 years. The ceramics unearthed from these sites are mainly red and brown pottery, with primitive decorations such as scratching, cone stabbing and reticulation on the surface, mostly in the form of tripods, jars and pots, which are of coarse quality, poorly fired and impure in color, and made by hand, showing the primitiveness of ceramic firing techniques.

### **2.2 The Inscription and Protection of Ceramic in Zibo**

In May 2011, Zibo Ceramic Firing Technique declared by Zibo Tanshan Porcelain Co., Ltd. was listed as intangible cultural heritage by the state. The success of this inscription is a milestone in Zibo ceramic firing techniques. It symbolized that Zibo ceramic firing techniques with a history of

10,000 years of heritage has been appreciated by the highest authorities in China, which is of great practical significance to enhance the reputation and influence of Zibo firing techniques as well as to increase the competitiveness of the Zibo ceramic market. However, it should be noted that the success of the inscription also implies responsibility, which brings new challenges and tasks, that is, how to get better inheritance and development of Zibo ceramic firing skills, how to advance Zibo ceramic firing skills to a new level. Over the past decade or so, Zibo has become an important ceramic production area in China, serving national gift porcelains and state banquet porcelains. Various types of Zibo ceramic ware and crafts have become the popular selection for collectors all over the world.

### **3. Self-integrity Protection**

As an intangible cultural heritage, ceramic firing techniques have the dual characteristics of toughness and fragility. The inheritance process has encountered wars, accidents, destruction and even clash with modern technology. It is easy to cause the demise of ceramic firing techniques, which reflects the vulnerability of Zibo ceramics. Especially in modern society, the continual commercialized process has brought a huge impact on Zibo ceramics as well. Zibo ceramic firing techniques are unable to survive from the rapid economic and social development, driving the firing techniques of ceramics gradually deviated from the track. With the firing techniques becoming increasingly simplified and on the verge of extinction, they are bound to face the risk of being disinherited if no targeted protective measures are adopted. It is in this context that the Chinese government has reinforced the conservation of ceramic firing techniques. In 1997, the State Council of PRC promulgated and issued the "Regulations on the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts", which clearly stated that the state has formulated a policy for the protection of traditional arts and crafts varieties and firing techniques [2].

Zibo ceramics are exquisite, and the engraved and printed celadon of the Song Dynasty is the best. The firing techniques show distinctive local characteristics, which conforms to the state requirements for the conservation of the traditional arts and crafts. Since 1999, the relevant departments of Chinese government has started to visit, collect and investigate the folk ceramic workshops in Zibo to obtain sufficient oral and video information, and made it into audio and video with audio-visual effects, recording the folk ceramic firing techniques and their production process. The best value of the holistic conservation is to preserve the in-depth understanding of making ceramics by the folk ceramic craftsmen, and to provide important source of inspiration that "holistic conservation is an effective way to protect intangible cultural heritage". However, due to the lack of budget for ceramic conservation funds and the existing bureaucratic issues in the government, as well as the inadequate conservation equipment for local intangible cultural heritage, there is still a problem of a lack of successors to the heritage of Zibo ceramic firing techniques. The ceramic firing techniques in Zibo are at risk of disappearing, and are in great needs for urgent attention from relevant departments and personnel.

### **4. The Living Conservation of the Project Itself**

Oral inheritance is the way of survival of Zibo ceramic firing techniques and productive protection of intangible cultural heritage. The carrier of the culture is "living" people, and the protection process is the developing and changing "active" national wisdom, values and the interaction process of the inheritor to the object of inheritance. People are important inheritors and carriers of Zibo ceramic firing techniques. Therefore, the living conservation of Zibo ceramic firing techniques is the top priority and the key to the protection of intangible cultural heritage of Zibo. In view of the deficiencies, this paper suggested the following three aspects to protect the "living" ceramic firing techniques of Zibo. Firstly, it is to learn from the Japanese "national treasure" system, sorting and completing the name list of Zibo ceramic firing techniques of intangible cultural heritage from the provincial, municipal and county level, increasing the allowance, and granting craftsmen with ceramic firing techniques a sense of social honor. Second, it is supposed to

encourage these skilled ceramic firing craftsmen to take apprentices to bring down the risk of losing these traditional skills. Third, the local government should undertake the responsibility to protect the intellectual property rights of Zibo ceramic firing techniques, select outstanding inheritors, give generous allowances and treatment, and form a mechanism for mutual selection of masters and apprentices [3].

## **5. Protection of Cultural Ecological Environment**

Zibo ceramic firing techniques have been constantly improved through dynamic development, and the people have always been the carrier of the inheritance, which has been preserved in a good cultural ecological environment. As one of the main carriers of ceramic firing techniques inheritance, exposition is a perfect model in the cultural ecological environment system of ceramic firing techniques. At present, cultural entities such as expositions and ceramic academic research institutions are valuable platforms for the inheritance of ceramic firing techniques, and the vitality of ceramic firing techniques depends on the survival of the form of intangible cultural heritage, in which local government departments should establish a comprehensive system for the conservation of ceramic firing techniques.

As a local-featured knowledge, ceramic firing techniques are gradually formed and developed around the local cultural plant area. The conservation is to create an atmosphere for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, to continuously raise the awareness of the general public to protect the inheritance of ceramic firing techniques, and to encourage people to participate proactively in the conservation work, specifically from the following aspects.

First, it is important to work on public culture. The conservation of ceramic firing techniques and the construction of public culture should be integrated, which is an essential part of the holistic conservation and can make the conservation more successful with half the effort. The Zibo Ceramic Museum, which has already been built, can introduce traditional ceramic culture to the public via pictures, videos and exhibitions, offering a professional venue and a convenient channel to promote Zibo ceramic culture. At the same time, the ceramic culture square has been set up in the urban area of Zibo, where ceramic culture wall and porcelain-making workshops can be adopted more often.

Second, it is to make efforts in terms of campus culture. Ceramic firing techniques reflect the wisdom of the ancient Chinese people and have great educational value. Education is another important way to pass on ceramic firing techniques and intangible cultural heritage. Zibo ceramics has accumulated tons of valuable experience through its long history of development. What's more, Zibo Culture, Radio, Film and Television Bureau and Tourism Bureau have organized a range of "intangible cultural heritage-into-campus" activities to promote Zibo ceramic firing techniques and enrich the children's ceramic DIY experience in several elementary schools. It is a great way to share educational and academic resources, build a community of university, middle schools and elementary schools, and integrate Zibo ceramic culture into the learning of students, as well as offer courses in ceramics and take a leading role in scientific research [4].

Thirdly, it is important to make efforts in terms of consumption culture. Holistic conservation is one of the major means for ceramic firing techniques to realize self-blooding and enhance its vitality. The fact that ceramic firing techniques are recorded as one of the intangible cultural heritage items is what makes it possible to be protected holistically. From the current situation, there are many ceramic factories in Zibo that have maintained the traditional ceramic firing techniques and are producing ceramic items in bulk, but on a small scale [5].

Fourth, it is important to make efforts from other cultural matters. The inheritance of one culture never stands isolated, but is closely interconnected with other cultural matters in order to form a holistic local culture. Therefore, in order to better follow the principles of intangible cultural heritage conservation, the relationship between ceramic firing techniques and other cultural matters needs to be considered thoroughly.

## 6. Conclusion on the Conservation Work

The conservation of Zibo ceramic firing techniques involves numerous aspects, i.e. the changes of intangible cultural heritage, the current and future economic and social development, the main body of ceramic firing techniques as well as the main body of inheritance, and the natural and humanistic environment in which ceramic firing techniques are preserved. Nevertheless, the conservation of Zibo ceramic firing techniques from the perspective of holistic conservation cannot be done so perfectly, but the conservation work should be carried out in a purposeful and prioritized manner based on its specificity and actual situation.

Archaeologists discovered traces of frequent primitive human activity as early as 400,000 years ago in Zibo, when the ceramic firing techniques were not yet in existence. As a result, many experts and scholars devoted to the compare, test and analyze the excavated kilns, kiln tools, artifacts from a holistic perspective, to have a better understanding of the inheritance of Zibo ceramic firing techniques and to gradually start the conservation work, which is one of the important missions and requirements in the current context. Nowadays, training inheritors of Zibo ceramic firing techniques has become the most challenging commitment to achieve the innovation and development in the new era.

## 7. Summary

Intangible cultural heritage, as an important culture of heir and heritage, is the culture and the beautification of human life. The representations of Zibo ceramic firing skills are the signs and symbols of the nation, in urgent need of intensified protection. The protection work is of crucial importance to Zibo ceramic firing techniques, which includes the protection of the skilled craftsmen, the natural ecological environment of the inheritance area, the humanistic environment, etc.. The self-integrity protection, living conservation and protection of the cultural ecological environment is to ensure the dynamic genes and cultural sources of Zibo ceramic firing techniques.

## References

- [1] Zhang Yue, On the Principle of Holistic Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage-Taking The Protection Practice of Xing Kiln Ceramic Firing Techniques As An Example[J]. Tradition and Innovation, 2019(7):121-123.
- [2] Liu Ruzhen, Huang Yun. Nostalgic Tapping: Interviews With People Involved in the Restoration Study of Jian Kiln and Jian-Zhan(Teacup) Firing Techniques[J]. Forum of Arts, 2017(6):144-147.
- [3] Qiu Furong. Research on Jian Zhan Firing Techniques[J]. Technique inheritance, 2016(11):88-89.
- [4] Dong Hui. Conservation and Sustainable Development of Yue Kiln Celadon Firing Technique[J]. China Science and Technology Information, 2014(21):89-92
- [5] Li Xiaoming. On "Community" and the Holistic Conservation of NRM [J]. Journal of Hezhou College, 2016(1):21-24.