

Protection of Handicraft Skills from the Perspective of Folklore Studies

--Taking Yaozhou kiln ceramics as an example

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Abstract

Handicraft skills and material culture are a research perspective of folklore and a major landscape of various ethnic customs in China. The long history, vast territory, and clever and wise Chinese people have formed a colorful and diverse folk handicraft technique. Under the diverse paths of design participation in handicraft innovation, handicrafts have undergone semantic, functional, and situational transformations in contemporary times, presenting an ecosystem of alienation and diversification. This article takes the ceramic craftsmanship of Yaozhou kiln as an example to explore how to improve the construction of national cultural soft power by protecting local traditional handicrafts.

Keywords

Folklore, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Traditional Handicraft, Inheritance and Protection.

1. Introduction

China is one of the earliest countries in the world to establish the concept of "folk customs". The term "folk customs" frequently appeared in literature over two thousand years ago. For example, in "Records of the Grand Historian," it is said that "both the newly elected and the tillers have given way to the shore, and folk customs have given way to the long term.". In the Book of Rites, there is a saying that goes, "For those who are loyal to the people, it is important to show good customs and be cautious of evil in order to prevent the people from indulging in debauchery, so that the people will not be confused." In the Biographies of Merchandise, it is also known as "folk customs" when it comes to the customs, products, and fashion preferences of a place. Folk customs are constantly in motion, like the prevailing trend, so our ancestors vividly referred to them as "customs". However, since the industrial era, traditional handicrafts have been impacted to a certain extent, and many traditional craftsmen are facing crises such as low income and loss of skills.

2. Handmade Memory and Historical Workshop Protection

Yaozhou porcelain was created and fired in the Tang Dynasty, matured during the Five Dynasties period, reached its peak during the Song Dynasty, and continued in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, with a history of over 1300 years of firing. According to ancient books, during its most glorious period, there were dense pottery workshops on both sides of the Qi River, known as the "Ten Mile Pottery Workshop" in history. Whenever night fell, the fires were scattered and never extinguished, becoming a magnificent landscape. "The Qi River never sleeps" was also known as one of the seven scenic spots in Yaozhou. It is one of the six major kiln systems of the Song Dynasty and a treasure in traditional Chinese porcelain making techniques. The kiln site is located in Huangbao Town, Tongchuan City, Shaanxi Province. It was

formerly known as Tongguan and belonged to Yaozhou during the Song Dynasty, hence the name "Yaozhou Kiln". It includes kilns such as Chenlu Town, Lidi Town, Shangdian Town, and Yuhua Palace. It was one of the main production areas of folk celadon in the northern part of the Song Dynasty. Chenlu Ancient Town is currently the most representative ancient town of Yaozhou Kiln, and it is also the only remaining Yaozhou Porcelain Base in history that has been burning for thousands of years. It is the only ceramic township among the cultural and artistic towns named in Shaanxi Province, and can be called the "Oriental Ceramic Ancient Town", with high popularity both domestically and internationally. Chenlu Ancient Town is still the only surviving porcelain making site in the Yaozhou kiln area after the Song and Yuan dynasties. Today, it still continues the tradition of firing Yaozhou porcelain, and its thousand year commitment is a witness to the development of its ceramic culture.

At present, several large-scale companies in Chenlu Ancient Town, supported by national policies and some school enterprise cooperation relationships, are relatively mature in the operation of the entire company, with professional personnel responsible for management, marketing, and publicity. But in some small handicraft workshops, the overall cultural level of the employees is not high, and there are very few people with a bachelor's degree or above. Small workshops usually lack product positioning and long-term planning, and their production and sales cannot meet market demand. For example, the porcelain workshop visited by the author is mainly operated by Master Li and his sister. Master Li is responsible for the production of ceramics, while his sister is responsible for sales. Due to its location outside the ancient town tourism center and the impact of the epidemic, the porcelain workshop's sales are difficult to sustain. And Master Tong's home porcelain workshop is completely operated by Master Tong alone. The small shop displays finished products for sale in front of it, and behind it is a ceramic making workshop. Master Tong introduced that his ceramics are mainly characterized by glaze color. He is not good at speaking and his products are often sold to loyal customers and occasionally interested tourists. Master Gao believes that the current situation in most industries is "not knowing what to do, but not knowing what to say." There is also competition among peers, and the survival situation of small workshops is even more worrying. After visiting several porcelain workshops, it was found that large workshops are mostly based on traditional classic techniques and glaze colors, while various small workshops have been passed down from generation to generation with their own unique characteristics. Handcrafters are often skilled, but they are not good at speaking and find it difficult to promote their excellent works.

It is worth considering how to make excellent handicrafts and unique small workshops well-known to the public. There are many universities around the birthplace of intangible cultural heritage in various parts of the country, and each university plays a certain role in the inheritance and industrial development of handicrafts. Universities rely on the advantages of rich talent cultivation and research platforms to input a continuous stream of talents into the cultural and creative industry, while also receiving support from local governments. Obtaining positive policy guidance not only leverages the advantages of university research platforms, but also lays the foundation for the development of Yaozhou kiln cultural and creative industries.

3. Handicraft Technology and the Inheritance and Protection of Craftsmen

The inheritance culture of handicraft technology is a treasure of ancient Chinese civilization. Since the Han Dynasty, there have been rich explanations of craftsmanship techniques and organization. Xu Shen explained the nature of craftsmanship from multiple perspectives in his book "Shuowen Jiezi", which can be roughly summarized into the following four aspects: ① skilled people ② magical power ③ capable tools ④ capable workshops. The traditional handicraft worker's "every product is made by himself/herself, and he/she often plays multiple

roles as a designer, producer, and seller. His/her products are closely related to his/her daily thoughts, emotions, and thoughts, and are all part of a community of regional and cultural customs.". This is the essential attribute that distinguishes handmade products from industrial products.

Family inheritance and industry inheritance have both positive and conservative aspects. From the perspective of craftsmanship and folk customs, it can be found that the production techniques inherited by families are more diverse. Each household fully unleashes their creativity under the norms of local customs. The inheritance of the industry emphasizes the relationship between teachers and inheritors, and the protection of technology within and outside the industry follows a closed principle. The technical difficulties and key points of art proverbs and techniques rely on language and physical memory to achieve inheritance. Handmade products, as a circulating commodity, have gained greater development in industry organizations. Nevertheless, the workshop style production in the industry is bound to shrink under the influence of modern markets and sales models.

The inheritance and protection of handicrafts is to introduce traditional handicrafts into contemporary social life and industrial systems, while striving to not violate the laws of handicraft production and its own operating methods, and not distort its natural evolution trend, so as to actively protect them in the production activities of creating social wealth. Ceramics are a type of utensil. Only by making timely adjustments and responses to changes in production and life, integrating products into people's food, clothing, housing, and transportation, rather than displaying them as artworks, can we gain greater development space and fit the contemporary proposition of creative transformation and innovative development. The production protection of Yaozhou kiln ceramics is also the same, and correct judgments and choices must be made based on their own attributes. Stubbornness or eagerness for quick success and instant benefits can lead to irreparable damage to their skills. Protecting traditional handicrafts is not only about preserving the objects themselves and related skills, but more importantly, it is about continuing the diversity of cultural traditions created by humans. Michael Owen Jones believed that "things like physical objects, artifacts, and other important things should not be elevated to the highest level beyond the people who make and use them.". If tangible products generated by human imagination become the focus of attention, while the thoughts, emotions, needs, and desires expressed by them are ignored, ironically, the appreciation and understanding of these artificial products themselves disappear. Therefore, the study of material culture and folk art can only be maximized when producers, users, and their processes of conception, completion, and use - rather than the product itself - become the objects of study That is to say, humans are the creators and subjects of things, and we should have a correct understanding of the "artificial" power hidden in handicrafts. Meanwhile, different types of handicrafts also need to be protected and inherited separately, and cannot be generalized.

4. Handicraft knowledge and cultural attribute protection

The function of handicrafts in modern society is undergoing changes. Ceramic products are increasingly detached from their practical functions and have become folk art pieces showcasing traditional handicrafts. Indeed, with the continuous development of new technologies and materials, most traditional ceramic utensils have emerged with replaceable new material utensils, which can better meet the needs of modern people. Most ceramic products inevitably lose their practical attributes, and while their entertainment and aesthetic functions are enhanced, their artistic value is also magnified. So, ceramic craftsmanship entered the field of folk art research and is no longer an essential item in daily life or an important item in festival culture. In fact, discussions about material culture or folk art can be summarized as

an analysis of the essential attributes of traditional craftsmanship. From this dimension, the two are not contradictory. Craftsmen use a pair of "skillful hands" and folk wisdom to create various handmade products full of folk aesthetic taste with different aesthetic tastes and simple and sincere emotions. This is a completely different expression from factory products, and it is also the charm of handicrafts. Therefore, the study of handicrafts from the dual perspectives of material culture and folk art has the characteristic of both observing society through "things" and seeing people's hearts through "art".

In recent years, globalization has advocated high technology and industrial speed, putting handicrafts and artisan groups at a disadvantage. This phenomenon overlooks the enormous creative passion and infinite artistic charm brought by personalized and non commodity industry technology pursuits, as well as the reflection left by handicraft production that balances ecological resources, production speed, and employment population.

Among the wealthy handicraft technicians and industry social organizations in China, their technological inheritance is completed through cultural inheritance. The outstanding points that the handicraft industry has maintained so far, including the education of apprenticeship and apprenticeship, the ideological realm of loyalty to technical ethics, the promotion of historical rules of industry cooperation, the pursuit of a balance between environmental raw materials, production rhythm and employment population, and the emphasis on maintaining a harmonious oral tradition of aesthetic appreciation and historical values in the natural environment, are all cultural aspects. Studying this culture requires combining cultural spaces with specific locations and the inheritance of technical knowledge for specific products.

The Yaozhou Kiln Museum houses classic ceramic artifacts from different historical periods, such as the early Tang Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty. These artifacts showcase the exquisite craftsmanship of celadon carving, showcasing the magnificent scale of China's famous historical kilns, which used to be "ten mile kilns with endless fires". However, the ceramic products sold in the product sales stores within the museum are mainly replicas of the classic cultural relics of Yaozhou Kiln, and no related cultural and creative products have been seen. Among the small workshops visited by the author, the traditional craftsmen can be said to be skilled craftsmen, but they lack some reasonable changes in product innovation to adapt to today's society. Some small workshops have also tried the sales model of the Internet platform, but because the craftsmen have worked in the shops for a long time, they have little contact with this marketing model and lack experience, and often after trying for a period of time, I chose to give up because I couldn't achieve good product benefits and spent a lot of time and energy. If university teachers and students can provide more innovative products and new media for Qi.

epilogue

In many European countries, folklore studies focus more on spiritual customs and less on material customs. Countries such as France, Germany, and Finland pay more attention to material customs, but mainly focus on architecture and utensils. China has been a major agricultural country since ancient times, with a large number of handicrafts and exquisite products. The scope of handicrafts covers various fields of daily life such as construction, utensils, agricultural production, urban aesthetic decoration, clothing, food and transportation, and is mainly passed down through oral customs, which cannot be compared to other countries in the world. The particularity of these technologies has also received significant attention over time. At the same time, the study of modern handicrafts and folk customs has positive significance for understanding the employment force, ecological environment protection, and diverse development forms of local society under the conditions of resource scarcity and large population in China.

Against the backdrop of global cultural environment changes and China's implementation of the strategy of building a strong cultural nation, we need to strengthen cultural construction at

all levels of grassroots society, encourage regional cultural development, consolidate multi-ethnic unity, improve the comprehensive level of national quality, optimize the folk cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation's cultural subjectivity, adjust China's foreign cultural exchange strategies, and establish a civilized style of China's multicultural integration in front of the world, It demonstrates China's strong construction ability to combine excellent historical and cultural traditions with modern social values.

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