

Contemporary Ceramic Art Creation: Pathways for Revitalizing Traditional Crafts

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Abstract: *Traditional crafts are now being employed in the creation of ceramic art to express language. In line with the idea of "revitalisation", this paper examines how the components of traditional crafts are being re-identified, deconstructed and recombined in contemporary society. The three stages of the study are: revaluation of the ontology of craft (covering the temporal dimension of material language, structures of tacit knowledge and semantic voiding of symbols); analysis of transformation mechanisms (such as parameter deviation, process interruption and defamiliarisation of tool tactility); and aesthetic reconstruction (focusing on the temporal landscaping of firing traces, the loosening of integrity boundaries and the isomorphism of craft rhythm and viewing time). Based on the above research, the way to revive traditional crafts is not to reproduce the whole style but to extract and rearrange the internal logic of these crafts to create an operable variable system and move away from manufacturing norms.*

Keywords: *Traditional crafts, Ceramic art, Revitalization paths, Material language, Tacit knowledge, Transformation mechanisms*

Introduction

The application of traditional crafts in ceramic art is no longer limited to the imitation of style or nostalgia now. Creative practice has shown that artists' use of crafts is not for function or story; therefore, we need to reconsider what crafts can be for people now. The reason for the inheritance of traditional crafts is not their rich history or symbols, but that they have material and operational logics that can be applied to other areas. Most of the previous research has focused on standardised records of the historical lineage or technical parameters of crafts, and little attention has been paid to the visual coding mechanisms of craft elements after they have been separated from their original functions. The goal of this paper is to present a way of inquiry that does not depend on external story systems, but rather starts directly from the material attributes, operating modes and perception methods of crafts to explore structural changes in contemporary creation. Based on the ideas of temporalisation of material language, algorithmisation of tacit knowledge, parameterisation of craft variables and explication of procedural rhythm, this paper aims to provide some practical analytical tools for studying the operation of traditional crafts in contemporary ceramic art and thus bridge the theoretical gap between technical research and aesthetic research.

1. Revaluation of Traditional Crafts in the Contemporary Era

1.1 Material Language and Temporal Dimension of the Craft Ontology

The material language of traditional ceramic crafts is not a fixed set of material attributes. The parameters of clay plasticity, the range of light transmission and melting temperature for glazes, and the shrinkage ratio of the body at different firing atmospheres are all codes that can be read repeatedly but not fully reproduced. At present, the appeal of such material language does not need to carry forward its original purpose; rather, it is used to express the remnants of time. Differences in the mining layer of clay, length of aging time, slight variations in the glaze formula during transmission, and so on, all cause each work of traditional craft to have irreversible temporal information. This is not a new story; rather, it is the result of the natural accumulation of materials during the production and alteration process.

In terms of the development of material properties, the firing stage of traditional crafts has been

going on for a long time. A change in the heating curve and holding time will result in different shapes of glaze crystals or body density. At present, many ceramic artists have begun to explore how to show changes in materials over time through firing. Phenomena such as the layered colouration of the same clay after different firing cycles or changes in the colour gamut of the same glaze under reducing and oxidizing atmospheres are no longer considered deviations that need to be corrected, but rather temporal expressions of material language. Therefore, the ontology of craft is no longer merely a tool but has become a continuous source of new applications and technological inheritance^[1].

1.2 Analysis of the Structure of Tacit Knowledge in Forming Techniques

Techniques have a large amount of tacit knowledge and cannot be fully expressed in writing or diagrams. There are many fine emotions in hand-throwing, such as how hard to press the clay with both hands, how to keep the seams of layered coils moist, and when to release pressure when a tool touches the clay in a paddle stroke; all of these require long-term training of bodily memory and touch. The two main characteristics of the structure of tacit knowledge are that it is highly contextualised; that is, the same technique may yield different results in different clay conditions; and that it is difficult to divide into independent sequential steps because the whole operation is not merely the sum of its parts. Tacit knowledge no longer needs to be acquired in the traditional manner at present; instead, it can be employed as the basis for creating new, non-prescriptive forms.

Many studies have found that the tacit knowledge in the traditional craft system is often passed down orally and through practical demonstration by masters and apprentices, and the effectiveness of this inheritance depends on the learner's ability to learn by doing. At present, in the creation of ceramic art, artists are consciously drawing out this tacit knowledge from skilled operations and building a formal system that can be expressed in code. For example, by separating the relationship between the rotational motion of hand-throwing and centrifugal force, one can combine it with the application of an off-centre force to create distorted contours that are not possible to achieve with the traditional shapes of vessels. The Goal of the tacit knowledge structure is no longer to unify; instead, it serves as a way to study the boundaries of material behaviour. The new type is no longer to be about memory; instead, we are free to modify it and create new works inspired by the body.

1.3 Symbolic Retention and Semantic Voiding in Decorative Crafts

Over the course of history, many stable systems of symbols have been established in decorative arts and crafts. Lotus patterns, Ruyi patterns and other intertwined branch patterns originally had specific symbols or ritual purposes, but as they have been used in many places and by various groups of people, their original meanings have gradually faded away or been forgotten. In recent years, many traditional decorative crafts have been combined with modern ceramic creation, but they often lack original meaning or purpose. On the one hand, the visual features of the techniques such as engraving, polychrome painting and coloured glazes are still recognizable; on the other hand, their original social or religious connotations are no longer widely known. Symbolic retention is the inheritance of formal language, and semantic voiding is a lack of meaning that contemporary artists can then fill in^[2].

The State of Semantic Voiding is not a lack but rather a type of creation. Repetitive patterns, standard composition rules and stylistic associations of certain colour combinations in traditional decorative arts can function independently of their original symbolic systems. In the current works, the blurred boundaries of coloured glazes are no longer considered good luck; instead, they can be used to express the randomness of chemical reactions in glazes, and the arrangement of engraved lines no longer needs to tell a specific story but can be purely visual. Symbols are no longer discussed in terms of "what they mean"; now people are more interested in "how they work". Therefore, decorative crafts have moved away from semantic loading and are now based on formal grammar; their life comes from combinatory logic and continuous arrangement, not from accurately representing a fixed meaning.

2. Transformation Mechanisms and Intervention Strategies for Traditional Craft Elements

2.1 Deviation-based Processing Strategies for Craft Parameters

Most of the time, to obtain a high yield and a good aesthetic effect in traditional ceramic crafts, the parameters of firing temperature, glaze composition and body thickness should be within a certain range. Deviation-based processing is to intentionally change one or more parameters out of the usual

range and to believe that this parameter system is correct. For example, reduce the proportion of flux in the glaze to be lower than usual so that the surface of the glaze is semi-molten and granular; or increase the firing temperature to almost the critical tolerance limit of the body and cause local deformation or bubble bursting. It is not the result of random destruction; rather, it is a deliberate increase in some factors that had been reduced in the system earlier, based on close knowledge of the causal links among craft parameters. The basic idea of operation is to limit both the extent and direction of the deviation so that the result is within the acceptable range of deviation and does not go too far out of hand.

At the bottom of deviation-based processing is the idea of redefining "right" and "wrong" according to craft parameters. In the past, any change in the production environment would result in defects or waste of products, and these particular effects were known as accidental flaws. These deviations have been organised into the material for creation now. Modifying the speed at which one is heated to reproduce the original glaze formula will change the crystal structure; similarly, changes in the amount of water added to different batches of clay can also result in a series of gradual modifications. Artists are no longer searching for the best value of the parameters but are exploring all the changes that can occur in these parameters. Now the processing parameters are taken as variables instead of constraints, and some freedom has been added to the traditional craft process^[3].

2.2 Reverse or Interruptive Operations of Procedural Logic

The stages of the old method for making ceramics are fixed. Clay preparation, mould making, trimming, bisque firing, glazing and glaze firing are all the first stages before the next one. The reverse operation is to change the usual direction of this process; for instance, after glazing, engraving or polishing can be done to reverse the interface between the glaze layer and the body layer. Interruptive operation, on the other hand, means to stop in the middle of a certain process and leave it in an unfinished state; for example, after bisque firing, one may not apply glaze but directly polish the bisque body, or one could cut off during the glaze drying process to preserve the drip traces of the glaze layer. The types of intervention mentioned above break the causal links in the steps and can be regarded as independent ends rather than steps in a chain.

Another type of sense for interruptive operation is that we are re-evaluating the traditional norm of "completeness". Although the traditional crafts hope to achieve all the above goals, they will occasionally be carried out sporadically and stop at an intermediate stage, such as at 80% or 50%. For example, some tool marks on the trimmed surface are not smoothed out, or only the inside of a pot is glazed and the outside is left in its bisque state. Therefore, the final form of the work has several levels of completion; one part is in a high-finished state of traditional craftsmanship, and the other retains the texture of a rough blank or semi-processed material. Breakpoints in procedural logic are frequently the focus of visual attention because they indicate where a decision is made and why the processing of an object has stopped. This stop is also a kind of beauty, so the time for the process is short.

2.3 Defamiliarization Matching of Tools and Tactility

The form, size and rough surface of the old ceramic tools have all been modified to be more convenient for hand operation. Tactility is also desired for the rotational speed of a potter's wheel, the angle and elasticity of trimming knives, and the curvature of wooden paddles; that is to say, a mild sense of touch. Defamiliarisation matching is to make these tools unfamiliar by employing the familiar so that artists are led to discover new ways of perceiving the world through touch. Increase or decrease the weight of the tool, change the grip diameter of the handle, replace the original component with one of a different elastic modulus, or combine the functions of the two tools into an irregular shape. Altered Tactility is a change in the force exerted on a material, so mould marks that cannot be produced under normal conditions may occur.

Another way to defamiliarise is not to use any tools. A rubber block is used instead of a wooden paddle; thus, the rebound force and acoustic feedback at impact will be different, and there will be no sharp texture on the surface of the clay body, but rather a dense one. No tools are needed; instead, one can use the fingers, palms, knuckles or even the whole arm to feel the clay. If the body is to take the place of a standard instrument, then the operation accuracy and reproducibility of tools in traditional crafts will be lost; instead, there will be more direct, non-reproducible bodily traces. The purpose of defamiliarisation matching is not to overlook tools; rather, it is to break the automatic link between tools and touch so that artists can re-examine the material qualities of clay and discover new formal options in an unconventional way. Rematisation changes the link between the "extension of the hand"

in traditional crafts and that of "rediscovery of the hand"^[4].

3. Contemporary Aesthetic Reconstruction of Traditional Craft Logic

3.1 Retention of Firing Traces and Temporal Landscaping

Changes in the kiln, slag deposits, smoke stains and glaze bubble bursting in traditional ceramic crafts are generally considered to be firing defects and should be avoided by regulating the firing conditions properly. Recently, some artists have deliberately left these marks and regard them as a way to record the process of creation. Each slag deposit is the time a particle has been detached from the saggar; the gray-black bands of smoke staining show the deposition path of free carbon in a reducing atmosphere, and unmelted quartz particles indicate how long they have been in certain temperature zones of the heating curve. The above traces are an irregular record of the actual time when the firing took place, not the symbolic time shown by the shape or ornaments of the vessel. Changes in the density, distribution and shape of the traces show that fire, atmosphere, glaze and body have interacted differently at various times.

The firing trace can be regarded as a kind of temporal landscape, and changes in the kiln during firing are also reflected on the surface of the ceramic. Traces produced at different times generally have different shapes; water vapour expulsion marks are from the low-temperature stage, organic matter combustion residues are from the mid-temperature stage, and glaze flow traces are from the high-temperature stage. If all the above traces occur together in the same work, they will form a layered temporal structure. Without external information, the order of the firing event can be determined from the superposition relationship of the traces. This sense of time is not to show the passage of time; rather than being a metaphor, it directly presents the material changes that occur in the presence of heat. Keeping the firing traces of the ceramics, they are no longer merely objects for storing things but also have a history of stratigraphy^[5].

3.2 Loosening of the Boundaries of Object Integrity and Fragment Reassembly

The demand for object integrity in the traditional aesthetic system of ceramics can be seen in many places, such as the wholeness of the contour of a closed vessel, the continuity of glaze coverage, and the defect-free state of the body structure. Now and then, creators will deliberately break this rule to find unfinished works beautiful. The usual symptoms of boundary loosening are an open treatment of the rim, partial perforation of the vessel wall, intentionally peeled areas of glaze, and the appearance of shrinkage cracks on the body. Therefore, there is no longer a distinction between integrity and defect, and the item is in an uncertain state; it is neither whole nor seriously damaged. At this time, the goal is not to establish a new standard for integrity, but rather to have people judge their own integrity based on the observations of the authorities. The same object has a full outline in one view, and the holes from manual perforation are not shown in that view.

Fragment reassembly is another way of not referring to the original thing directly. Combine fragments from different bodies, or deliberately misalign and join fragments of the same object, to break the logical link between the shape of the original vessel and these pieces. The reconstruction process will reveal the defects of the original work, such as gaps, colour differences in the glaze, and unevenness of the body thickness. Therefore, it is assumed that the ceramics cannot be repaired; instead of rebuilding them, a new connection will be made. The fragments still have the marks of their original containers, and the spaces and gaps between them offer a rest for the eye; thus, it can be seen that ceramics are deconstructible and reconfigurable, and the traditional idea of "cherishing objects" has changed from valuing wholeness to appreciating the beauty of breakage.

3.3 The Isomorphic Relationship Between Craft Rhythm and Viewing Time

At all times, many waiting periods are necessary in the process of ceramic craftsmanship, such as the drying time after forming, a second drying after trimming, cooling after bisque firing, solidification of the glaze layer after glazing, and cooling after glaze firing. The periods of waiting are the times when the crafts are done, and they are irregular. Artists can keep some of the marks of their creation in modern works of art. For instance, one can intentionally leave tool marks after trimming and then cover them with a thin layer of slip to show the order of trimming and slip application; or, after glazing, scraping off part of the glaze layer to reveal the bisque body can show the time interval between the

actions of glazing and scraping. The above operations show that there is a time lag in the production process^[6].

Viewing time and the rhythm of craftsmanship are isomorphic; that is, there is a correspondence in the movement of the viewer's eyes and the order of craft creation in a work. When a work has both throwing and trimming marks, and is also moist after bisque firing and glossy after glazing, a person's eyes will naturally move across the surface in the order these crafts were created. Viewing is no longer a general awareness; rather, it is a particular sweep of the time cues in a work. Rough cross-sections left at the points of process interruption in some works are next to finely polished smooth areas, so the viewer's eye is forced to move back and forth across this boundary, and thus one can feel the very moment one has to decide whether to "stop" or "continue" during craft operations. Thus, the act of looking is also a reproduction of craft time, and the ceramic work is the trigger for this reproduction.

Conclusion

The revival of traditional crafts is not the revival of old techniques; rather, it is the reconstruction of their constitutive logic after structural deconstruction. The three stages of this argument are as follows: At the level of revaluation, the ontology of craft is taken to be a dynamic system that contains temporal information, tacit operational experience and detachable symbols; At the level of transformation mechanisms, parameter deviation, process interruption and defamiliarisation of tool tactility disturb the controllable boundaries of traditional crafts, and non-predetermined form-generating capacities are released; Finally, at the level of aesthetic reconstruction, firing traces, object boundaries and craft rhythm are reconstructed as viewable temporal structures, and ceramics are changed from modelling objects to material interfaces for time indexing. The three ways together show that the life of traditional crafts is not in fixed forms, but in the separation and recombination of their constituent parts and names. In the future, scholars will explore the intersection of materials science and the concept of craft, study controlled randomness models for trace generation under various firing conditions, and investigate cooperation between digital fabrication and traditional handicrafts; for example, tacit knowledge can be turned into parametric design rules via motion capture to achieve precise segmentation and control over the firing process. The above will help to turn the idea of "revitalisation" into an organised system for creating craft knowledge.

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