

On the Contemporary Value of Xuejia Kiln in Junan County

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Abstract

Carrying forward Chinese traditional culture and protecting the intangible cultural heritage is not to be conservative, but to hold a scientific attitude to the traditional culture, to retain the national heritage of unique value in this era of rapid development, and to adhere to the principle of making the past serve our present-day needs, inheriting the essence and discarding the dross. Therefore, in regard to the exploration of the culture of Xuejia kiln, we must attach importance to the maintenance of traditional culture, give equal attention to inheritance and innovation, and strive to achieve the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture. This paper analyzes the contemporary development and value of Xuejia kiln from multiple perspectives, identifies the role of culture in traditional handicrafts from the perspective of cultural history, and proposes that today ceramics has begun to integrate into people's lives and has become a household item integrating practicability and beauty.

Key words: Xuejia kiln; Cultural of Ju; Heritage and protection; Combination of aesthetics and practical uses

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INTRODUCTION

Xuejia kiln is a long-lasting folk kiln in the southeast of Shandong Province which is characterized by strong

local folk art style. The potters' rich experience and high-level skill has played an important role in promoting the development of the pottery industry in Shandong Province. Xuejia kiln has enjoyed a long-term reputation of "Pottery Town" under the nourishment of Ju culture, whose ancestors have produced black pottery from age to age.

1. THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AND VALUE OF XUEJIA KILN

In recent years, due to the decreasing use of pottery in rural areas, the production of pottery in Huxiya Village has reduced a lot compared to before. The potters are faced with the plight of unemployment. The worst is in the fall of 2005 when the government introduced the relevant policy of pollution control, most of the pottery kilns were shut down within only two months. Until the end of 2006, when the author took the investigation, there were only two families Xie Jingling and Bao Xuejun who still followed the traditional pottery manufacture technique. However, how long will the kiln fire which has been brilliant for thousands of years maintain, no one can tell.



Figure 1
Location of Xuejia Kiln

Xuejia kiln, which is located in the remote rural area, is in a better situation, but is also faced with a variety of actual problems such as the lack of reserve personnel, lack of investment and weak capacity of R&D in core technology. The specific reason lies in the complex clay production process, which usually takes 5 to 8 years for a talented young people to complete apprenticeship, so few people are willing to work on it. In addition, ceramic products have thin profit margins with disproportional input and output, not all people would like to take to pottery production. Now there are only more than 20 families of over 100 people who are engaged in this industry, and the number is in a downward trend. In the village, there are only 4 to 5 people over 60 years old who are able to master the casting technology, in particular the technique of making fast boiling pot. Most of them are not educated, who can only take oral teaching and demonstration for spread of pottery technology. There are little writing materials in this field, not to mention professional teaching institutions. Therefore, although modern production technologies continue to innovate nowadays, the technology has been far behind in R&D and is facing the situation that there will be no followers. Moreover, this technology lacks literature for reference but the core value deserves not to lose, which needs us to protect and carry forward immediately.

This kind of decline of kiln fire is quite common in China in recent decades. Today, when people strive to pursue a modern way of well-off life, many excellent traditional cultures, craft technologies and arts are slowly abandoned as being backward and outdated. Open commercial thinking, intense market competition as well as huge benefit are to encourage people to accept more high-tech and abandon tradition. Therefore, the soil for folk art is lost and it is hard for the market to rejuvenate. People will make a review on these excellent traditional cultures some day, but I'm afraid it will be too late to pay attention to and restore these cultures.

Xuejia kiln, the representative of the pottery industry of Southeast Shandong Province for example, is an outstanding traditional art originated from the civilians, which accumulates the wisdom of the working people throughout history and is a part of national science, technology and culture. We can not wait to recognize its value until it is complete disappeared, so how to protect and develop this disappearing folk pottery of rich cultural deposits is a matter of great urgency.

The pottery products of Xuejia kiln were famous, which participated in the Canton Fair exhibition in the 1980's and were exported to 7 to 8 countries and regions in Southeast Asia. In 1984, Yu Tuo, a journalist from Shandong TV International Department produced the 13-part documentary "Beauty in the Folk" to feature the black pottery of Xuejia kiln. In 1986, the famous physicist Ding Zhaozhong made a special visit to Junan county to collect

the pottery products of Xuejia kiln. On August 20th 1996, The Chinese Arts and Crafts Society Folk Art Professional Committee held the 13th annual meeting in Junan County, where some products exhibited caused a discussion by many experts on Xuejia kiln pottery. In October the same year, Xuejia kiln exhibited the mud pottery in the "China's Folk Art Show" held by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and received a certificate of award. In 2004, Linyi TV station came to Xuejia kiln to make a documentary of the clay pottery production process which was later broadcast in CCTV. The substantial publicity is conducive to the protection and heritage of Xuejia kiln black pottery. The pottery technology of Xuejia Kiln was included in the 4th batch of the provincial non-material cultural heritage expanded project list by the Shandong Provincial People's Government on June 22nd 2016.

The pottery culture of Xuejia kiln is a representative of Ju Culture and a part of Shandong culture, as well as a symbol of the oriental marine civilization. Xuejia kiln pottery has an honest, full, delicate, interesting and quiet artistic style as a whole, reflecting the geographical style of Xuejia kiln—depth and black as the main tone and vividness, mystery and endless temptation of the ocean civilization as the embellishment. The pottery products not only bring us a visual impact, more importantly, they bring a kind of free, bold and fresh oriental ocean atmosphere, a new oriental civilization compared to the outdated, feudal and conservative tradition.



Figure 2
Dawenkou Unearthed Zun

2. CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION IN TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFTS

From the perspective of cultural history, any form of culture in any region can not be totally enclosed to

develop but exchange with other cultures. The culture of Xuejia Kiln is not an exception. In the long history of Ju Culture, Xue Jia kiln is not independent but deeply influenced by the Ju Culture to form its rich culture today. Its ancestors have accumulated a wealth of production experience in pottery. They have explored the production technology by virtue of the geographical elements, and allow for other social and humanistic elements to establish a cultural model of their own in the historical progress.

Ceramic culture is an important part of humanistic culture, which is characterized by both material culture and non-material cultural elements, and non-material cultural elements present through the carrier of material cultural elements. Therefore, the unique culture of Xuejia kiln is presented by the black pottery in unity of the natural environment and humanistic environment. Black pottery is the irreplaceable material basis for Xuejia kiln people who also meets their needs of intangible cultural life. In the long process of historical development, the local craftsmen are more aware of the importance of the unity of natural development and humanistic development, so they have created a suitable broad environment while continuing to nourish the humanistic environment, and as a result, they have established a hard-working and continuously progressive cultural environment of Xuejia kiln.

From the perspective of historical and cultural development and its results, the black pottery culture of Xuejia kiln is the embodiment of the spirit “harmony of man and nature”. The ancestors have created the humanistic environment for the ceramic culture of “harmony between man and nature”, and made use of local natural resources, such as yellow clay and water, to restore the natural resources and return to the nature. They have made great efforts to establish a beautiful and comfortable humanistic environment. Apart from the adherence to black pottery production, Xuejia kiln people also enrich the production process and shape of black pottery with a variety of techniques. In respect for the natural properties of the materials, they constantly strive for perfection in technology, and aim to display the themes and contents in accordance with the needs of the time. They keep innovating on the basis of inheritance in order to win the market and vitality for the products.



Figure 3
Modern Black Pottery Tea Products

The art of black pottery brings people spiritual enjoyment in addition to traditionally practical function. It contains not only practicability, aesthetics, but also the cultural connotation possessed by the technology itself. The technology is a specialized and professional skill, which is a means of livelihood for the craftsmen in the beginning, but then sublimates the artistic value by integrating the craftsmen’s creative will, life experience and artistic aesthetics. When step into the modern society, the craftsmen not only stay in the level of making a living, but further improve the production process and pass on the spirit and cultural connotation to the future generations.

In the history of human creation, the production of pottery is a major breakthrough in the manufacturing technology. Pottery is also a symbol of ancient Chinese civilization and condensation of art. It began as a daily necessity and has gradually played an important role in the national economy. Today, pottery has come out from the ancient art palace. Whether it is from an official kiln or a folk kiln, it has entered into the lives of people and become works of art of ornamental value and practicability. Xuejia Kiln, as a unique representative of Ju culture, embodies many elements of the culture.

CONCLUSION

Xue Jia kiln is not only a representative of Ju culture but also a symbol of the times. It contains the custom, thinking way and cultural trend of the nation in the specific region, and conveys people’s material need and folk taste at the time. Our protection of the heritage is also to protect a great, precious and irreplaceable wealth for the mankind. Respecting, protecting and carrying forward the tradition is the foundation to create future and share resources. In the highly prosperous society today, we can only win the respect of the world by the pursuit and maintenance of our tradition. Therefore, the study on the contemporary value of Xuejia kiln in Junan county is well worth the effort.

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