

# The Changing Characteristics of Intangible Cultural Heritage from Ceramic Production Techniques of Zibo (Shandong, China)

Ly Huina<sup>1,a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Humanities, Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Xi'an, China

<sup>a</sup>1697951747@qq.com

**Abstract:** Intangible cultural heritage refers to the specific expressions of traditional culture that are closely related to the daily life of the general public, such as folklore activities, performing arts, knowledge and skills, ceramics, objects, as well as handicrafts and cultural spaces. Zibo City is known as the "City of Porcelain", rich in diversified types of intangible cultural heritage. Among these, some are indigenous invention by local people during the long-term production activities, while some are imported from other places. However, whether it is native or foreign, it reflects the ingenuity, broad-mindedness, kindness and hard work of Zibo people. Moreover, the unique creativity, imagination and productivity of Zibo people is the basis and key component of Zibo culture, reflecting its splendid long history and culture.

**Keywords:** Zibo ceramic making; Evolutionary process; Intangible cultural heritage; Changes

## 1. Introduction

Changes are constantly happening. Everything in the world is in a non-stop process of movement and change, which is no exception for intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Changing is one of the characteristics of ICH, differentiating it from tangible cultural heritage. ICH is not easily replicated as its form, content and values are continuously changing over time. From a historical perspective, although ICH is one and the same, it is not immutable. From a spatial change perspective, ICH remains in the same style from its birthplace to the place where it is circulated.

## 2. Characteristics and Evolution of Zibo's Ceramic Making Techniques

### 2.1 Characteristics of Zibo Ceramic Making Techniques

Zibo ceramics are known for their unrestrained, interesting and distinctive style that are close to people's everyday life. Therefore, in summary, the changing characteristics of the ICH, Zibo ceramic making techniques, are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

#### 2.1.1 Innovativeness

Zibo ceramic making techniques have evolved along with the economic and social development, with innovation in inheritance and changes in perseverance. Zibo ceramic production techniques, condensed the wisdom of ceramic craftsmen from different historical periods, is a perfect set of technical system that is suitable for the local conditions of Zibo city. It has been also tested and preserved over a long-term practice, but it is not enduring. In the process of historical evolution with the change of materials and objective conditions, Zibo ceramics making techniques have been modified accordingly, characterized by continuous improvement and refinement throughout the process of inheritance.

#### 2.1.2 Flexibility

The preferences of the general public and the needs of the civilian population are flexible to a certain extent. Zibo ceramic making techniques are more closely related to the actual needs of the general population's lifestyle, compared to the official kilns of the royal aristocracy. Since Zibo ceramic ware are catering to the aesthetics of the common people, the high demand from the people has been a

source of motivation for the development of ceramic making techniques, which is another aspect for the contemporary ceramic craftsmen to learn and carry forward. As shown in Pic.1, the ceramic “Po Po”, a local featured ceramic work, is a perfect example. Ceramic “Po Po” is a folk baby seat in Zibo, which was quite popular in the 1960s. The ceramic craftsman invented “Po Po” by turning the preform ceramic urn ware upside down as the bottom and hand-mold the upper part as safety loops. The edge parts was rounded and comfortable, with two openings for the baby to stretch legs, and a hole on each side for easy moving. At the same time, the ceramic “Po Po” is decorated with delicate hollow patterns, which can not only reduce the weight but also be breathable, combining beauty with practicality. The introduction of this work shows that the craftsman follows the people-oriented philosophy in the design. “Po Po” means granny in local dialect. The ceramic “Po Po” is a ceramic-made granny that can help to support and keep babies safe when the parents are busy with work. It is a simple and handmade work with strong humanistic atmosphere, which is definitely worth of learning for the contemporary ceramic craftsmen.



Figure 1: Ceramic “Po Po”

### **2.1.3 Regional Cultural Characteristics**

Zibo ceramic production techniques are deeply based on the fertile grounds of local folk culture and have unique characteristics of Qi-Lu [1] regional culture, witnessing the different aesthetic standards, technological requirements and technical standards in different historical periods. Besides the technical skills, it is notable that the inspiration for ceramic creation is also derived from the fertile environment of the local regional culture of Zibo, which not only contains the designer's meticulous observation and understanding of everyday life, but also involves the refinement of local art. Zibo is located in the central part of Shandong Province, and has been profoundly influenced by the culture of Qi-Lu, especially Confucianism, for thousands of years, which has given Zibo ceramics production techniques a distinctive regional cultural identity.

## **2.2 The Evolution Process of Zibo Ceramic Production Techniques**

In the long history, Zibo ceramic production techniques have gradually formed their own unique and distinctive artistic style, and become the leading ceramic production base in the Northern China. Its evolution process can be divided into the following periods.

### **2.2.1 Neolithic Age**

It is found that the Yiyuan Paleolithic, which is synchronized with Zhoukoudian, appeared in Zibo City as early as 400,000 to 500,000 years ago, according to the research of archaeologists. In the Neolithic period, Zibo has gone through different stages of Houli culture, Beixin culture, Dawenkou

culture and Longshan culture, forming a sound and complete prehistoric cultural system. The history of ceramics making in Zibo can be traced back to the earliest Neolithic period of the Houli culture. In the site of ancient Houli culture, a lot of kiln sites were found, indicating that the ancients of Zibo had started making pottery at that time. At the same time, it can be judged from the stratigraphic surface that the ceramic culture of the Houli era was significantly earlier than that of Beixin culture [2]. This remarkable discovery has made the stoneware culture of Zibo advance by at least a thousand years.

At that time, the earliest Zibo ceramics mainly relied on hand-made, simple shaped. The firing temperature was not high, and the raw materials of ceramics were mostly red pottery. In the second phase, the ceramic forming method was dominated by the coil method, and the slow-wheel method gradually came into view. The number of gray and brown pottery increased significantly, and the variety of ceramics was much richer than before. Moreover, the firing temperature of ceramics also increased significantly. In the late period, the fast-wheel method dominated in turn. Ceramic wares were mostly gray and brown pottery, in more complex shapes. The techniques were enhanced to a greater extent than ever before, and the firing techniques became quite mature.

### ***2.2.2 North and South Dynasties***

In the North and South Dynasties, Zibo ceramics firing has achieved a technical leap from pottery to porcelain, which signified that Zibo ceramics has become the earliest ceramic production base in the North of China. For example, the “lotus petals-piled celadon-glazed porcelain vessel with an open mouth” unearthed in Longquan Village, Zichuan County, Zibo City, is the only celadon work among all green porcelains of which the firing kiln can be identified. This celadon piece has distinctive regional characteristics, both in color and in body shape, which reflects the progress of economic and social development and the liberation of human mind at that time.

### ***2.2.3 The Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties***

During the Tang and Song dynasties, Zibo ceramics firing skills were divided into official kilns and folk kilns under the influence of local government departments. At that time, Zibo ceramics entered a time of development hardships due to the shortage of local raw materials. During the reign of Song Xining(1068-1077), coal mines and new raw materials for making ceramics were discovered in Zibo, so Zibo ceramics industry started to move gradually from Zichuan to Boshan. Although the production was mostly coarse porcelain, but still favored and enjoyed by the local people. In this context, although Zibo ceramics was listed as the official kilns, it has served as folk kilns for more than a thousand years since then. At that time, the artistic style of Zibo ceramics are not subject to the restrictions imposed by government departments, with more of free romance. The creative style has changed from complex and flashy decoration to the unruly and energized folk style. In the middle of the Song Dynasty, the release of Tea Dust Glaze porcelain and Rain Drop Glaze Porcelain has put Zibo ceramics on the map [3].

### ***2.2.4 During Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republic of China***

After the war at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, there was a new development in Zibo ceramic firing techniques. Since the number of ceramic practitioners grew in Boshan(Zibo, Shandong, China), the development of Zibo ceramics entered a boosting stage in the Golden Age of the Three Emperors in Qing Dynasty, during the reign of the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong. Not until the reign of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, Zibo has become an important production base for civil ceramic in North China, and won renown as a porcelain city. At the mean time, the development of the ceramic industry in Zibo has also brought great convenient conditions for the local people. During the reign of Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, to better serve the market, Zibo ceramics changed from making black porcelain to white porcelain with different colors painted. Zibo ceramics has become more popular among the people with its competitive price and bright colors design. Conversely, people also commissioned the craftsmen to express their creative ideas on the ceramics wares. It was a period with the most intense ceramic atmosphere in Zibo history. The objective copying of actual life of Zibo ceramics has become a great source of creation for its firing techniques. Although the firing technique was clumsy, it represented the atmosphere of real life. In 1905, the establishment of the "Boshan Craft Training Institute" imported the most advanced firing techniques around China upon the inheritance of Zibo ceramic firing techniques, which has brought great progress to Zibo ceramics industry by optimizing its raw material ratios and glaze color use.

### **3. Interpreting the Change of Techniques from A Longitudinal Perspective of Historical Development**

From a longitudinal perspective of historical development, whether the ICH is imported from other provinces, spread within or return to Zibo, due to changes in the natural and cultural environment, ceramic production techniques often integrated with the local history and culture, humanistic style for the better survival and inheritance, which in turn shows the characteristics of coexistence and change. It is this changing characteristic that makes ceramic crafting of great value as an ICH. In other words, the changing characteristic of the ceramic making facilitates the expanding of both scale and quantity of ICH in China, highlighting the connotation of the origin place of ICH, as well as ensuring the appreciation of culture and the diversification of worldwide culture. The development and evolution of history has brought about changes in the natural and cultural environment of ICH. For better development and inheritance, it is necessary for Zibo ceramic making skills to overcome the difficulties and incorporate them into the local cultural characteristics. In order to adapt to the new environment, ICH needs to be favored and loved by the local people of the place of dissemination. It is also necessary to decompose the characteristics of the holistic culture of ICH, taking the culture of the place of dissemination as the basis and combining the decomposed cultural elements with the natural and cultural characteristics of the place of dissemination to manifest the core features of ICH. The culture of the place of dissemination includes tangible culture, intangible culture, and spiritual culture. Only when the ICH adapts to the environment of the place of dissemination and actively integrates the new cultural concept can it be developed in a healthy and sustainable way.

The changing characteristics of ICH also have the feature of keeping up with the times. Historical changes and the development of the times have changed the development context of Zibo ceramic crafts, which has caused fundamental changes in its function, role and content. However, no matter what changes have occurred, Zibo ceramic crafts have been able to keep up with the times, with its diversified techniques of expression being liked by collectors around the world.

### **4. Interpreting the Change of Techniques from A Transversal Perspective of Synchronicity**

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, ICH can only be preserved through continuous dissemination. It is all the changes that occur in the process of dissemination that contribute to the development of culture in China and even throughout the world. Therefore, it is important to examine and analyze the changing of ICH from the perspective of Zibo ceramics making techniques, so as to further explore its connotation and value as well as to promote the diversity of culture. Another changing characteristic of ICH is dissemination, which is a fundamental feature of the evolution of ICH and an important means of preserving it. ICH is created and disseminated by human beings, and it has been inherited from generation to generation by people all over the world. It is the changes in thinking and behavior brought by human initiative that have led to diversified and distinctive forms of ceramic production techniques. Thus, it is of great practical importance to analyze and study ICH in terms of its changing characteristics.

Referring to the current regional scope of China's provinces and cities and historical records, the author has concluded vaguely three types of changes that happened to the ICH in Zibo from a transversal perspective of synchronicity, namely, ICH imported from other provinces, ICH circulated within Zibo, and ICH returned to Zibo. According to the author's research, the ICH imported into Zibo from other provinces is either from very far away places, such as the central plains, or from nearby provinces, such as Hebei, Jiangxi, Anhui and etc.. The basis for the development of ICH is the population and the environment in which it lives. From feudal society to the early founding of P.R.China, the main changes of Zibo ICH is mostly upon the migration of people, which can not only cause the transfer of different elements of ICH, but also lead to the intermingling and collision of different cultures, and the creation of ICH connotations. The development of Zibo ceramic making techniques is also the reflect of the changing characteristic of ICH, accompanied with the movement of population, including officials, artists, soldiers, wounded people, etc. These techniques were gradually brought into the place of dissemination. The most common ways of dissemination for Zibo ceramic making techniques include the teaching by non-local people and different forms of migration, include job transfer, relatives visiting, returning to hometowns, passive migration and etc..

The changes and development of Zibo ceramic making as an ICH are partly brought in by people's initiative and purposeful learning, and partly by the objective movement of population. In the specific process, Zibo ceramic making manifests its own ecology and uniqueness as ICH. Ecology and

uniqueness are the main characteristics of ICH. Based on these two characteristics, when ICH is transmitted to other places, the cultural characteristics of ICH will be decomposed. Some of its cultural elements will be integrated into the local popular culture, which can enhance the changes of ICH in the place of its origin.

### **5. The Influence of the Changes in Zibo Ceramics Production Techniques on the Field of Ceramics in China**

In recent years, with the guidance of local government, associations and alliances, the brand awareness of Zibo ceramics is becoming strong, breaking the traditional inertia of thinking on development, and actively building Zibo ceramic as a regional brand. Insisting on sustainable, low energy consumption and high value-added development has become the consensus of Zibo ceramic industry. Today's Zibo ceramic firing techniques is better engaged and internationalized in diversified fairs, paying more attention to cultural heritage, interaction and exchange. The fascinating ceramic firing techniques of Zibo is showing its vigorous vitality and broad development prospects of the industry, interpreting the city's historical ceramic culture, excellent business environment and uniqueness of charm.

### **6. Summary**

The article has studied and analyzed the historical development of Zibo ceramic making techniques by looking at the changing characteristics of ICH, from which the development of Zibo ceramic techniques has been analyzed and its characteristics and extraordinary artistic achievements have been explored. Among them, practicality and decoration are the basic principles of Zibo ceramic making techniques. In the historical process, Zibo ceramics have combined these two naturally. The artistic achievements of Zibo ceramics are mainly manifested in the following aspects. First, Zibo ceramic techniques, with the continuous development of economy and society, are innovative in inheritance and varied in perseverance. Second, it does not only cater to the actual needs of the people, but also possess the characteristic of innovativeness and flexibility. Third, Zibo ceramic techniques is based deeply on the fertile grounds of local folk culture and have unique characteristics of Qi-Lu regional culture. Fourth, Zibo ceramic firing techniques exude a strong humane compassion and affinity and have a profound influence on the field of ceramics in China.

### **References**

- [1] Yang Chao, Zhang Nana. *Research on Teaching Reform of the Course of "Ceramic Craft" for Art Majors [J]. Literature and Education, 2009(14):14-16.*
- [2] Wang Yanxiang. *Discussion on the Construction of Key Courses in Ceramic Crafts [J]. China Light Industry Education, 2007(3):23-26.*
- [3] Gan Chunsong, Zou Shipeng, Hu Yiping, ed. *Cultural Heritage and the Future of China [M]. Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 2004.*