

Research Article

A Study of Dali-Sukhothai Cross-cultural Ceramic Art Creation

Li Liping *

College of Art, Dali University, Dali, Yunnan 671003, China

Abstract

This article is a part of the study entitled *The Dali-Sukhothai Cross-Cultural Art Creation of "Thai Dragon Pattern"*. In the Dali-Sukhothai cross-cultural art creation study, ceramics were involved in both architectural decorative art and ceramic art, which implied the importance of ceramic art in the cross-cultural relationship between Dali and Sukhothai. This study focused on the cross-cultural relationship between Dali and Sukhothai ceramics and conducted a field study of the ceramic art at Dali Fengyi Jingtian Village and Sukhothai Sri Satchannalai No. 61 kiln site. The study compared and analyzed the ceramics of both places at the perspective of: 1) firing technique, 2) production process and 3) decorative patterns, and extracted the artistic elements for art creation.

Keywords: Dali, Sukhothai, Cross-cultural, Ceramic art, Comparative study

* Corresponding author:

Li Liping E-mail: li.lp@foxmail.com

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Introduction

Dali is a frontier city in southwest China, and was historically the political and cultural center of Yunnan from the 7th to the 13th centuries. Sukhothai, a city in central Thailand, was historically the political and cultural center of the region from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The stability of political power brought cultural and artistic prosperity, allowing both Dali and Sukhothai to produce ceramics with excellent craftsmanship and their own representative works at a very early stage. Dali is represented by the use of green glaze, yellow glaze, and shadow green, while Sukhothai is represented by the use of black paint, green glaze, and white glaze.

The modern ceramic art heritage of Dali-Sukhothai is represented by the ceramic studio community gathered in the West Satchanalai area of Sukhothai and the ceramic art studio in Fengyi Jingtian village of Dali. The contemporary ceramic art of both places inherited their respective traditions and showed a strong stylistic identity. The cross-cultural ceramic art creation of Dali-Sukhothai is based on the study of the firing techniques, production processes, decorations and themes of Dali-Sukhothai ceramics in history to obtain the similar ceramic art elements of Dali and Sukhothai, and finally to create a cross-cultural art. The art creation shows the richness and inclusiveness of culture, and is a contemporary ceramic installation artwork created with the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

Objective

1. Comparative study of ceramic firing techniques, production processes, decoration skills and subject matter between Dali and Sukhothai.
2. To obtain art elements that can be used in Dali-Sukhothai cross-cultural art creation.
3. To create Dali-Sukhothai cross-cultural ceramic installations by means of deformation, deconstruction, reorganization and integration.

Method

1. Material collection

Visiting museums and exhibition halls in Dali and Sukhothai region, including the Langkham Heng Museum, the Sungaro Ceramic Museum, the Dali Prefecture Museum, and the Dali City Museum, to photograph for collecting materials of ceramic artworks from the history of Dali and Sukhothai.

2. Field research

Field research at ceramic art studios in Dali and Sukhothai, including the Dragon Kiln in Fengyi Jingtian Village, Dali, and Kiln No. 61 in Sri Satchanalai, Sukhothai, to study the firing methods and production techniques of ceramic art in Dali and Sukhothai region.

3. Comparative study

Statistical analysis and comparative study of data and information obtained from data collection and field research, from which elements useful for artistic creation can be obtained.

4. Creation of ceramic works

To create new ceramic artworks with contemporary visual language by deforming, deconstructing and reorganizing the artistic elements of the Dali and Sukhothai region obtained from the previous step of study.

Result/Finding

1. Ceramic art of Dali

Dali is a region where pottery art developed earlier in Yunnan. Among the pottery from the prehistoric period excavated in Dali, the main items are living and ritual objects. The pottery unearthed in the Neolithic period is mainly sand-laminated red pottery and gray and black pottery. Reaching the Qin and Han dynasties, the pottery art of Dali began to diversify and ceramic art began to appear. From the 7th to the 13th century, the development of ceramic art in Dali reached its peak. Its production techniques were further developed and a ceramic culture began to emerge. The pottery part inherited from the previous black pottery, while the

porcelain part was mainly Tang Sancai, green glaze and shadow blue. At present, the traditional pottery-making techniques are still preserved in Dali. The ancient kiln sites of considerable scale include the kiln of Dajinpan Village in the west of Dali city, which mainly fires black pottery, and the Dragon Kiln of Jingtian Village in Fengyi, Dali, which mainly fires the blue-and-white and blue glaze.

The Dragon Kiln of Jingtian Village

The Dragon Kiln in Jingtian Village, Fengyi, Dali, is currently the most concentrated ceramic art studio in the Dali region, and there are still six ancient kilns in the village that have survived from the Chinese Qing Dynasty, which are hundreds of years old. The ceramics made here have retained the tradition of pure handcrafting. The firing method and production process have been used since the Chinese Tang Dynasty (Lai, 2016). Today, it has a history of over 600 years. The Dragon Kiln is a long brick kiln built on the slope of a mountain, relying on the slope of the mountain to get wind power. Its firing temperature can reach 1200 °C, which makes fine ceramic products.

At present, the process of making pottery in Jingtian Village includes: 1) clay selection, 2) clay preparation, 3) molding, 4) shaping/decoration, 5) glazing, and 6) firing. Among them, the process of selecting and blending clay is very important. The potters first dug a hole from the hill behind the village called "Da Ching" to get the clay, where the clay colors are red and white, and the local potters usually use the white clay. The clay is then mixed with water and left in a pit for a few days to filter out the clean clay for use. The clay is drawn into shape using a potter's wheel and then decorated. Decoration methods include punching, embossing and drawing. After the decorated biscuits are air-dried, they are then glazed and fired in the kiln. The glaze is made by burning grass and wood into ashes and mixing a certain percentage of water. The finished glaze is a transparent green color, commonly known as qingyou (green glaze).

2. The Ceramic Art of Sukhothai

The earliest ceramic art in Sukhothai originated in the Neolithic period, and the pottery products of this period were mainly gray pottery, including some household and labor items. Later, in the pre-Sukhothai period, it was influenced by the ceramic art of the Khmer region. During the Sukhothai Dynasty, the world-famous Sangkhalok ceramics emerged. Sangkhalok ceramics is the general name for the Sukhothai and Sri Satchannalai kilns. The Sukhothai kiln mainly produces ceramics with black-painted designs on a white background, while the Sri Satchannalai kiln can produce high quality green-glazed ceramic ceramics.

Sri Satchannalai Kiln No. 61

Kiln No. 61 at Sri Satchannalai is a typical representative of the Sangkhalok kilns of the Sukhothai period. The Sangkhalok kiln is an oval-shaped kiln with name "Tao-pratoon" in Thai. The firing temperature can reach 1150-1280 . It can be used to produce high quality ceramics such as celadon and white porcelain. Soon after the discovery of Kiln No. 61, archaeologists discovered Kiln No. 41 nearby. During the excavation, it was discovered that the Kiln No. 41 complex was made up of nine layers of kilns stacked on top of each other and was 7 meters deep. Grey and unglazed pottery in the Khmer style was also found in the deepest cultural layer. Upward, celadon, white porcelain and other ceramic products were found in order.

The steps in the production of Sangkhalok pottery include: 1) clay selection, 2) clay preparation, 3) molding, 4) shaping/decoration, 5) firing/polishing, 6) painting, and 7) glazing/second firing. The clay used is from the nearby "Khao-Si-Lan" mountain. Usually, the potters take the clay directly from the mountain, clean and let it silt up in a mud pond before taking it out and drying it. The clay is then re-mixed with water and clinker and beaten until there is no air or air bubbles in the clay. Then, the clay is drawn and decorated. In this step, the main decoration skills are through-carving and embossing, followed by lower temperature firing. After the firing is completed, they are polished, painted and decorated, then glazed and fired in the kiln for a second time. This method of production ensures a high yield rate (Nirat, 2017).

3. Comparative study of Dali and Sukhothai ceramics

The photographic data collected in this study and the data from fieldwork were compiled and analyzed for categorization. Each basic element of ceramics in the history of Dali and Sukhothai regions was analyzed and compared in terms of 1) firing technique, 2) production process, 3) decoration skills, and 4) subject matter.

Table 1 Comparison of Dali and Sukhothai Ceramic Firing Techniques

Region	Kiln	Temperature	Fanning	Kiln chamber	Number of firings
Dali	dragon kiln	1200	slope fanning	5-7/one layer	once
Sukhothai	cross-fan kiln/ top-drawing kiln	900-1200	cross fanning	1/two layers	twice

Table 2 Comparison of Dali and Sukhothai Ceramic Production Process

Region	Raw material	Ingredients	Forming	Glazing	Drying
Dali	clay/ grass ash	clear water, filtering, aging/claying	shaping/rolling/molding	wheel glazing/ dipping glazing	natural air-drying
Sukhothai	aged clay/ quartz	clear water/ clinker, filtering, aging/claying	shaping/grouting/ kneading	rotational glazing/dipping glazing	natural air-drying

Table 3 Comparison of Dali and Sukhothai Ceramic Decoration Skills

Region	Engraving	Printing	Carving	Painting	Glazing
Dali	negative engraving	embossing/ dot printing	Relief	underglaze painting	green glaze
Sukhothai	positive and negative engraving	embossing	through-carving/ pinch-carving	underglaze painting	green glaze/ transparent glaze

Table 4 Comparison of Dali and Sukhothai Ceramic Subject Matter

Region	Figure	Religion	Animal	Plant	Other pattern
Dali	servants/ historical figures	lotus flowers/ dharma vessels	fish pattern/ mythical beast	flowers/trees/ plantain leaves	geometry/lines
Sukhothai	mother-and-son/ father-and-son	lotus flowers/ Buddha figures	pattern/mythical beast/elephant	chrysanthemum/ tree/grass	geometry/lines

The comparative study revealed that the commonalities between the ceramic arts of the Dali and Sukhothai regions include:

1. Firing techniques - firing temperatures are the same, and the use of support plates is common in firing. (Ma, 2001).
2. Production techniques - the clay is locally sourced and handmade, and both have a process of filtering and aging the clay. And both use the potter's wheel to make the vessel shape.
3. Decoration - Both places use negative engraving, and use embossing, underglaze painting, and specialize in using green glaze.
4. Subject matter - The frequently used types of subject matter are similar, but the patterns vary widely. The shape of the mythical beasts appears in both places.

Creation Process

The historical architectural decorations of the both Dali and Sukhothai regions have included images of mythical beasts. Usually the mythical beasts are presented as positive images - protectors - and are used in temple entrance ways or on roof beams, and are usually the first images encountered when people and gods communicate. The mythical beasts are culturally similar between Dali and Sukhotha region, so are their figures. The final cross-cultural artwork combines the similarities between Dali and Sukhothai ceramic cultures. The images of the animals and patterns are deformed, deconstructed, reorganized and integrated to create an artwork.



Figure 1 Deforming
source: Li Liping, 2020



Figure 2 Deconstructing
source: Li Liping, 2020

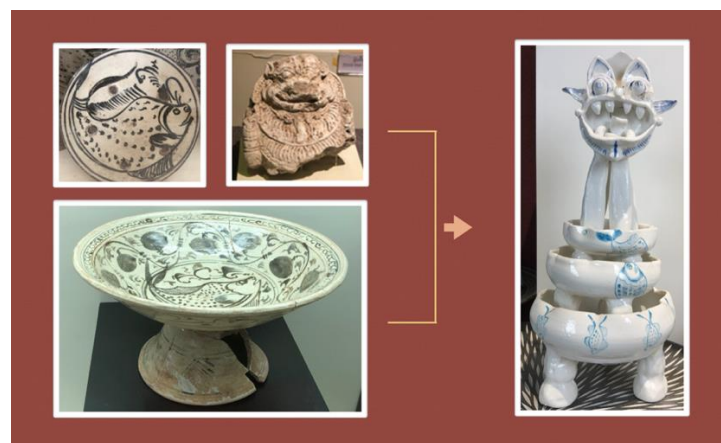


Figure 3 Reorganizing and integrating
source: Li Liping, 2020

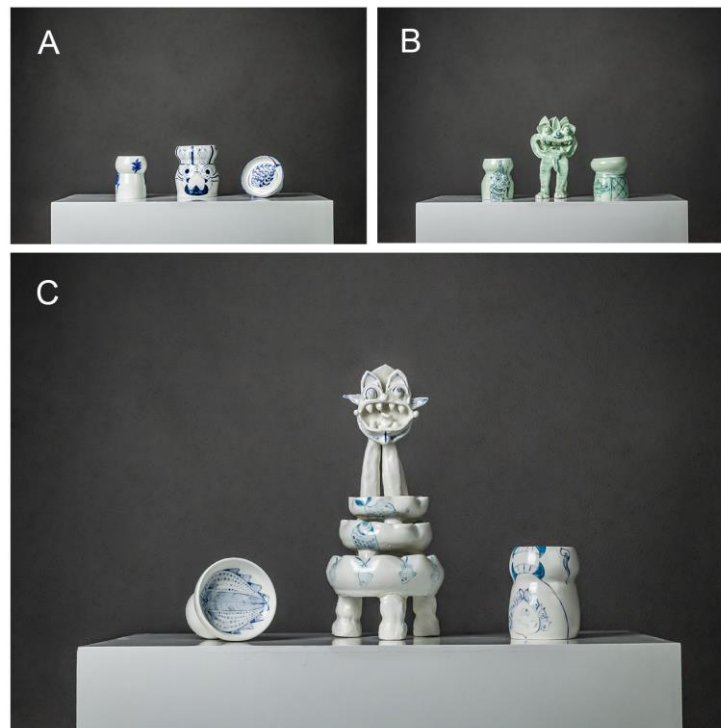


Figure 4 Part of the final art creation
source: Li Liping, 2021 (A: Mythical animals with blue-and-white patterns, B: Mythical beasts with green glaze, C: Wandering beast installation)

Discussion

The final artwork conveys welcoming and opening, symbolizing the desire for good communication and understanding. The images of the mythical beasts in both Dali and Sukhothai are similar and their functions are also in the form of guardians. Therefore, this sense and understanding of the mythical beasts is also a presentation of the cross-cultural relationship between Dali and Sukhothai. The ceramic art of Dali and Sukhothai is influenced by Chinese ceramic culture, and the imitation of blue-and-white decoration is very popular. Therefore, the whole group of artworks uses the image of mythical beasts as the theme and the basis of creation, and adopts the common decorative patterns of fish and beasts in both places with imitation blue-and-white. The work holds an open and exhibition attitude, hoping to use good communication to realize the cross-cultural exchange from Dali-Sukhothai to China-Thailand.

Suggestion

In the Sino-Thai art exhibitions that conduct cross-cultural exchanges, there are many works that blend Chinese and Thai cultures, and distinctly among them are works by artists who travel to both places to create artworks. However, most of them are based on the artists' personal experience and comprehension, and rarely involve academic research before rising to the works of art creation. However, academic research is one of the ways to deeply understand a culture, and cross-cultural exchange can also provide more possibilities and references for the cultural integration of the two countries based on comparative research.

Conclusion

The creation of artworks fusing Dali- Sukhothai ceramics is both a microcosm of the cultural interchange between China and Thailand, and a display of the results of cross-cultural exchange. The cross-cultural relationship between Dali and Sukhothai ceramics is a result of the historical evolution from pottery to porcelain and the influence from Chinese ceramics. The final artwork is a contemporary installation of imitation blue-and-white ceramics, using the mythical animals and patterns in architectural decoration as the main subject, together with the popular decorative patterns of Dali and Sukhothai.

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