China Dream and the Revival of Ceramic Culture

LIANG XU and YAN WU

ABSTRACT

Culture is not only the vein for a nation to survive and develop for ever, but also the foundation for a country to stand upright in the world. As the representative of Chinese culture, ceramic culture will be inspired by China Dream and develop fully in all its new glory.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that China Dream is the hottest word nowadays. Not only does it appear most frequently in different domestic occasions, it also often draws the attention of international media. When Comrade Xi Jinping was elected as the General Secretary, he has given a systematic illustration of the detailed connotation, the goal, the general layout, the implementation route and etc in many domestic and international occasions.

China Dream is a simple but vivid word which includes the hope, pursuit and mission of the contemporary Chinese people. Not every country is entitled to put forward the project—revival. It is only the nation with a brilliant civilization in its history that is qualified to bring forward the revival as its goal, because it is ridiculous to mention restoring it to its glory if it did not have a glorious history. Throughout the development of human’s history, many outstanding nations experienced a short period of glory and then walked towards decline and extinction.

The national progress and the country’s prosperity cannot be accomplished without the cultural revival. At present, the competition between countries seems to focus on the following aspects—economy, politics, military, science and technology and so on, but the cultural competition is one of the most important aspects that can not be ignored. As the representative of Chinese culture, ceramic culture will develop in its new glory under the inspiration of China Dream.
Chinese culture with ceramic culture as its representative is the strong spiritual impetus to realize China Dream

Culture is not only the vein for a nation to survive and develop for ever, but also the foundation for a country to stand upright in the world. Outstanding traditional culture is the spiritual impetus to realize the revival of Chinese great culture. In November 2013, Chinaman Xi Jinping said, “The prosperity of a country and a nation is always supported by the flourish of culture, so the flourish of Chinese culture is the precondition of the revival of Chinese great culture” when he investigated Kong Family Mansion and Confucious Institute in Qufu, Shangdong Province.

Culture is becoming a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity, a more and more important factor influencing the competition of comprehensive national power and a more and more important support of economic and social development, playing a more and more important role in the international competition. No country can live in the nations without the peculiarity and cohesion of its national culture, which is the “gene identity” of a nation and a country. Huntington, an American scholar put forwards the paradigm of the clash of civilizations in his work The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order and believes that the clash and competition between different cultures has taken the place of the simple military conflict nowadays in the world. Some of his opinions are in the following: the tokens, for example, cross, crescent, or veil, become something with great value after the Cold War because they are endowed with some special culture, so the cultural recognition becomes the most significant things for the majority of people; people all over the world are divided into different groups based on the cultural boundary to a greater extent, which means that the conflicts between different cultural groups become more and more important. Civilization is the most widespread cultural entity. Therefore, the conflicts between different cultural groups would become the center of world politics.

So it is the case. Currently, the clash between different nations and countries exists in the real world, but it apparently happens more between different cultures. The result of clash does not depend on which country is bigger or stronger because stronger culture does not always exist in the bigger countries, for example South Korea is a very small country but its culture is popular widespread.

Theory is based on objects. Ceramics considered as the symbol and carrier of Chinese culture influence and change people’s lifestyle. China is one of the earliest countries to make porcelains. China not only emphasizes etiquette but also its use and aesthetics, so objects have their practical use and are endowed with another important function—the carrier of culture. As an important component of Chinese culture, ceramics is a good object to show the culture, thus it is a good cultural symbol and representative. From the decorative symbols in ceramics, we can see lots of lucky emblazonry and their symbolic significance are shown on the surface. Dragon and phoenix as the representatives of Chinese culture are the lucky symbols particularly used among the royal families. Some lucky symbols derived from animal and plants emblazonry perfectly reflect the Chinese ceramics culture. For example, five bats offering birthday congratulations (Bat’s Chinese pronunciation is the same as that whose meaning is luck or best wish), wintersweet (a special flower
blooming in winter is endowed with some special spirit such as strong, noble and etc.). The decorative symbols shown vividly in ceramics brings people beauty and reflects the influence and importance of culture. These show that Chinese culture pursue completeness and festivity, emphasize living and reproduction and hope luck.

The close relationship between the change of ceramics and the countries’ rise and decline

Ceramics is the best representative of Chinese culture with symbolic significance and is the most obvious identification in the economic and cultural exchange between china and other countries. It has existed for thousands of years and has created the legend of civilization. As a name of a product, it has become the name of a country. In other words, the mild and smooth porcelain is more influential than the four great inventions all over the world.

The production and development of ceramics is closely related to people’s life and has gone through the whole history of china continuously from the Neolithic Age till nowadays. Ceramics culture is also closely related to the rise and decline of china. The scale and quality of porcelain show the rise and decline of the feudal dynasties and tell us the true historical information of its era. From the porcelain, we can know the rise and fall of the history, the diligence and wisdom of Chinese people, the lifestyles in different periods, and the change of aesthetic standard and so on. Thus, it’s no exaggeration to say the history of Chinese ceramics can be said to that of Chinese cultural development.

Since the modern times when the Silk Road on the sea began to flourish, ceramics witness the cultural exchange between eastern and western countries. Just as Mikami Tsugio who put forward the Silk Road on the sea mentioned in his work The Road of Ceramics—the Cultural Exchange between Eastern and Western Countries that it was a very wide bond to link the eastern and western countries and served as a bridge for the cultural exchange. In 1517, an ambassador from Portugal came to China and asked for the establishment of trade activities between Portugal and China, and in 1534 the normal trade has began. Later, Portugal, Netherlands and England etc obtained the trade rights on the sea and then started the economic and cultural exchange between China and western countries. It is difficult to give an accurate number of ceramics traded overseas in early times, but undoubtedly it is amazing. Some experts estimated roughly that within 80 years in 17th century Dutch East India Company exported 16-million pieces from Jingdezhen and other cities in China, and in 1700 the ships belonging to Dutch East India Company unloaded 146,748 pieces of Chinese porcelains in one of European ports. What’s more, lots of ship wrecks were salvaged in the sea, which proved how prosperous the ceramics trade between China and western countries was. For example, according to the order of Dutch East India Company, the number of porcelains loaded in Geldermalsen—a Dutch ship wreck reached 2250,000 pieces, including 62623-piece tea wares, 19535-piece chocolate drinking-wares and 578-piece teapots which accounted for 1/3 of all the goods and outnumbered all the other ceramics. Augustus II, the King of Poland, owned lots of ceramics as much as 75000 more pieces, and he even exchanged 127 fully armed cavalry guardian for 127 chinas with Frederick William I, the King of Prussia. Some more people, such as Louis XIV—the King of France and George IV in England, were crazy about the collection of Chinese ceramics. Chinese porcelain became the symbol of identity and status. The noble families in Europe used Chinese ceramics utensils and tea wares to treat guests, which proved
their higher class and treasure. Some other nobles use Chinese ceramics vase and statue to decorate their rooms so as to tell others their outstanding taste totally different from the commons.

Influenced by ceramics culture, the European countries began to show special interests in Chinese culture. And even later, the European people worshipped Chinese culture so much so that Chinoiserie lasted for more than a century. Some great philosophers, such as Hegel, Leibnitz and Voltaire, were influenced by Chinese culture. Hegel said in his work The Philosophy of History that the rationality view of philosophy is that the—perhaps the greatest thought the easterner held is the metaphysics. When confronted with the turbulent European society in the historical reform period, Leibnitz exclaimed words failed him about how Chinese people created such a peaceful society and established such an order that people could live peacefully with each other and meanwhile try not to disturb others. Voltaire spoke highly of Chinese history and culture and thought that westerners undoubtedly should attach importance to China. He even said when you want to know the world as a philosopher, you should first eye at the East because the eastern countries are the cradle of all the art. So he held an opinion that China had the best politics and organization because of the advanced culture. In Dictionary of Philosophy, he explained China as the country with the best organization, as the only one country to rely on the patriarchy and as the only one country to penalize the provincial governor who was not loved by his people when he was relieved of his duty. The recognition of Chinese culture showed he recognized China. Along with the ceramics, Chinese classic culture became accessible to European people and was gradually approved by them. If we did a research into it carefully, we can know it was after Chinese ceramics were exported to Europe that Europeans began to praise Chinese culture. The objects began to give scope to its cultural function and had some influence in European societies. Due to the cultural function in the ceramics, people accepted them more easily in western countries, so in other words, the objects and the culture benefited each other.

A large demand of ceramics and high profits quicken the research and development of ceramics among Europeans, especially Augustus II who was very crazy about ceramics. Due to his strong support, Germany produced the ceramics whiteware similar to China’s in 1708 finally, starting the independent development of European ceramics. This success forecast that western countries would take an overwhelming role in the modern world. As a result, Chinese ceramics became to collapse in the world market from a broad sense. At the time, China began to decline in the world affair meanwhile western countries developed rapidly and became the center in the world. We can see ceramic technology developed along with the advancement of its country while the decline of country brought that of the ceramics. In mid-19th century, China began to start with the research into the advanced objects and put forward an opinion—learning from foreigners to compete with foreigner, which was a bit like that European countries accepted Chinese culture before. But then, the objects were different from the traditional handicraft works or artworks but referred to the modernized ships, weapons and machines and so on. Later we found out that our backwardness was mostly due to technology influenced by the culture. Since then, the western culture was introduced into China on a large scale. Under such influence, China began to accept the western objects and lifestyle until now, which was very similar to what happened when European countries had accepted Chinese objects and lifestyle.
The Revival of Ceramics Culture is the Representative and Reflection of China Dream

Ceramics culture as an outstanding representative of Chinese objects plays a very important role in Chinese culture system. Ceramics—the representative of daily life and aesthetics are more influential than the others, having an important impact in traditional Chinese society.

Chinese etiquette is shown by objects, so China is a nation symbolized by objects to some extent. We use Ding Sheng to refer to the country’s prosperity, use Ding Ge to refer to the country’s reform and use Ding Li to refer to the country’s standing-upright spirit. Here Ding refers to an ancient cooking vessel in China which was later used to refer to the symbol of a dynasty. Chinese people not only use the objects to show etiquette but also try to develop the beauty in objects. There is a saying in China, “the cuisine needs the better tableware”. From this we can know that we emphasize the etiquette, beauty and food, which causes China became the first country to produce ceramics and the country’s name was derived from china—the name of the ceramics. The pursuit of the objects’ functional use and the objects’ theoretical implication created the unique beauty of Chinese ceramics which shocked the world. In 18th century, The European royal and noble class would be proud of possessing a set of Chinese ceramics which is a good way to show their nobleness and elegance. Actually its beauty does not only rely on its quality and its form, but more on the spirit of etiquette and the cultural dream from Chinese people. It is a good contribution to the world from a country of courtesy.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent 30 years, China has more say in international affairs along with the rapid economic development and more national power. Chinese culture was output into other countries and drew the worldwide attention. Especially currently, on the background of national revival and the strategic critical period of carrying out One Belt and One Road, to establish the leading role of Chinese ceramics in the world can make ceramics become an important carrier of exporting Chinese culture to the world so as to make the world feel its cultural influence, feel the wonder of China and experience the charm of Chinese stories. This is not only the revival and rise of the culture of objects with ceramic as its representative, but also the revival and rise of China Dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was financially supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China (Grant NO. 15CXW031).

REFERENCES