

Contemporary Chinese Ceramic Arts

Prepared by I-Chi Hsu for Khmer Ceramic Conference
Editor, Chinese Potters Newsletter Quarterly, Beijing, China
Curator, FuLe International Ceramic Art Museums, Fuping, China

China is rich in ceramic tradition, but when talking about contemporary ceramic art, China is very weak. People always ask me how do I define the *Contemporary Chinese Ceramic Art*. My answer is that the appearance of ceramic studio artists in China in the 90's marked the beginning of the contemporary Chinese Ceramic art. It came a long way and from a complicated background which on one hand is the influence of Chinese ceramic traditions and on the other hand is the Chinese uneasy political and military environment in the last half Century.

Chinese traditional ceramics were made under the team effort. This is the reason why all the Chinese ceramic masterpieces never bear artist's name. Then, in the middle of the 20th century, China was in the war most of the time. When communists took over the Mainland China, China denounced the individualism. China was very much isolated from the world of art. The development of modern arts in the world in the second half of the 20th Century is significant but Chinese artists never shared such benefits and glory.

However, in the last 20 years of the 20th Century, due to China's reform and opening up, China's ceramic industry, just like any other industries, was under dramatic changes. In the late 80s, most government-run ceramic factories were either closed down or reorganized to suit the modern economic environment. At the same time, private factories and family-run production units were flourishingly established and even controlled the mainstream of production in many ceramic towns. Such marketing economics in China provides a suitable background for independent ceramic artists to grow. The "ceramic studio artist" concept, which is the core of the contemporary ceramic arts in the world, is introduced to China from western world.

Since 1995, contemporary ceramic art movements have been developed with amazing speed. The "China Ceramics Today", a traveling exhibition started from Ariana Museum in Geneva in 2002 and toured 6 more cities in Europe and the U.S.A. for two years. This exhibition marked the significance of the development of the first generation of contemporary ceramic art in China which covered the last twenty years of the 20th Century when China just opened up and conducted the reform. This was the first time to have the world to see Chinese contemporary ceramic art. The response was warm and encouraging. However, this generation still represented the one with strong traditional background even their effort to approach the contemporary ceramic art was strong.

Just as the fast speed of development of China in various fields, the

ceramic art in China was more confused. This is caused by the following factors:

1. A new generation merged in: In the 21st Century, a new Chinese generation was born after China opened up and never suffered any hard living. They are the only child in the family and had a happy childhood. They practically disconnected from Chinese tradition. Art work created by this generation is quite different from the generation before.
2. Diversified approach: Because the vast merged in contemporary art in general into China, ceramic art was also influenced, particularly to this new generation.
3. An ambitious mind: A tendency of becoming a significant ceramic artist is what most young ceramic artist looking for. They try to make big art work, big installation or set up a huge studio.

This may be some one's dream but it also become true to some artists.

However, I believe this period will be passed soon. Chinese ceramic art will be settled down more reasonably and marched into a more promising future. When people ask me what is the future of Chinese contemporary ceramic art? I would say that the future of Chinese contemporary ceramic art always lies in between tradition and contemporary expression; Although China had a late start, and is going through a confusing period, but it has a high and solid foundation laid by our ancestors. I am expecting a "great leap forward" future for Chinese contemporary ceramic art.

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