

# Protection and Inheritance of Xing Kiln White Porcelain from the Perspective of Chinese Traditional Aesthetics

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## Abstract:

As the earliest white porcelain site in Chinese history, Xing kiln has always influenced and affected the development of Xingtai civilization since its appearance. The Xing Kiln site is a national key cultural relic protection unit, and the Xing Kiln cultural heritage is an important part of Chinese porcelain culture. This article uses the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetics to sort out and analyze the Xing kiln culture, explore its value and aesthetic connotation, and combine with the current social development to propose a path for the protection and inheritance of Xing kiln white porcelain culture.

## Keywords:

Xing Kiln, White Porcelain, Traditional Chinese Aesthetics, Culture, Inheritance

## 1. Development and Evolution of White Porcelain in Xing Kiln

The existing Xing Kiln site is located in Neiqiu, Lincheng(Xingtai, Hebei) within the Taihang Mountain foothills and plains. According to textual research, Xing kiln began to produce in the late Southern and Northern Dynasties, fell in the Five Dynasties, and end in Yuan Dynasty. During Tang Dynasty, it is one of the seven famous porcelain kilns, and also the earliest kiln producing white porcelain in northern China, which lasted about 900 years. [1]

During the Northern Dynasty, Xing kilns mainly produced celadon ware. On the basis of producing celadon, craftsmen continued to select raw materials with less iron to create original white porcelain. Utensils are mainly bowls and plates. During the Sui Dynasty, Xing kiln began to transform from celadon ware to white porcelain. At this time, the scale of Xing kiln expanded, and there were more than ten kiln sites. The firing quality of white porcelain has also been improved. From the initial rough body makeup white porcelain, it gradually transitioned to fine porcelain. The main objects include bowls, jars, basins, bowls, cups, pots, inkstones, animal decorations, etc. In the early Tang Dynasty, Xing kiln was one of the seven famous kilns in the porcelain industry. In the mid-Tang Dynasty, Xing kiln reached its peak, and the appearance of fine white porcelain was an inevitable process of the Xing kiln

development. At that time, the quality of Xing kiln porcelain has reached a very high level, the variety of utensils has increased, and the porcelain making process has reached a level of proficient. [2] The output greatly exceeds that of fine white porcelain in the Sui Dynasty, forming a situation of "South Qing and North White", which laid the foundation for the development of colored porcelain after the Tang Dynasty. [3]

During the Five Dynasties, the production of Xing kiln porcelain declined rapidly. Due to the war and the reduction of fine porcelain raw materials, the white porcelain represented by Neiqiu no longer had the same scenery as it used to be. However, Qicun and Gangtou kilns located in the northwest of Lincheng were still producing, and the quality of most white porcelain had declined, but there were still fine works including bowls, plates, plum bottles, pots and so on. During the Northern Song Dynasty, Xing kiln still paid tribute to white porcelain, but due to the lack of physical data, there are not many white porcelains of the Northern Song Dynasty that can be identified. [4] Judging from the quality of Song Dynasty porcelain that has been discovered, the texture and color of the products are often yellow, but the workmanship is still fine, with the rigorous style of Xing kiln. During the Jin Dynasty, the northern region was relatively stable. The scale of Xing kiln increased, and it was mainly concentrated on both sides of the Zhi River in Lincheng, eight sites have been explored so far. Varieties and unearthed "utensils" have increased significantly. Overlay printing, engraving, stippling and other decoration methods are common. The main varieties are bowls, plates, cups, pots, etc. The efficiency of making porcelain is high, and the wall of the utensils is lighter and thinner. During the Yuan Dynasty, Xing kiln entered a period of great development. At this time, Xing kiln mainly produced white-glazed porcelain, followed by black-glazed porcelain, and also fired three-color and Jun porcelain. The decorative crafts mainly include black flowers on a white background, carved flowers, tick flowers, plum blossom dots, chrysanthemums, and printing. Utensils include bowls, plates, cups, cups, pots, pots, figurines and porcelain pillows. The commonly used characters are "Feng", "Xue", "Taiping", "Hu", "Liu", "Shangzhai", etc. The main production areas are Sheshou, Nancheng Village, Xici Yaogou and other kiln sites. After the Yuan Dynasty, Xing kilns were rarely used and withdrew from the stage of history later on.

## **2. Xing Kiln White Porcelain and Chinese Traditional Aesthetics**

Xing kiln white porcelain lies not only in the beauty of the external form, but in the artistic Chinese traditional aesthetic conception. The complementarity of Confucianism and Taoism is an important ideological basis for the concept of "harmony between man and nature" in China. Meanwhile, leaving blank spaces in art works is also a aesthetic method in Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese aesthetics can be expressed in porcelain making.

### ***2.1. "Nature and Humanity" in Xing Kiln White Porcelain***

Lao Zhuang's Taoism emphasizes a free state of "sitting and forgetting" and a state of inaction beyond utilitarianism. The Confucianism yearns for resemblance between man and nature and induction between man and man, and radiate from human ethics such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, etc. The fundamental point is the "humanization of nature". The "humanization of nature" mentioned by Confucianism mainly includes two aspects: one is that nature contains aesthetic

features that are compatible with ethics and morality or has the imprint of human ideology and morality and social activities. The second refers to the power of nature or the will of God being personified and ethicized as the highest moral standard. Here, "nature" refers to the abstract natural force and providence, and "induction between heaven and man" means that after nature is personified as the highest moral standards, these moral standards in turn educates people. If Confucianism is the concept of "humanization of nature", emphasizing sociality and ethics, then Taoism is "naturalization of man", that is, to completely get rid of utility, desire, right and wrong, life and death, and become a free man who is one with nature. But "naturalization of man" does not mean going backwards to the ignorant state of nature, it does not mean going back to animality and passively adapting to the environment; on the contrary, it refers to going beyond the limitations of one's own biological species, actively interacting with the functions of nature, the structures, and laws. [5]

In the heyday of white porcelain, the stability of society and the tranquility of life make people turn their attention from the empty and boring palaces and pavilions to the simple and vivid countryside, and discover the meaning of life in the mountains, rivers, plants and trees of nature. This concept of symbiosis with nature has a commoner meaning, and the civic simple style was gradually gaining the upper hand (i.e., Figure 1). The shapes of the utensils are mostly practical utensils such as cups, bowls, plates, pots, bottles and earthenware pots, while the aristocratic colors are becoming less and less. The characteristics of Xing kiln porcelain at that time reflected the people-oriented and pragmatic view of material use in traditional Chinese aesthetics (i.e., Figure 2).



*Figure 1. Nature elements in white porcelain.*



*Figure 2. Pragmatic aesthetic in white porcelain.*

## **2.2. "Colorless Rhyme" - the Blank Space and Artistic Conception of Xing Kiln White Porcelain**

The aesthetics of Confucianism and Taoism are the aesthetic viewpoints that have a greater impact on Chinese arts. Xing kiln white porcelain, which is deeply infiltrated with traditional cultural heritage, is no exception. Under the influence of Confucianism and Taoism, the art of blank space has been formed, becoming an aesthetic form with great traditional aesthetic connotations. The blank space is a common technique in the creation of Chinese art works, which refers to the intentional blanks left in the art creation of calligraphy and painting to make the whole picture and composition more harmonious and exquisite. Leaving room for imagination, which is very characteristic of traditional Chinese aesthetics. White

space is one of the expressive techniques of art. It refers to consciously leaving a "blank" in order to express the theme more fully in artistic creation. The art of "white space" is also an important composition rule and aesthetic feature of Chinese painting. The art of "white space" in Chinese painting creation is generally considered to have been formed in the Six Dynasties, grew up in the Tang Dynasty, prospered in the Song Dynasty, and became a mature creative technique in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Chinese painting pays attention to artistic conception and rhythm, which is a metaphysical spiritual touch and experience.

Ceramic is the art of combining mud, glaze, blank, porcelain body, pigment, fire and painting. Xing kiln white porcelain can best reflect the aesthetic connotation of blank space. The conditions for the blank space for ceramic decoration have been initially prepared, Craftsmen often need to decorate or paint on it. Chinese traditional Confucian aesthetics emphasizes the golden mean and pursues the beauty of harmony, and white space is an indispensable means to make Xing kiln white porcelain present the harmony of Confucianism. A Xing kiln white porcelain work that expresses the art of blank space properly, the plain white porcelain blank is like a piece of white rice paper. It is very particular about where to write and where to leave blank, showing the harmony and beauty of Confucianism in every inch, and makes the picture full of imagination. In addition to ceramic painting, craftsmen use various tire decorations very delicately, which not only retains the clean and simple white, but also plays a decorative role (i.e., Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Blank space in white porcelain.*

### **3. Problems in the Protection and Inheritance of Xing Kiln White Porcelain Culture**

In the 1980s, the relevant departments tried to market Xing porcelain products, but in the end, due to the relative lack of capital and technology, the marketization attempt failed. Thus, a significant problem in the development of Xing Kiln cultural industry appeared, that is, the problem of funding. At present, most of the protection and development of Chinese intangible cultural heritage relies on governmental funding. However, government appropriations sometimes cannot meet the financial needs of heritage protection and development.

Nowadays, many intangible cultural heritages are faced with a dilemma that is the problem of inheritance, and people who really master cultural skills are the aged, while young people are very indifferent to intangible cultural heritage. The Xing kiln heritage also faces the same problem in the specific operation process, that is, the lack of talents and the difficulty of inheritance.

As time goes by, the Xingyao ruins cannot resist the erosion of time. Under the conditions of sun exposure in summer and the cold weather in winter, the soil ruins

will eventually peel off, collapse, and even become a pile of loess. However, the cost of scientific protection is very high, that forms a difficult problem for the site. After consultation with experts, they believe that the protection of the Xing Kiln has become an urgent matter to deal with.

#### **4. Suggestions on the Protection and Inheritance of Xing Kiln White Porcelain Culture**

The development of Xing kiln white porcelain culture must require a professional team of talents. In the past, professional training was to organize experts and scholars to conduct research on Xing kiln, and in this process, the research successors were slowly cultivated. With the development of the times, the previous inheritance model has also changed. Cizhou kiln and Longquan celadon have achieved good successful experience in professional team training. They have strengthened cooperation with colleges and universities in training, and students come to their research bases for internships every year. Colleges and universities have also set up related majors, established research bases and R&D centers. Therefore, a model that combines production, learning and research has gradually formed. The attempt of combining education and cultural inheritance has played an important role in cultivating a professional team. The government and relevant cultural departments can also hire professionals in related fields such as design, art, culture, history, etc. to help cultural research.[6]

The protection of Xing kiln cultural heritage should also have sufficient financial support. In addition to the financial support of local governments at all levels, public welfare funds also play an important role in the protection of intangible cultural heritage. To this end, special fund companies should be established, rules and regulations should be formulated, clear goals should be set, and various funds should be effectively managed. The government should raise the awareness of the whole society to protect intangible cultural heritage, and increase the enthusiasm of the whole society to protect intangible cultural heritage, so as to raise more social welfare funds, gradually expand the channels and methods of social fund raising.

"Xing kiln firing skills" is listed as a national intangible cultural heritage and is also a national key cultural relic protection unit, but Xing kiln culture has not established a corresponding cultural system and cultural brand. In order to build the brand of Xing kiln culture, firstly, the public's awareness should be increased, which inevitably requires expanding the publicity channels of Xing kiln culture and investing in publicity resources. Traditional media such as newspapers and TV can no longer meet the needs of most young people to obtain information. This requires the government and relevant media departments to use new media platforms to advertise Xing kiln white porcelain culture such as WeChat and APP. To create a cultural brand, it is necessary to establish a unified cultural logo. A cultural brand is a highly condensed cultural symbol, and the logo is the concrete embodiment of this symbolization, which is visible and memorable. Taking Xing kiln white porcelain as the cultural carrier, we will create a unique urban business card. The innovation of Xing kiln is to protect and explore Xing kiln culture, cultivate Xing kiln industry, develop projects, focus on building Xing kiln commodities, and create brands. It is necessary to follow the development law of cultural industry, identify market positioning, and give full play to the advantages of Xing kiln location and ecological environment, make full use of various resource elements, and create a comprehensive and rich cultural industry. To start with, focusing on the production of daily-use porcelain, then exploring the

psychology of consumers and predict market trends, studying competitors' production and marketing methods. [7]

Rationality needs to be an important principle to be followed in the development and utilization of Xing kiln cultural heritage. Many excellent traditional cultures that have survived to this day have been developed because these cultures have their own characteristics. Therefore, rational construction and utilization is a very important way to protect intangible cultural heritage, it also inherits a kind of spiritual wealth of human beings.

## 5. Conclusions

Xing kiln products, with their graceful art style and exquisite porcelain craftsmanship, play a demonstration role for the development of China's ceramic art. The decorative techniques created by Xing kiln pioneered the decorative art of white porcelain in China. The sculptural products shaped by the artisans in Xing kiln are exquisite in style and various in variety. All kinds of practical instruments shaped by hand are also colorful and have many characteristics, which add important examples to the art treasure house of Xing kiln.

The cultural and artistic connotation of Xing kiln products fully reflects the scale and achievements of political, economic, cultural and artistic development in ancient China. At present, our main topic is how to protect the ruins of Xing Kiln, and how to pass on the culture and firing skills of white porcelain. It is expected that in the future, Xing kiln white porcelain can bloom the glory of the past.

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