

Research on the New Era Aesthetic Transformation of Traditional Chinese Arts and Crafts: The Cases Focusing on Glass Art

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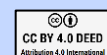
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ABSTRACT

Traditional craftsmanship maps out the Chinese philosophy of creation, but it has suffered during the rapid transformation of the aesthetic of industrialised, urbanised modernity. Glass art has a long history in China, but for a long time it has not been able to integrate deeply with science, but has existed as an imitation or substitute for nearby materials, so the several changes in glass art are closely linked to the entry of 'Western art' into the Chinese art world, which is why it is defined as 'imported'. After the initial imitation of Western glass art, modern China has come to recognise the importance of its own cultural identity, which is at the heart of Eastern art's standing on the world stage and its dialogue with the world.

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1. Introduction

In 2011, the International Year of Glass 2022 initiative, initiated and led by the International Glass Association, jointly promoted by the Union of Glass Associations and ICOM-Glass, and supported by the global glass academia and industry, was formally approved by the 75th United Nations General Assembly at its 66th plenary session, making 2022 the United Nations International Year of Glass. Chinese glass has a long history, but for a long time it has not been an important art form, instead becoming a subordinate to ceramic and jade art, and it often overlooked, and the status and public recognition of glass art in China is far lower than that of ceramics and jade and other materials. As a latecomer to modern glass art, China has developed rapidly in recent years, but has not yet formed its own national ethos in terms of overall style, and Chinese glass art needs to construct its own cultural colours on the basis of a summary of western imported ideas.

2. The value of traditional handicrafts in the new era

Traditional Chinese handicrafts manifest the long-established thinking of the Chinese people on the creation of things, and to a greater extent than literature, art and folklore traditions, they condense the creativity of a people in material form. As the accumulated experience and wisdom of an agrarian civilisation, traditional arts and crafts have been affected by the rapid transformation of modernisation, including industrialisation and urbanisation, and have undergone different degrees of change. Whether traditional crafts survive, revive, or become marginalised or even replaced, the core issue lies in the foundation of life, the soil of culture and the cultivation and development of inner creativity. (Lusheng, 2018) .

The Fourth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed that "we must firmly establish cultural self-confidence, firmly grasp the direction of advanced socialist culture, stimulate the vitality of cultural creation of the whole nation, and better construct the Chinese spirit, Chinese values and Chinese power." The concept of "cultural lineage" contains the logic of Chinese aesthetics and the ethical thought of man and nature, and has a strong influence on the thinking of future generations, whose value can only be reflected through creative continuation and inheritance.

Traditional handicrafts carry the nostalgia of people and the image of the nation, and can also be a sustainable cultural resource. As objects that have undergone a period of history, they reveal the cultural colours of the country and the region. The positive aesthetic ideals of traditional handicrafts, full of the spirit of the nation, have long supported economic development and cultural prosperity, and have come to life through renewal and change. Traditional handicrafts, which continue to pass on the culture of the nation and create the beauty of life, will certainly usher in a new era of prosperity and development. (Lusheng Pan, 2019).

Glass art has a long history in China, but has long existed under the name of '琉璃 (Liuli) ', sometimes referred to as '料器 (Liaoqi) ' or '硝子 (Xiaozi) '. Jian Hang, a leading Chinese folk craft researcher, believes that today's glass art still exhibits the colours of Western modern art. At the same time, it is believed that modern glass is a 'reborn latecomer' similar to modern ceramic art, and that glass art in contemporary China, after an initial stage of imitation and re-creation in its development, is now gradually recognising the importance and inevitability of its roots in Eastern culture, i.e. the power to construct a dialogue with the world of art. (Jian Hang 2014).

3. The Aesthetic Transformation of Chinese Glass Art

Prior to the 1980s, glass was often presented in the form of utilitarian vessels (with glassblowing technology as the core technology) or painted windows (with cold-working cutting and painting as the core technology), and there was little pure art in the true sense of the word (art forms in the form of three-dimensional sculptures), due to the difficulty of glass in meeting the requirements of medium- and large-scale sculpture production, both in terms of materials and technology.

The Bohemian region of Europe (today's Czech Republic) has long been synonymous with "quality glass" thanks to its abundance of high-quality raw glass materials and its long tradition of glassmaking, a tradition that continues to this day. Jaroslava Brychtova pioneered the global expansion of large glass thermoforming

casting technology (Sylva, 2001), giving Harvey Littleton's Studio Glass Art movement (Klein, 2001), launched in 1962, the most reliable core technology, while in the 1970s the Royal College of Art, combining Czech and American technical and theoretical In the 1970s the Royal Academy of Arts combined the technical and theoretical foundations of the Czech Republic and the United States to give glass art the status of a discipline for the first time (Dai, 2000).

The 1980s and 1990s saw the maturation of glass casting techniques, which were safer and easier to control than blowing, inlay and lampworking techniques, and with the Czech Republic as the world's largest glass casting centre (LaMonte, 1999), the technology associated with glass art was further enriched by Stanislav Libensky's inventive 1993 The concept of the 'dimension of light' was introduced by Stanislav Libensky in 1993 (Kehlmann, 2002), and this concept quickly gained worldwide recognition in the glass art world.

In the 21st century, Western glass art is closely integrated with contemporary art, and even tends to be reduced to a mere medium of artistic reproduction, with the boundary between craft and art tending to blur (Zhou Jing, 2005), with the ' Libensky' s School of thought' and the American Pilchuck School of Glass being the most famous in the international glass art community, still adhering to the most traditional artisanal techniques. In the United States, however, glasswork has been given more meaning in the form of performance, commercial and environmental art.

Prior to the 21st century, Chinese glass art existed for a long time as '琉璃 (Liul)', but due to cultural differences and material problems, glaze was reduced to a subordinate to jade (Alan Macfarlane, 2002), and even deliberately suppressed its own material language to suit the aesthetics of jade and ceramics.

After entering the 21st century, China's leading art institutions actively sent scholars to study glass art in the UK, and these scholars opened the first glass studios in universities around the country one after another upon their return. As Chinese modern glass art has largely followed the British model in terms of both studio establishment and creative methodology, and British glass art has distinctly Czech and American characteristics, this is why Chinese glass art in the early 21st century as a whole has a strong Western connotation. The first generation of Chinese glass artists generally had a background of study abroad, while the second generation of glass artists, like the branches and leaves of a large tree, brought the experience of the first generation to art colleges and universities in all regions of China. The core of glass art has matured technically, but still does not have a strong spiritual core for international dialogue.

Glass art in today's Chinese art world has become a fresh breath of art form, in the overall compared to the European and American glass art shows a significant backwardness, this backwardness is reflected in three aspects: first, the lack of innovative breakthroughs in technology; second, the lack of material language as the entry point for deep theoretical accumulation; third, in general, the development stage is still struggling in the "imitation reproduction - oriental symbols of rigid transplantation" stage, failed to form its own artistic language.

4. The Experimental Exploration of a New Generation of Chinese Glass Artists

The exploration of modern Chinese glass art focuses on the new visual art language as a starting point, the connotations of traditional Chinese culture as a grip, and the formation of Chinese national cultural confidence as an aim. Against the

backdrop of emerging material art gradually gaining recognition, the current situation, challenges and problems of contemporary Chinese glass art are explored, and strategies for establishing a cultural identity for Chinese glass art are investigated.

In my PhD thesis, I explored and classified the visual language of glass (Sun Zhihao, 2021). Glass is centred around 'transparency' and has eight languages specific to itself:

1. transparency (the core language of glass);
2. the absorption of light by glass (adding a new dimension to the aesthetics of glass art);
3. refraction (a way of artistic expression that creates the illusion of sight);
4. diffuse reflection (the translucent effect of glass, and an important means of creating mystery);
5. fluidity of glass at high temperatures (the trajectory of glass movement);
6. negative space (the creation of a reverse world);
7. hole (the gathering of shadows and light on the surface of glass);
8. Bubbles left by vital breath (a sense of simplicity in Oriental art).

Analysing the principles of the production of glass language is an important support for the development of research, both in terms of exploring them physically and using them poetically, which is an important contribution to the creation of art.

Chinese art is particularly fond of the 'realistic' aesthetic, which comes from traditional Chinese ink painting, and this aesthetic taste has influenced other art forms.



Figure 1. Shilla Labatt. New Shanghai. Glass art.40*30*30cm.2007



Figure 2. Sun Zhi-hao. 食既. Glass art.40*40*5cm.2018

Canadian glass artist Shilla Labatt, a long-time resident of China, has a keen interest in traditional Chinese culture and, having travelled through China's many ethnic cities, has created a number of glass artworks that are imbued with Chinese ethnic elements. The work *New Shanghai* (Fig. 1) was completed in 2007, during which time the artist observed Shanghai in a phase of rapid development, with countless young people running around with dreams of striking gold, busily moving through the city's streets, while the city is elegant and refined, clean and vibrant filling the city. The New Shanghai series emphasises the clean, geometric, vertical contours of the future," says artist Shilla. The external form is geometric, clean and elegant, while the interior is dynamic, colourful and busy. Such is the nature of the current frenetic economic activity and growth, the work highlights the rapid socio-economic growth and the danger of the bubble captured by the visuals of the art." In Shilla's artwork, rapidly rising fog-like visual language and squared-off modern urban symbols convey the dramatic urban transformation of Shanghai at the beginning of the 21st century.

The author's glass artwork, 食既 (Fig. 2), intends to recreate an ancient Chinese legend about the moon, 食既 referring to the position of the moon in relation to the sun during the first internal tangency of a solar (or lunar) eclipse. At a time when science was inadequate to explain solar and lunar eclipses, almost the whole world panicked about the phenomenon, considering it an inauspicious sign, and it was against this backdrop that the legend of the "Dog Eclipsing the Sun" was born.

The work 食既 borrows the form of a lunar eclipse and melts the flowing ink-like black into the interior of the work. These misty layers of space and the flowing trajectory at the top of the work reveal the beauty of the universe as the veil of mystery is gradually lifted



Figure 3. Qing Wang. 端月. Glass art.79*40*10cm.2009



Figure 4. Qing Wang. 葭月. Glass art.79*40*10cm.2009

In the series *The Twelve Festivals of the Chinese Lunar Calendar* (fig. 3 and fig. 4), Artist Qin Wang uses the poetic title of the twelve Chinese months to recall the expectations of the ancients for nature, such as the 端月, 葭月、梅月 in this series. It is also the most traditional month in folk culture, such as the Spring Festival, the fifth day of the year to welcome the New Year, the reception of the God of Wealth and the Lantern Festival.

The artist has used a large area of transparency in this work, ' *The Twelve Festivals of the Chinese Lunar Calendar* ', to highlight the lush green spring colours and the image of a distant mountain in a landscape painting, a technique that is easily reminiscent of the traditional Chinese aesthetic of a quiet life, where distractions and desires are removed to achieve a tranquil state of mind. This work, *The Twelve Festivals of the Chinese Lunar Calendar*, embodies traditional Chinese rituals and views on life.

The national temperament of traditional culture and the new aesthetics of modern glass art have contributed to the innovation of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. Chinese glass has a distinction between tradition and modernity, with modernity being the overall trend, and this trend is linked to the Chinesization of Western art, where the incorporation and transformation of advanced achievements in Western art can rejuvenate Chinese glass art.



Figure 5. Jin Qu. *Qi Lu ink stone of China*. Glass art.30*30*6cm,2011

The artist, Jin Qu, has always been committed to the fusion of Chinese ink and wash art with new art materials. *Qi Lu ink stone of China* takes the form of an important tool in Chinese ink painting, the inkstone, and conveys the long history and splendid culture of traditional Chinese art through the visual expression of ink painting and the translucent effect of glass.

5. Conclusion

It is a requirement of the times for Chinese art to continue the national cultural lineage, enhance cultural taste and establish a high degree of cultural self-awareness and cultural confidence. After China's reform and opening up, the art world has undergone great changes, and traditional arts and crafts have been strongly impacted, but the corresponding types of crafts have been protected in different ways, and a consensus on the value of handicraft protection and inheritance has been established among the people, because traditional crafts are derived from history, carry cultural nostalgia and national image, and determine the world view and values of a nation, and through the transmission of traditional craftsmanship, the culture of the nation can be renewed and can also be used as a sustainable cultural resource for the nation.

In today's world, the significance of traditional handicrafts remains invaluable. These unique creations are not only exquisite in their craftsmanship, but they also represent the cultural heritage of a community. Traditional handicrafts provide a glimpse into the history and way of life of past generations. Moreover, they serve as a means of preserving and promoting cultural diversity and traditional skills. By purchasing and appreciating traditional handicrafts, we can support local artisans and ensure the continuation of these cherished traditions for generations to come.

Modern glass art will develop further, while China's profound traditional culture will provide more spiritual meaning to modern glass art. Only by following the development of the times, combining the pace of the times, and drawing on the essence of tradition, can art make new progress. The traditional Chinese elements in modern glass art will therefore provide us with a never-ending impetus.

It is perfectly true that life needs to be understood backwards, but more importantly life must be seen forward (Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, 2006). This phrase has the same value in the creation of art, traditional national culture is important, but it is the responsibility of the glass artist to present it in a new form that will attract the next

generation of Chinese to pass it on in a positive way, rather than passively accepting something that is 'out of date'. It is the artist's vocation and at the same time his contribution to the process of building a humanistic world.

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