

Strategic Management of Traditional Clay Sculpture in Northeast China in Contemporary Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are (1) to study the characteristics of traditional ceramics in Northeast China and the current market status of traditional ceramics, and (2) to analyze the development of traditional ceramics industry in Northeast China to improve its competitiveness. This research is a qualitative research, which reviews the literature from articles, research papers and documents related to the historical background, management status of traditional ceramics in Northeast China, PEST analysis and SWOT analysis to analyze the factors and conditions of internal and external environment, and interviews with three experts, including intangible cultural heritage inheritors and cultural heritage sculpture and design experts. The results of the research show that: 1) Traditional ceramics in Northeast China are folk arts with a long history, which not only has valuable cultural value, but also is an important center of cultural diversity in Northeast China. In the context of modern society, ceramics in Northeast China are facing challenges in terms of culture, protection, inheritance and development management. This traditional art form has significant advantages in terms of historical background and cultural characteristics, but it still needs to be effectively managed in terms of development, protection and inheritance to avoid affecting cultural value and economic potential; and 2) The development of ceramic industry in Northeast China has benefited from policy support, especially under the policy of protecting intangible cultural heritage and revitalizing the traditional industrial base in Northeast China, ceramic art has gained development opportunities, including protection The inheritance of cultural heritage and development direction of ceramics in Northeast China enables traditional art forms to adapt to the needs of modern society.

Keywords: Northeast Traditional Ceramics, Ceramic Art, Ceramic Industry

INTRODUCTION

Traditional ceramics in Northeast China represent a distinctive form of folk art unique to the region. Using clay as the primary material, artisans shape various figures, animals, and vessels that embody the local cultural characteristics through processes such as kneading, carving, and hand painting. This art form not only reflects the folk traditions of Northeast China but also conveys the temperament and bold spirit of the northeastern people. One of the most representative examples is the culture of winter fishing (as shown in Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

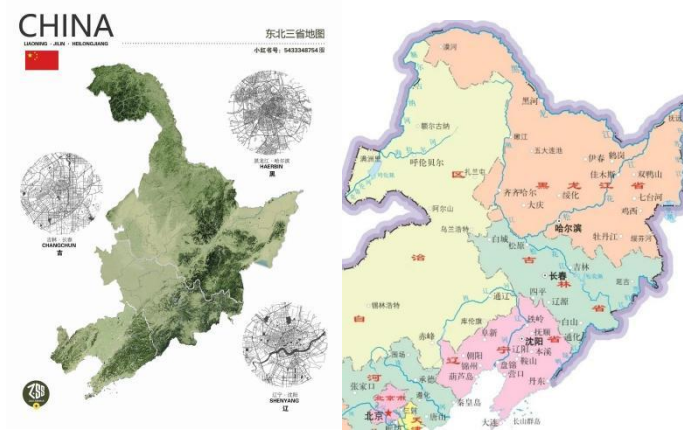


Figure 1.1 Map of Northeast China (People's Republic of China)



Figures 1.2 and 1.3 Winter fishing at Chagan Lake

Traditional ceramics in Northeast China not only embody the region's rich cultural heritage and historical memory but also reflect the wisdom and creativity of the Chinese people. However, as modernization accelerates, this traditional art form faces increasing challenges in terms of cultural preservation, transmission, and development management.

The development of ceramic arts in Northeast China has been significantly affected by urban expansion and the spread of modern culture. Consequently, determining how to protect and advance this traditional art in contemporary society has become an urgent issue. To adapt to the changes brought about by urbanization and modernization, Northeast China's ceramics industry requires new management approaches and creative thinking to safeguard its cultural value and unlock its economic potential.

In terms of preservation and transmission, Northeast ceramic traditions face the challenges posed by the aging of master artisans and a shortage of skilled successors. Some traditional products have gradually declined due to shifting market demands, which, in turn, alters the cultural meaning and craftsmanship associated with Northeast ceramics. Therefore, additional institutions and related organizations are needed to support economic, social, and tourism development, as well as other related sectors, to ensure the sustainable future of this traditional craft.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the cultural landscape and current status of traditional ceramics in Northeast China, including an examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. These analyses offer valuable insights to guide the development of clay sculpture in the region. By integrating creative design with contemporary cultural elements, traditional ceramics can be more effectively adapted to contemporary society—achieving a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity—and revitalizing the traditional ceramic industry.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the distinctive characteristics of traditional ceramics in Northeast China and their status in the current market.
2. To analyze the development of the traditional ceramic industry in Northeast China in order to enhance its competitiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs literature review and qualitative analysis, including SWOT analysis and interviews.

1. **Literature Review Method:** Through reviewing and analyzing relevant literature, the research covers the historical context, existing frameworks for cultural heritage preservation, and current practices related to intangible cultural heritage management and development.
2. **In-Depth Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with three experts, including an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage and specialists in sculpture and creative heritage design. The content of these interviews was analyzed to explore the development of the traditional ceramic industry in Northeast China.

Experts List

Name	Position	Field
Han Xiumei	Inheritor of Intangible Cultural Heritage / Expert in International Folk Crafts	Traditional clay sculpture culture of Northeast China
Liu Jun	Lecturer / Artist / Designer of Intangible Cultural Heritage Crafts	Art management of intangible cultural heritage products
Zhang Guohong	Ceramic art specialist	Preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage; sculpture and cultural studies

RESULTS

Ceramic cultural heritage is a multidimensional concept that encompasses rich historical, cultural, economic, educational, and scientific resources. It represents not only the essence of cultural diversity but also the foundation and symbol of a nation's identity and continuity. This heritage brings together both tangible and intangible cultural elements, including traditional knowledge, beliefs, values, and distinctive modes of thinking and behavior. Traditional ceramics of Northeast China are part of this intangible cultural heritage, embodying the wisdom and creativity of the Chinese people. Ceramics are not merely cultural artifacts; they play a crucial role in preserving cultural diversity and advancing social civilization.

Traditional ceramics are a deeply rooted folk art in the black-soil region of Northeast China. Through their unique artistic forms and production techniques, they have become treasured components of China's intangible cultural heritage. These ceramics not only reflect the aesthetic preferences and cultural values of the northeastern people but also convey the region's rich history and cultural vitality. Using clay as the primary material—combined with skilled kneading, carving, and painting—artisans create lifelike forms and animal figures that represent the daily lives and spiritual attitudes of the people in Northeast China.

In 2008, the traditional clay sculpture of Northeast China was included in the second batch of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage List, marking national recognition and protection. The government and related institutions have actively supported the preservation and development of this heritage by formulating appropriate conservation plans and policies.

From the perspective of strategic management of the ceramic industry, the goal is to highlight the importance of protecting and promoting intangible cultural heritage. Through creative design and modern reinterpretation, Northeast ceramics can be better integrated into contemporary society, achieving a natural blend of tradition and modernity and revitalizing the traditional ceramic industry with renewed energy. At the same time, inheritors and artists must dedicate themselves to the creation and transmission of ceramic art, ensuring that this traditional form endures across generations and serves as a cultural bridge connecting the past with the future.

Traditional ceramics of Northeast China preserve crucial cultural heritage while also demonstrating significant social influence and economic value in modern society (as shown in Table 1.5).

Table 1.5 Forms and Management of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Traditional Ceramics of Northeast China
Source: Sun Hao, 2024

Intangible Cultural Heritage	Cultural Forms	Management	Impacts
Traditional ceramics of Northeast China	Folk crafts	Conservation and heritage integration to support education and cultural exchange	Increasing youth participation and transmitting cultural heritage
Northeastern ceramic art	Artworks	Emphasis on skill transmission, with limited ability to adapt to contemporary society	Traditional techniques have been inherited but attract limited public interest
Folk festivals of Northeast China	Folk storytelling activities	Integration of diverse cultures and modern media communication	Promoting tourism development and disseminating the folk culture of Northeast China

From the literature review, it is evident that traditional ceramics in Northeast China possess clear advantages in terms of cultural and historical heritage. However, the lack of financial support and effective protection strategies has limited their potential in cultural transmission, urban innovation, and the enhancement of cultural and economic brand value. Greater attention and investment are therefore necessary to preserve and promote this traditional art form.

Various social forces—including government agencies, businesses, universities, non-profit organizations, and media institutions—play vital roles in supporting intangible cultural heritage such as clay sculpture in Northeast China. These forces are gradually creating new locally distinctive advantages and injecting fresh vitality into the regional economy. Their contributions span key areas of regional development, including business models, innovation and integration, and resource planning. Such cultural management strategies are expected to stimulate the revitalization of the ceramic industry in Northeast China within the context of creative cities, aligning with future development trends and integrating creative-city concepts to highlight the unique identity of cultural heritage.

The PEST analysis method helps identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the development of traditional ceramics in Northeast China. It provides insight into new environmental conditions, challenges faced by intangible cultural heritage, and the evolution of folk arts in the region.

In this study, the PEST analysis framework was applied to assess the macro-environmental context of the intangible cultural heritage of traditional ceramics in Northeast China (as shown in Table 1.6). Current policy environments provide strong political support for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, while the growth of cultural and creative industries demonstrates economic potential. Socially and culturally, local communities play a crucial role in fostering strong identity and shared values rooted in tradition, whereas technological development offers new opportunities through digital innovation and experiential cultural tourism.

Table 1.6 PEST Analysis of Traditional Ceramic Cultural Heritage in Northeast China

Politics (P)	Economy (E)	Society (S)	Technology (T)
The 32nd UNESCO General Conference adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the corresponding legislation of the People's Republic of China.	Developing the traditional clay sculpture industry in Northeast China	Contemporary society Respecting and developing local culture	Digital communication enables the widespread dissemination of local culture.

Source: Sun Hao, 2024

Advantages of Policy

Traditional ceramics in Northeast China benefit from strong governmental attention and support for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. This creates a solid political environment for the preservation and transmission of traditional ceramics. Government agencies, enterprises, colleges and universities, public welfare organizations, and media institutions have gradually come to play significant roles. Drawing upon national intangible cultural heritage—such as Northeast ceramics—they contribute to regional development by highlighting their own unique developmental characteristics.

Economy

As a form of folk craftsmanship, Northeastern ceramics faces challenges under the market economy. Long production cycles, high costs, and limited market recognition reduce their economic competitiveness. However, with the rapid growth of cultural tourism and the craft industry, innovations in design and expanded market development hold the potential to increase monetary value in the future.

Society

With the growing interest in traditional culture, ceramics—an art form unique to the Northeast—have the opportunity to gain new vitality through the development of cultural tourism. Digital innovation and experiential cultural tourism have opened new avenues for presenting and marketing traditional ceramics. Nevertheless, young people today may show less interest in traditional crafts. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance social awareness and encourage more involvement through educational and cultural activities that promote Northeast ceramic traditions.

Technology

Advancements in digital technologies—such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI)—offer new possibilities for managing and promoting intangible cultural heritage. While

these technologies introduce new methods for cultural dissemination and promotion, they also bring challenges. Traditional crafts face pressure from modern manufacturing techniques, making it essential to explore ways to integrate technological innovation while preserving their traditional characteristics. This balance is crucial for increasing public engagement and cultural appreciation.

SWOT Analysis

An analysis based on internal and external competitive environments—examining strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities, and potential threats—is presented as follows:

Table 1.7 SWOT Analysis of Traditional Ceramic Cultural Heritage in Northeast China

External	Opportunity (O)	Threat (T)
Internal Factors External Factors Other Factors	1.Cultural Revitalization Strategies within the Strategy for Revitalizing Traditional Industrial Bases in Northeast China 2. Northeast China Clay Sculpture “Kanto Zhang Clay Figurines” Listed as National Intangible Cultural Heritage	1.Market Competition: Competition from modern crafts and fast-selling consumer goods poses a threat to traditional clay sculpture. 2. Cultural Homogenization: Under the influence of globalization, cultural homogenization may diminish the uniqueness and appeal of Northeast China’s traditional clay sculptures.
Strength (S)	Strength – Opportunity (SO)	Strength – Threat (ST)
Profound Cultural Heritage: Northeastern ceramic art is one of China’s ancient folk art traditions, possessing a long history and rich cultural significance. It is recognized as one of China’s intangible cultural heritage forms.	1.The central and local governments place great importance on this matter. 2. The intangible cultural heritage of traditional ceramics in Northeast China 3. Geographical concentration 4. Economic strategies for traditional ceramics in Northeast China	1.Planning strategic and innovative solutions to develop intangible cultural heritage sites and strengthen the industrial value chain. 2. Enhancing market value and competitiveness of cultural products. 3. Cultivating talents and skills related to intangible cultural heritage. 4. Strengthening publicity efforts and expanding dissemination channels for intangible cultural heritage.
Weakness (W)	Weakness-Opportunity (WO)	Weakness – Threat (WT)
1.Lack of technological innovation capability, resulting in limited economic benefits. 2. Economic resources and operational capacity require further development. 3. The industrial value chain has not yet fully taken shape. 4. The management structure needs further improvement.	1. Innovation-driven development: Integrate modern design concepts to enhance the compatibility between ceramic art and market demand. 2. Financial support: Seek additional public and private financial support to strengthen the development capacity of the ceramic industry. 3. Industrial collaboration: Establish an integrated industrial value chain—from raw materials to sales—to improve overall competitiveness. 4. Management development: Introduce modern organizational management methods to enhance operational efficiency and product quality.	1. Integrating traditional and modern aesthetics: Incorporate modern design concepts into the teaching of traditional skills and cultivate a new generation of ceramic artists. 2. Creating a distinctive cultural brand: Strengthen the aesthetic identity and market recognition of northeastern Chinese ceramics through differentiation strategies and narrative-driven marketing. 3. Ensuring policy and resource support: Utilize government funding and resources to secure the sustainable development of traditional ceramic arts and the stability of raw material supply chains.

Source: Sun Hao, 2024

Strengths

1. ***Profound Cultural Heritage:***
Traditional clay sculpture in Northeast China is one of China's ancient folk arts, characterized by a long history and diverse cultural meanings. It represents an important component of China's intangible cultural heritage.
2. ***Distinct Regional Characteristics:***
Ceramic works from Northeast China often reflect local folk traditions and the unique regional identity of the Northeast, such as the works of "Kanto Clay Man Zhang", which vividly present traditional Northeastern Chinese culture.
3. ***Recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage:***
Traditional clay sculptures of Northeast China—such as "Kanto Clay Figurines"—have been listed as national intangible cultural heritage, enhancing their cultural value and importance in preservation efforts.

Weaknesses

1. ***Limited Market Recognition:***
Although Northeastern ceramics possess unique artistic value, their recognition and influence in the modern market remain relatively limited.
2. ***Difficulties in Inheriting Traditional Skills:***
Rapid modernization has resulted in a decline in successors capable of carrying on traditional clay-sculpting skills. Younger generations show diminishing interest in the craft.
3. ***Low Production Efficiency:***
The production cycle of ceramics is long and inefficient, making it challenging to meet the demands of a large modern market.

Opportunities

1. ***Promotion through Cultural Tourism:***
With the rise of cultural tourism, Northeastern ceramics can be integrated into regional cultural narratives to attract tourists and collectors.
2. ***Policy Support:***
Government protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage provide policy opportunities for revitalizing the Northeastern ceramic industry.
3. ***Digital Transformation and Internet Technology:***
Modern technologies such as 3D printing, digital design, and internet-based marketing can enhance production efficiency and expand market reach.

Threats

1. ***Market Competition:***
Competition from modern handicrafts and mass-produced consumer goods threatens the survival of traditional ceramics, as consumers increasingly prefer affordable and easily accessible products.
2. ***Cultural Homogenization:***
Under globalization, cultural homogenization may weaken the uniqueness and attractiveness of Northeastern clay sculpture.

Summary

Traditional clay sculpture in Northeast China plays a vital role in enhancing regional cultural competitiveness. However, inadequate preservation measures and ineffective transmission systems pose challenges to sustainable development. Proper and innovative inheritance of traditional ceramics is essential for cultural and regional revitalization.

Cross-sector collaboration can improve sustainability in cultural heritage protection and contribute to regional economic and social development. Transforming traditional ceramic practices—emphasizing design, creativity, and cultural storytelling—offers a crucial path toward building a competitive cultural industry.

Although Northeastern ceramics possess significant historical and cultural value, management systems for their development remain insufficient. Strengthening protective mechanisms, increasing investment, and elevating cultural branding are vital for advancing the region's cultural and economic growth.

Analysis of Factors Influencing Development

1. Influential Factors

- 1) **Policy and Legal Support:** Greater policy precision and legal protection are needed to strengthen the preservation and transmission of traditional ceramics.
- 2) **Economic and Market Factors:** Industry development requires technological innovation and market-oriented strategies to meet rising demand and promote commercialization.
- 3) **Social Awareness and Participation:** Public awareness of the cultural and historical value of Northeastern ceramics is essential for sustaining interest and supporting cultural preservation efforts.
- 4) **Technological Applications and Innovation:** Emerging digital and AI technologies can significantly enhance cultural protection, storytelling, and dissemination effectiveness.

2. Development Environment and Management Potential

- 1) **Geographic Advantages and Market Opportunities:** Northeast China's dynamic economic environment and strong tourism appeal provide favorable conditions for commercialization and cultural dissemination.
- 2) **Cultural Innovation and Technology Integration:** Integrating ceramics with modern technology allows a holistic innovation system encompassing cultural inheritance, creative design, production processes, and market expansion.
- 3) **Knowledge-Sharing Platforms:** Establishing digital cultural heritage platforms—centered on Northeastern ceramics—facilitates interactive exhibitions, creative product design, and public participation, all of which enhance cultural experience and visibility.

DISCUSSION

Traditional Northeastern ceramics, as intangible cultural heritage, require both cultural and industrial integration to remain relevant in contemporary society:

1) Integration with Creative Industries

Ceramics should be embedded into the creative industry chain, transitioning from traditional craft to modern cultural products through new production, processing, and marketing models. This transformation will stimulate market competitiveness and cultural value enhancement.

2) Talent Development and Technological Innovation

Specialized training institutions should be established to cultivate professionals capable of integrating traditional craftsmanship with modern design. Policy support and international collaboration should also be strengthened to improve global competitiveness.

As urbanization and modernization accelerate, balancing cultural preservation with innovation becomes essential. Creative cultural-tourism integration and supportive environments for innovation can transform traditional ceramics into key assets for regional economic and social development.

Digital technologies such as VR, AR, and AI offer new pathways for preserving and presenting intangible cultural heritage, promoting diverse and vibrant forms of cultural transmission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Current Research

1. Establish a comprehensive protection mechanism for traditional Northeastern clay sculpture and strengthen cooperation among government agencies, NGOs, and professional institutions.
2. Conduct deeper studies into the cultural meaning of Northeastern clay sculpture to integrate it with modern creative industries and create culturally distinctive products.
3. Strengthen talent cultivation through specialized training programs and promote intergenerational transmission of traditional skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Explore cultural-tourism development by designing cultural tourism routes centered on Northeastern clay sculpture to expand public awareness and increase economic benefits.
2. Investigate the application of new media technologies—such as VR, AR, and AI—in the protection and exhibition of traditional clay sculpture, enabling wider public engagement through virtual museums and interactive experiences.

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