

Mixed Influences-East and West: Diversity of Post-Modern Impacts in Ceramics Higher Education Today

Ray Chen

Twenty-First Century modernism and post modernism, with the idea of the contemporary, is characterized by pluralism. Mixed influences, concepts and impacts, have been reaching Eastern and Western borders with the broadest and most positive definition of visual art in ceramics. It overturns, modifies and questions our way of seeing and comprehending the contexts of the visible and invisible that symbolize contemporary and post-modern artistic language, as well as exposes the symbolic, philosophical vision and aesthetic force. Mixed influences-East and West movements in higher education today extend and reach beyond the boundaries of artistic expression. Twenty First Century thinking in ceramics higher education and learning can broadly exist and be cultivated through initiative, critical thinking and efforts that experience and challenge the intellectual process. Post-Modernism reflects a time of great progress, and “progress” is an important metaphor for change. Change is seen not as a linear progression, but as a series of networks and flows, connections and reconnections that, because they are always forming and reforming, never have time to solidify. Therefore, creativity has become the main focus in ceramics higher education today.

I incorporate the impact of both cultures to communicate the diversity of universal vision evident in my personal and professional experiences in ceramics higher education. Also, I learn and grow from a process of time, culture, history, and value. Process speaks to historical or cultural significance because it is a testimony to cultural continuity, change, possibility, and potential at the core of my creative process.

As a Chinese individual in the United States and teaching at the New England Institute of Education, I am linked to a traditional oriental background and to the modern, post-modern and contemporary technology of American society. My experiences also involve European artistic, cultural traditions and its post-modern expression. My work and teaching is the result of how I evaluate the mixed impact of East and West ceramics higher educational systems. It is an attempt to reach the best synthesis of contemporary communication and to find a link and voice relevant to younger generations that will allow ceramic art education to cross the boundaries of cultural experiences and challenges to achieve profound artistic development.

How does the mixed Influences between East and West and the diversity of the Post-Modern impact ceramics higher education around the globe today?

Germany has a long tradition in Arts education. The roots of the arts as a school subject date back to the times of the reformation of art instruction and have been firmly anchored in the curriculum since 1880. It is based on the character of art education as a cross-sectional task and the strong federalism of the German political system. Also today the accents have shifted, one does not ask whether arts education is good, but one checks the quality of the arts educational projects in particular cases. This means product launches rely on the unusual and inventive.

Through the fostering of creativity, communication, thinking skills, collaboration, and problem solving, the British art education system has become renowned across the globe. The British are dedicated to

maintaining a balanced intellect, developing the ability to think creatively in future roles, encouraging risk-taking, and instilling the ability to question. The Royal College of Art ceramics and glass program represents the impact of the post-modern for discursive practice, where cultural, social, personal, historical, and aesthetic concerns intersect.

Italy is a culturally rich country. Even the smallest village has a wonderfully historic aesthetic that hoards marvelous secrets. Contemporary thinking in Italy examines the development of arts education and its relationship to the concept of creativity. It provides an impact which explores aesthetic philosophy, its traditions and distinct subject issues, and versions of self-expression theories. A more balanced and integrated view is recognized in the importance of the arts curriculum. It responds and also acknowledges within the context of arts education a teaching of form, concept and design in ceramics arts.

The necessity of the arts, and particularly Australia's instrumental purposes within pedagogy and curriculum, provides rich insights into the nature of the Arts, individually and collectively, their distinctions and commonalities, and their place in the ceramics higher education community more broadly. Experiencing the Arts is natural and necessary for all children and young people. The university setting also involves cross media studies and cross disciplinary focuses.

Ceramics is recognized as indispensable to art education and contemporary human life in Japan. In a cultivation of student artistic qualities and abilities, ceramics and art subjects contribute to holistic education and character building. Fundamental abilities not only refer to technical knowledge and skills but also reflect the abilities of communication, imagination, thinking and expressive skills, and the ability to recognize positive strengths and aesthetic values. The history of Kamakura period (1183-1333) wood fired pottery, the Momoyama period (1573-1614) aesthetic sensibility of the tea ceremony, and the Edo period (1615-1866) explosion of artistry at all level of society and the essence of wabi sabi (an often misunderstood aesthetic sensibility) have influenced contemporary art both in the East and West. Today, that influence continues and has gone on to inspire new generations with the Japanese attention to aesthetics of form, texture, color, and materials.

Art education in the United States reflects the social values of American culture. With the democratization of education, opportunities have greatly expanded, artist training has become the charge of colleges and universities, and contemporary art has become an increasingly academic and intellectual field. Contemporary ceramics has been reborn in the last decade and placed firmly in an art context.

China is exhibiting a great change due to their adoption of a national policy of reform and an opening-up of higher learning. The change also includes the adoption of student professional development goals in the national guidelines for art education; blending traditional examination-centered approaches with critical thinking and versatility, and easing exam pressures; so that the teaching structure of ceramics art education has taken an initial new shape. In addition, international exchanges have been actively pursued through diversified channels and co-operative programs. These have been conducted successively and internationally, regenerating China's own incredible history and tradition of design and innovation. Most importantly, Chinese local, regional and national organizations have been actively organizing along with University and art academy ceramics programs for professional and higher educational learning.

The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

The Ceramic arts in higher education today follows a material specific, interdisciplinary investigation in which Fine Arts is the field of research and innovation. To be capable is to open the restless mind to many wonders. We discuss and challenge our limitations and objects. We examine viewpoints, place in time, changes, and improvements as an opportunity to reach the broadest and most positive definition of visual expression and quality. We push the artistic tradition far into the future with possibilities and potential. Questioning is the only constant for learning to wonder about, as well as to wonder at art.

Clay, as a material, has the boundless power to cross time, connect history and challenge the intellectual process. Reflective of this changing dynamic, contemporary and post-modern ceramics continues to explore its role and challenge perceived constraints of the media. Its receptivity to the possibilities of the unexpected and its response to the world aesthetically and intellectually evidences our motivation and vision in our creative process.

As an artist, I share my ongoing process of re-examining and studying advanced contexts, as well as the conceptual and contemporary artistic aspects that reflect new ways to reshape physical expressions, redefine modernism and elevate its visual language. My objective is to open my vision of possibilities and present philosophical views of vast international reach.

As educators, we look at ceramics higher art education today as including the continuing education of ourselves as professionals. I continually seek to refine, strengthen, explore, and expand my knowledge of contemporary concepts and develop my teaching contexts for student learning; guiding and developing each individual and nurturing a productive and interactive multi-cultural environment. The connections between Eastern and Western cultures in my education, teaching and professional artist practice also reflect a positive and supportive learning experience, growing explorative vision, and intellectual openness. My fully participation in the influx of a multidisciplinary and multi-cultural environment are offered with humbleness and enthusiastic energy.

With total commitment to ceramic arts, we believe that ceramics and its expression of context characterizes every reason to extend ceramic's role in the world through providing new avenues of critical thinking, initiative, cultural significance, and technological innovations. We explore clay instinctively and are motivated by its inviting and responsive sensory qualities. Metamorphosis, a kind of trial, is the beginning of a rebirth that allows us to move fluidly across the material of clay and its methods. It gives us a new understanding about ceramic materials; it also challenges our boundaries, creative expression, material applications, skill, and connections with the rich history of ceramics and artistic movements. It provides a new vitality within the broader body of ceramic art and time, paramount as the future begins.