

Article

A Study on the Decorative Installations of Dehua Blue-and-White Porcelain and Ceramic Mosaic Sculpture from the Perspective of Li Shutong's Aesthetic Education of Personality

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Abstract: As a key heritage site within the "Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China" complex, the Dehua Kiln produced vast quantities of blue-and-white porcelain during the Qing Dynasty. Large numbers of discarded fragments from everyday wares found their way into the community, serving as vital mosaic materials for the Minnan *jianciqiao* (cut-and-paste porcelain sculpture) craft, thereby giving rise to a unique aesthetic of creation from fragments—a progression from "World Heritage kiln product" to "discarded fragment" to "architectural decoration." Li Shutong's philosophy of aesthetic education—which prioritizes the cultivation of character and broad insight (*qishi*) over mere artistic technique—gave rise to the practical concept of "forging insight through objects." This approach entails, on one hand, that creators cultivate deep cultural insight and ensure their technical expression remains subordinate to their character and scholarship; on the other, it uses objects as a medium to influence the public's character, offering a localized theoretical perspective for the contemporary creation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Current creative practices involving Dehua blue-and-white *jianciqiao* often suffer from a lack of understanding regarding the material lineage of this World Heritage ware, a tendency to merely replicate decorative symbols, a weakening of the narrative potential inherent in the fragments, and an absence of aesthetic educational value. Grounded in the bidirectional logic of "forging insight through objects" and drawing on field research, this paper examines the localized evolution of Dehua blue-and-white fragments within the context of Quanzhou's World Heritage status and analyzes the practical challenges of their contemporary transformation. It explores creative pathways for mixed-media *jianciqiao* installations across three dimensions: the construction of the creator's insight, the reconstruction of the narrative surrounding the fragments, and the realization of aesthetic education through decorative installations. The study concludes that the contemporary creation of installations using Dehua blue-and-white fragments is not merely a matter of re-engineering craft and form; rather, it leverages World Heritage material remains to translate the cultural memory of the Maritime Silk Road. It achieves a synthesis of the object as a carrier, the creator's personal cultivation, and the moral edification of the public, thereby providing a practical paradigm-rooted in character-building aesthetic education—for the living transmission of Quanzhou's handicraft-based Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Keywords: Li Shutong; shaping consciousness through artifacts; aesthetic education of character; Dehua blue-and-white porcelain; *jianci diao* (ceramic shard mosaic); decorative installation

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1. Introduction

The Dehua Kiln sites are part of the World Heritage property "Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China," bearing witness to a millennium of ceramic production and export along the Maritime Silk Road. While public perception of Dehua ware often centers on the "Blanc de Chine" (white porcelain) of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns of the Qing Dynasty saw a significant shift toward the production of blue-and-white porcelain. Characterized by a

pure, fine white body and motifs featuring folk-style flora, landscapes, and autumn leaves, these wares served both domestic daily needs and export markets in Southeast Asia, resulting in a vast quantity of blue-and-white shards. These discarded fragments were reclaimed by the people of Southern Fujian and incorporated into *jianciqiao* (cut-porcelain mosaic) art-cut and pieced together to adorn the roof ridges and walls of ancestral halls and temples. Thus, waste from utilitarian trade ceramics was transformed into architectural decoration, creating a unique aesthetic of fragmentation in the region. Although shards from the Zhangzhou Kiln's "Kraak ware" were also used in this mosaic art during the same period, distinct differences exist between the two regarding body, glaze, and imagery; this paper uses Zhangzhou ware as a point of comparison while focusing its research on the blue-and-white shards from the Dehua World Heritage kilns.

Amidst the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of Quanzhou's World Heritage status, elements of Dehua blue-and-white porcelain and *jianciqiao* have been incorporated into decorative arts, cultural and creative products, and exhibitions. However, current practices face significant issues: many creations conflate the material characteristics of Dehua blue-and-white ware with Kraak ware, merely appropriating their blue-and-white visual symbols; there is an overemphasis on collage techniques at the expense of understanding the history of the World Heritage kilns or the concept of transforming shards into new objects; works often prioritize visual impact, reducing shards to mere color elements and thereby eroding the material narrative of "waste-to-rebirth"; and most pieces serve merely as gallery exhibits, overlooking the potential of craftsmanship to cultivate character and enlighten the public-falling into the very trap Li Shutong criticized: valuing artistic technique over the cultivation of broad vision and character.

Li Shutong advocated for an art education philosophy of "prioritizing broad vision and character over artistic technique," a concept that extends to the practice of "forging character through objects." For the creator, this means allowing regional ceramic heritage to enrich one's breadth of vision and insight, placing character cultivation above technical skill; for the audience, it involves using the material object as a medium to inspire personal growth and cultural enlightenment. Existing research on Li Shutong's philosophy of aesthetic education regarding personality development has largely focused on music, calligraphy, and teacher training, with limited exploration of its connection to regional handicrafts and mixed-media installations. Studies concerning Dehua blue-and-white porcelain and *jianci diao* (cut-and-paste porcelain mosaic) have predominantly centered on kiln-site archaeology and the documentation of craftsmanship, leaving a research gap regarding the application of indigenous modern aesthetic education theories to guide contemporary decorative creation.

Set against the backdrop of Quanzhou's World Heritage status, this paper takes the concept of "forging insight through artifacts"-derived from Li Shutong's aesthetic education philosophy-as its core thread. Focusing primarily on Dehua blue-and-white porcelain fragments and using Zhangzhou Kraak porcelain as a point of reference, the study employs field research at ancient Dehua kiln sites and sites featuring Minnan architectural porcelain mosaics to analyze the generative logic behind incorporating these porcelain fragments into mosaic construction. By reflecting on the challenges facing contemporary creative practice, the paper constructs a creative pathway for contemporary decorative installations across three dimensions: the creator (subject), the artwork, and social aesthetic education. This approach aims to translate the educational philosophy of "prioritizing insight derived from artifacts over mere artistic technique" into the practice of decorative art, thereby offering new perspectives on the living transformation of intangible cultural heritage associated with Quanzhou's World Heritage sites.

2. Theoretical Core: The Dual Dimensions of Li Shutong's Aesthetic Education of Personality and "Forging Cognition through Instruments"

Li Shutong's concept of aesthetic education regarding character-which diverges from the dual function of painting outlined in *Methods of Cultivation through Drawing*-evolved

from the classical principle that "character and insight must precede artistic skill." It branches into two dimensions: the cultivation of the creator's character and insight, and the shaping of personality through the influence of material objects. The synthesis of these dimensions forms the article's core concept, "forging insight through objects": the use of regional material heritage to mold the cultural insight and character of both creators and audiences.

2.1. The Subject Dimension: Capacity and Vision First, Art and Craftsmanship Second - Research into Objects Cultivates the Creator's Capacity and Vision

In his teaching, Li Shutong repeatedly emphasized to his students: "For a scholar to achieve greatness, character and insight must take precedence over artistic technique." This concept of "character and insight" (*qishi*) encompasses two dimensions: the creator's moral integrity and their understanding of history and regional culture; artistic expression-comprising forms and techniques-is merely the outward manifestation of this inner substance. No matter how skilled the craftsmanship, a lack of cultural depth and insight renders the work a hollow shell. Applied to the concept of "forging insight through the object" in this study, this means the creator must visit kiln sites and historic buildings to engage directly with Dehua blue-and-white porcelain fragments-artifacts of a World Heritage site. By conducting field research on these objects, the creator builds a comprehensive understanding, clarifies the developmental trajectory of the Dehua kilns, distinguishes the differences in era, body, glaze, and pattern between Dehua blue-and-white ware and Zhangzhou Kraak porcelain, and appreciates the creative wisdom inherent in the "rebirth" of these discarded fragments. Only after establishing this foundation of character and insight should the creator proceed to design and physical production, rather than simply copying imagery.

2.2. The Object Dimension: Shaping Character through Artifacts-Forging Public Awareness and Cultivating Character via Fragmentary Relics

Aesthetic education centered on character development is not limited to the self-cultivation of artists; it also engages the general public, establishing a social dimension wherein "objects shape understanding." Handcrafted artifacts are far more than mere decorative items for display; their textures, traces of wear, and material narratives-experienced through sight and touch-subtly cultivate public aesthetics and enlighten the mind. The installation featuring Dehua blue-and-white porcelain fragments serves as more than just an exhibit for a graduation show; it acts as a medium for aesthetic education that embodies Quanzhou's "Maritime Silk Road" heritage and the folk wisdom of circular craftsmanship. By observing and perceiving these material remnants, viewers gain insight into the history of maritime trade and traditional creative ingenuity, thereby fostering personal growth and shaping a public sensibility grounded in cultural appreciation and material understanding.

2.3. "Casting Knowledge through Objects" and Dehua Blue-and-White Porcelain Fragments- the Adaptability of Ceramic-Shard Mosaic Creation

First, the concept of "forging understanding through the object" critiques the tendency to prioritize technical skill over conceptual insight; it addresses the contemporary issue of conflating Dehua blue-and-white ware with the mere replication of simple motifs, emphasizing instead that empirical research and an understanding of heritage must precede formal creation. Second, this approach values the narrative inherent in the artifacts themselves; fragments of Dehua blue-and-white ware embody a complete material history-spanning production at a World Heritage kiln site, daily use and consumption, disposal, and architectural reuse-making them natural vehicles for "forging understanding." Third, this form of aesthetic education focused on character cultivation seeks to transmit the spirit of the tradition rather than merely replicating or restoring historical forms; it aligns with contemporary goals of translating heritage into modern decorative installations, prioritizing the conveyance of the spiritual values underlying the objects over the exact reproduction of ancient architectural components.

3. The Generative Logic and Contemporary Dilemmas of Dehua Blue-and-White Porcelain Shards in Ceramic-Shard Mosaic Art within the Context of Quanzhou's World Heritage Status

3.1. *The Logic of Localized Generation: Material Memory in the Rebirth of Artifacts through Ceramic-Shard Mosaic Art*

As a historical continuation of the Dehua Kiln sites—a World Heritage property—Dehua blue-and-white porcelain reached its zenith during the Qing Dynasty. Kilns proliferated across the region, producing vast quantities of everyday blue-and-white ware for both domestic use and export to Southeast Asia. Production rejects and broken household items accumulated into a massive volume of porcelain shards. Artisans in Southern Fujian broke these shards down further and—leveraging the pure white body and soft, lustrous blue-and-white glaze characteristic of Dehua ware—cut them into shapes such as floral leaves, clouds, water patterns, and the scales of auspicious beasts. These pieces were then inlaid into swallow-tail roof ridges and gable walls, serving the needs of folk beliefs and traditional rituals for blessings.

When compared with the shards of late-Ming Zhangzhou "Kraak" porcelain—also used in this "cut-porcelain mosaic" (*jianci diao*) craft—distinct differences emerge. Zhangzhou shards are characterized by dense, compartmentalized panels and intricate brocade-like patterns. In contrast, Dehua blue-and-white shards feature a fine, pure white body and minimalist, airy compositions—often depicting folk motifs like autumn leaves or flowering branches—representing a separate lineage of Southern Fujian porcelain shards from the Qing era. While both types enriched the material repertoire of cut-porcelain mosaics, they differed in their material origins, historical periods, and aesthetic qualities. The aesthetic essence of Dehua blue-and-white shards comprises three layers: first, their status as material remnants from a kiln site associated with the Maritime Silk Road World Heritage; second, the folk wisdom of "transforming waste into utility" through creative recycling; and third, their role in conveying folkloric narratives when integrated into architecture. This entire material practice serves as a tangible example of how ancient folk society used objects to embody cultural memory, while also offering a historical reference for contemporary creative works that seek to "shape understanding through objects."

3.2. *Three Major Dilemmas in Contemporary Creation (Examined through the Perspective of "Forging Cognition through the Medium")*

3.2.1. The Subject Level: A Lack of Insight and Judgment; Symbolic Appropriation Detached from Material Reality

Some creators fail to distinguish between Dehua blue-and-white ware and Zhangzhou Kraak ware, lumping them together under the generic label of "Southern Fujian blue-and-white." They lack an understanding of the fact that Dehua blue-and-white flourished during the Qing Dynasty, setting it apart from the late-Ming Kraak ware. Focusing solely on the collage techniques of *jianci diao* (porcelain shard mosaic) while neglecting fieldwork at kiln sites and the study of physical specimens, they fail to cultivate a genuine appreciation for the objects through direct engagement with the artifacts themselves. Their works merely mimic the blue-and-white aesthetic; lacking substantive historical narrative, they fall into the trap described by Li Shutong: "prioritizing artistic expression over a deep understanding of the object's essence."

3.2.2. At the Level of the Work: The Dissolution of Material Narrative and the Loss of the Material Basis for "Forging Consciousness" in Fragments

The value of Dehua blue-and-white porcelain fragments lies precisely in their "fragmentary" nature; the fractures and signs of wear are historical traces left by the passage of time. Many creative works substitute authentic fragments with faux blue-and-white tiles, deliberately smoothing over the fractured texture and retaining only the blue-and-white color scheme. This reduces the fragments from historical artifacts to mere decorative elements, dissolving the core narrative arc of "product of a World Heritage kiln

site-discard-rebirth," and depriving the objects of the material capacity to "embody knowledge through form."

3.2.3. Societal Level: Aesthetic Education Is Neglected; Installations Prioritize Visual Display While Lacking an Awareness of Shaping Knowledge and Cultivating Character.

Existing installations themed around *jianci-diao* (cut-and-paste porcelain sculpture) often prioritize visual impact within exhibition spaces, paying little heed to how the works might convey the spirit of Quanzhou's Maritime Silk Road-a World Heritage site-or the folk philosophy of circular creation. Consequently, these pieces function merely as art objects rather than vessels capable of edifying the human spirit; the potential for "shaping understanding through objects"-a dimension of public aesthetic education-remains unrealized.

4. Creative Pathway for Dehua Blue-and-White Porcelain Shard Mosaic Installations Guided by the Concept of "Casting Consciousness through Objects"

Grounded in Li Shutong's philosophy of aesthetic education through character-which prioritizes "character and insight" over "art and literature"-and implementing the bidirectional logic of "forging insight through character," this study proposes actionable creative pathways across three dimensions: the creator's personal cultivation, the narrative construction of the work, and the practical application of aesthetic education media. These pathways are designed to directly support the creation of physical projects for master's degree graduation requirements.

4.1. Subject Level: Cultivating Knowledge through Objects; Fieldwork and the Study of Physical Artifacts Take Precedence over Formal Creation.

Adopting the principle of "prioritizing character and insight over artistic technique," the project seeks to cultivate the creator's own vision through engagement with the physical objects themselves-prioritizing cultural understanding before proceeding to the actual rendering of designs. First, field research: conducting on-site visits to Qing Dynasty blue-and-white kiln sites (such as Dalongkou) and the Dehua Ceramics Museum to examine authentic specimens; visiting Minnan (Southern Fujian) architectural sites to compare-in the context of *jianci diao* (cut-porcelain mosaic)-the physical differences between Dehua blue-and-white fragments and Kraak porcelain shards; and interviewing artisans to understand material selection and cutting techniques. Second, literature review: analyzing archaeological data on Dehua kilns and documents related to Quanzhou's World Heritage status to clarify the historical periods, decorative patterns, and material characteristics (body and glaze) of Dehua blue-and-white ware, thereby establishing a clear understanding of its material lineage. Third, material and prototype experimentation: collecting Dehua blue-and-white fragments (or replicas) to conduct material tests, evaluating fracture textures, collage techniques, and compatibility with composite substrates such as resin and metal.

4.2. At the Level of the Artwork: Preserving the Material Narrative of Fragments to Construct a Vehicle for Embodied Knowledge in Contemporary Installation Art

The creative process is grounded in a deep understanding of the medium and artistic vision; it rejects the mere replication of traditional architectural patterns and adheres to the narrative theme of "rebirth from fragmentation" inherent in Dehua blue-and-white porcelain shards, transforming the installation into a physical medium capable of embodying historical memory.

Material Strategy: Prioritize the use of Dehua blue-and-white shards, preserving their fractured edges and signs of wear; incorporate mixed media-such as resin and metal-in a balanced manner without forcing the shards into perfectly regular shapes, thereby maintaining the narrative focus on "rebirth after breakage"; selectively introduce Kraak porcelain fragments for contrast to highlight the minimalist, soft, and lustrous qualities of Dehua blue-and-white ware.

Pattern Translation: Extract and deconstruct/recompose iconic Dehua blue-and-white motifs-such as autumn leaves, flowering and fruiting branches, seawater, and fish patterns-moving away from literal copies of complete antique porcelain designs to better suit the spatial context of contemporary installations.

Shift in Medium: While traditional porcelain-shard mosaic (*jianci-diao*) relies on the roof ridges of historic buildings, this contemporary approach transforms the craft into standalone mixed-media installations or large-scale wall art suitable for art museum graduation exhibitions; the project can be presented as a cohesive series comprising a "main installation" accompanied by "display panels featuring smaller prototypes."

4.3. The Medium Level: Enlightening the Mind through Instruments-Fostering Knowledge and Aesthetic Education of Character for the Public

Embodying Li Shutong's aesthetic education philosophy-that "objects shape character"-these decorative installations transcend their role as mere graduation exhibits to become media for disseminating Quanzhou's World Heritage culture and fostering public understanding through material objects. First, the explanatory texts for the works have been refined: beyond detailing materials and craftsmanship, the descriptions highlight the World Heritage status of the Dehua Kilns and the folk wisdom behind repurposing ceramic shards, guiding viewers to appreciate the Maritime Silk Road history embedded in the fragments. Second, the scope of aesthetic education has been expanded: alongside the exhibition itself, supplementary educational graphics and simple teaching aids have been developed to share Quanzhou's World Heritage and Minnan intangible cultural heritage with schools and local communities. Third, a bidirectional, closed-loop process has been established: creators cultivate their own aesthetic insight and character through field research and the creative process, while the public exhibition facilitates character-building aesthetic education, thereby completing the "object-creator-audience" cycle of shaping understanding through material objects.

5. Research Value

5.1 Theoretical Value: Constructing the concept of "forging knowledge through the craft" and expanding the application of Li Shutong's aesthetic education of personality to the realm of intangible cultural heritage handicrafts.

Drawing upon Li Shutong's principle that "character and insight must precede artistic expression," this paper proposes the practical concept of "forging insight through the medium" (*yiqi zhushi*). It integrates the philosophy of aesthetic education for character development into the creative practice of Dehua blue-and-white porcelain and *jiancici* (cut-porcelain mosaic) decoration-set against the backdrop of Quanzhou's World Heritage status-thereby translating this educational ideal from pedagogical theory into the practice of mixed-media installation art. This study addresses the existing research gap-characterized by a focus on craft archaeology at the expense of indigenous aesthetic education theory-and enriches interdisciplinary scholarship linking modern aesthetic education with regional World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage.

5.1. Practical Value: Resolving the Dilemmas of Superficiality in Creative Symbols and Genealogical Confusion Regarding Dehua Blue-And-White Porcelain Fragments.

This project establishes a comprehensive creative framework-"cultivating insight through artifacts, narrating material stories, and sparking wisdom through objects"-to directly guide graduate students in creating physical graduation projects. It clarifies the material lineages of Dehua blue-and-white porcelain and Zhangzhou Kraak ware, avoids the generalized, symbolic appropriation of "Southern Fujian blue-and-white porcelain," and provides an actionable framework for transforming intangible cultural heritage associated with World Heritage sites into contemporary decorative installations.

5.2. Social Value: Leveraging Decorative Installations to Promote the Dissemination of Dynamic Public Art Education Centered on Quanzhou's World Heritage Sites.

Creative practice goes beyond the mere production of artworks; by utilizing fragments of Dehua blue-and-white porcelain-a tangible carrier of World Heritage-it conveys the spirit of openness and inclusivity characteristic of the Maritime Silk Road, as well as the folk wisdom of circular craftsmanship. Through these objects, it fosters character cultivation, realizes the social value of "shaping understanding through artifacts," and supports the dissemination of public aesthetic education centered on Quanzhou's World Heritage sites.

6. Conclusion

Li Shutong's philosophy of aesthetic education for character development-prioritizing "character and insight" (*qishi*) over "art and literature"-gives rise to a practical approach of "forging insight through the object." This framework offers a localized theoretical basis for creating contemporary decorative installations using Dehua blue-and-white porcelain shards and *jianci diao* (cut-porcelain mosaic) within the context of Quanzhou's World Heritage status. Addressing current challenges-such as a blurred understanding of heritage lineages, the erosion of narrative potential in shard materials, and the neglect of aesthetic-educational value-it is essential to prioritize "character and insight." This involves establishing a comprehensive understanding of World Heritage Dehua blue-and-white porcelain through fieldwork and the study of physical specimens; respecting the unique material texture of the shards and transforming them into media that embody historical memory; and leveraging the power of handcrafted objects to cultivate character and inspire the public.

Contemporary artistic creation using Dehua blue-and-white porcelain shards is not a mere replication of traditional architectural *jianci diao*, but a contemporary reinterpretation of Quanzhou's World Heritage material legacy. While craftsmanship serves as the means, the core lies in "forging insight through the object" and the transmission of spirit. Future efforts may further explore the application of such installations in community public art and in educational programs that integrate World Heritage studies with aesthetic education.

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