



Heritage and Education in Yixing Zisha Teapot Design: A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Yixing Zisha teapots represent a significant aspect of Chinese ceramic craftsmanship, recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. Beyond their functional role as teaware, these teapots embody substantial cultural and aesthetic value within ceramic art. However, the lack of systematic research into their underlying design concepts and theoretical foundations has contributed to perceptions of stagnation or limited innovation, posing considerable challenges for their preservation and transmission within educational contexts. **Method:** This qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews (N=20) to examine the design principles of Yixing Zisha teapots through the lens of intangible cultural heritage.

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify fundamental concepts embedded in Zisha teapot design and to synthesise key themes, thereby enhancing the comprehension of systematic design principles.

Findings: The findings reveal that Yixing Zisha teapot design constitutes a holistic practice informed by traditional Chinese philosophical thought, incorporating six key elements: design form, method, pattern, aesthetics, and decoration. **Implications for Research and Practice:** This study consolidates principles relevant to Yixing Zisha teapot design, articulates a theoretical framework, and offers practical recommendations for the preservation and education of this intangible cultural heritage.

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Introduction

Yixing Zisha teapots, esteemed as treasures of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, have garnered international acclaim for their distinctive materials and exceptional artistry. Recognised as part of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage, these teapots are

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valued not only for their refined craftsmanship but also for their profound cultural significance and historical legacy. The art of Zisha teapot production has been preserved and transmitted across generations for centuries. The raw material, sourced exclusively from the distinctive Zisha clay in Yixing, Jiangsu Province, undergoes meticulous selection and proportioning before being shaped by hand, intricately carved, and finally fired – each stage embodying the accumulated wisdom and dedication of skilled artisans (Wu, 2015; Xuyang & Hein, 2023). Additionally, due to their unique heat retention and breathability, Zisha teapots serve as both functional teaware and artistic collectibles, highly prized among tea culture enthusiasts (Leidy et al., 1997; Wang, 2005).

The recognition of Yixing Zisha teapots as an element of intangible cultural heritage serves not only as an affirmation of their craftsmanship and cultural significance but also as a safeguard for their continuity and development. The preservation of intangible cultural heritage prioritises transmission, necessitating not only the conservation of traditional skills but also their evolution within the broader framework of cultural inheritance. As a living heritage, the Yixing Zisha teapot embodies both historical continuity and adaptive transformation (Pan, 2004). To revitalise the cultural essence of Yixing Zisha teapots, artisans and designers are actively exploring innovative approaches, addressing a range of challenges that include technical constraints, the balance between heritage preservation and innovation, market reception, and environmental sustainability (Chen, 2014; Lo, 1986; Zhu et al., 2019). Striking an equilibrium between maintaining traditional craftsmanship and accommodating contemporary aesthetic and functional expectations remains a critical concern. The enduring forms and artisanal techniques of Zisha teapots, deeply embedded in cultural heritage, constitute a valuable legacy that must be carefully integrated with modern innovations to prevent the erosion of traditional values while sustaining market competitiveness (Gao et al., 2023).

Moreover, an in-depth understanding of consumer preferences and functional requirements is essential for ensuring market acceptance. This task is further complicated by the proliferation of substandard imitations and excessive commercialisation, both of which undermine the authenticity and cultural significance of Yixing Zisha teapots. Environmental sustainability also emerges as a pressing issue, with the responsible extraction of Zisha clay being crucial for the longevity of this craft (Sun et al., 2024). Consequently, artisans and designers must collaboratively pursue sustainable material practices and mitigate environmental impacts in their efforts to innovate, thereby navigating the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity to ensure the enduring relevance of Yixing Zisha teapots for future generations (Chen & Wang, 2022).

In addressing the challenges inherent in the evolution of the Yixing Zisha teapot industry, this research poses a central question: what key design principles have been preserved from traditional craftsmanship to contemporary practice? It is argued that the design principles of Yixing Zisha teapots are not only systematically structured but also composed of distinct elements that have given rise to unique visual characteristics and stylistic identities. To examine these principles through the lens of intangible cultural heritage, the study will employ semi-structured interviews with 20 Yixing Zisha teapot artisans. Through thematic analysis, this methodological approach seeks to identify the enduring components that shape the design ethos of these culturally significant artefacts.

Investigating the design principles of Yixing Zisha teapots and their influence on form development carries both academic and practical significance for the preservation and advancement of this national intangible cultural heritage. Academically, this study aims to

systematically document and elucidate the fundamental principles that underpin Yixing Zisha teapot design, thereby establishing a theoretical framework to guide future innovations in the field. Practically, the findings are expected to stimulate design innovation within the Yixing Zisha teapot industry, ensuring both the continuity of traditional craftsmanship and its adaptation to contemporary contexts. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader dissemination and appreciation of Chinese traditional culture, highlighting the distinctive aesthetic and cultural value of Yixing Zisha teapots.

Method

Thematic analysis is a highly adaptable method for examining qualitative data, enabling researchers to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within data. This approach facilitates the simplification of complex information while allowing integration with other analytical methods (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Its widespread adoption is largely attributed to its ability to generate in-depth insights across diverse research questions. However, despite its frequent application, the process of distilling intricate data into thematic insights is often insufficiently articulated (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). As qualitative research methodologies continue to advance, a comprehensive understanding of their standards and techniques is essential. This phase of research seeks to identify shared design principles and processes between traditional artisans and contemporary designers. A rigorous review of existing literature and theoretical frameworks informs the development of a systematic coding strategy prior to data analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis serves as a fundamental tool for organising and interpreting qualitative data, with software such as NVivo enhancing this process through intuitive graphical representations. Such tools facilitate the identification of structured and recurring phrases, thereby providing a robust analytical foundation for the study.

Research Instrument and Procedures

In this study, the Yixing Zisha teapot craftsmen were regarded as a cohesive group, with 20 representative practitioners purposefully selected for in-depth interviews to ensure comprehensive coverage of the field from diverse perspectives. The use of purposeful sampling not only facilitated the collection of high-quality interview transcripts but also enhanced the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis. The selected participants were categorised into two primary groups: craftsmen and academicians. The craftsmen group comprised 10 individuals directly descended from the seven master craftsmen officially recognised by the Chinese government, along with their esteemed apprentices. This cohort included two Chinese ceramic art masters, five provincial level masters of arts and crafts, and three widely acknowledged apprentices. Representing the highest calibre of Yixing Zisha teapot artisans, these craftsmen have inherited the design philosophies and techniques of the seven master's while simultaneously contributing to innovation and development through their mentorship and influence on apprentices.

The second group, the academicians, also consisted of 10 individuals, each holding advanced degrees in arts and crafts-related disciplines and possessing over a decade of experience in Yixing Zisha teapot design and production. These practitioners integrate theoretical knowledge acquired through higher education with practical expertise, introducing new perspectives and methodologies into the design and production of Yixing Zisha teapots. In formulating the interview questions, a structured three-generation framework – "master-self-apprentice" – was employed, with questions carefully phrased

to ensure clarity and conciseness. This structure provided participants with sufficient time to articulate their responses while allowing interviewers to rephrase, clarify, and confirm comprehension at each stage. The interviews commenced with the collection of basic demographic and professional background information, focusing on participants' early learning experiences and motivations within the craft. This initial phase aimed to establish rapport, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the data gathered (Table 1).

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Part	Number Question
A : Personal Information	
	1. What age did you start learning and Why learn about Zisha teapot?
	2. Do you want to learn by yourself or someone guides you?
	3. Is there a learning background or foundation at the beginning?
B : Your Master Information	
	4. What kind of shape types of Zisha teapots mainly made by your master?
	5. What are some of your master's masterpieces?
	6. Analyse the design concepts that inspire you.
	7. Have you seen your master making his masterpiece?
	8. If not, have you seen production of other works?
	9. Briefly describe your master's producing process.
	10. What principles did your master emphasize during the production?
	11. How did your master get design inspiration or ideas?
	12. Will your master draw drawings or create directly based on his experience?
	13. During the process of teaching you, did the master talk about. some design methods, patterns or anything?
C : Your Working Experience Information	
	14. What are the main types of Zisha teapots you make?
	15. What is your working experience?
	16. What are your representative works? Analyse the design concept. of the work?
	17. Are there any differences between your producing process with. your master?
	18. How did you get your design inspiration?
	19. What inspiration or theme motivates you to keep creating new. shapes?
	20. Do you draw drawings or design and create based on experience?
	21. What do you think are the traditional design methods or ideas or. concepts in Zisha teapots?
	22. What modern design ideas, techniques, and inspirations can be integrated into the design of Zisha teapots?
D : Your Apprentice Information	
	23. What do you mainly emphasize in the process of mentoring. apprentices ?
	24. What principles or concepts are important?
	25. Do the works of your apprentices or descendants mainly follow your ideas?
	26. Will they have changed or been different in any way compared to you?
	27. Compared with your apprentice's creative process, what is new for you?
	28. What advice and guidance would you give to young practitioners. of Zisha teapots in terms of shape design, so as to prevent them from breaking away from tradition?

Data Analysis and Results

In the detailed analysis and categorisation of 20 documents examining the design process of Yixing Zisha teapots, the objective was to identify key themes and distinctive topics. This process commenced with the identification, definition, and labelling of relevant codes derived from primary sources to clarify their underlying concepts and scope. A three-step approach was employed: The first stage, conceptualisation, involved deconstructing raw interview data into individual sentences to extract and refine coding elements. Everyday language was progressively translated into more precise terminology to establish foundational concepts. The second stage, concept categorisation, entailed grouping related concepts through systematic analysis, filtering, and refinement to reveal word relationships, thereby structuring these concepts into coherent categories (Boyatzis, 1998; Castleberry, 2014; El Said, 2016; Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). The final stage involved further abstraction and labelling of these conceptual groupings to develop overarching themes. Utilising NVivo 12 software, the researcher meticulously coded and labelled the verbatim interview data without imposing preconceived assumptions or biases. This approach ensured that preliminary concepts and conceptual categories emerged directly from the primary data, providing an objective and foundational understanding of the thematic principles underlying the design process of Yixing Zisha teapots (Table 2).

Table 2

Category of Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency
Preservation of Traditional Design Concepts	Academic Heritage	91
Design Concepts	Traditional Design Elements	136
	Traditional Form Elements	153
	Decorative Elements	38
	Design Principles	40
	Design Methodologies	56
	Visual Imagery	45
	Ancient Chinese Philosophical Thought	28
Emergence of Innovative Design Concepts	The Integration of Interdisciplinary Knowledge	55
	The comparative Integration of International Knowledge	12
Design Process	The Impact of Local Culture	26
	The Impact of Practical Needs	65
	The Conditions Facilitating Artisanal Design	88
	The Ultimate Realization of Artisanal Design Forms	62

Design Process

The Impact of Practical Needs

In examining the design process of Yixing Zisha teapots, the interview data revealed that functional needs emerged as a frequently mentioned theme. This indicates that when

describing the design process, interviewees consistently emphasised functionality, highlighting its significant influence on design decisions. Function and form are inherently interdependent, with aesthetic considerations, as an expression of form, reinforcing the necessity for Yixing Zisha teapot design to be grounded in functional requirements before progressing to formal refinement. Respondent A05 remarked, "Zisha teapots are regarded as tea utensils for both enjoyment and use, and therefore must have a practical function, or else the Zisha teapot will lose its value."

The Conditions Facilitating Artisanal Design

In the study of Yixing Zisha teapot design, the theme of "material and technology" emerged as a dominant code throughout the interviews, highlighting the critical importance placed by participants on the superior quality of Zisha clay and its traditional crafting techniques. This emphasis underscores the central role of material selection and artisanal craftsmanship in shaping both the aesthetic and functional attributes of Yixing Zisha teapots. As the foundational element of design, the unique texture and natural hues of Zisha clay contribute to the distinctive visual and tactile qualities of these teapots. Moreover, the exceptional plasticity and air permeability of Zisha clay enable designers to shape the teapots with artistic flexibility while enhancing their functional properties, particularly in heat retention and breathability. These attributes significantly improve the tea-drinking experience, demonstrating the intricate relationship between material properties and product quality (Ströber, 2014). A comprehensive understanding of the physical and chemical properties of Zisha clay is therefore essential for designers. As Respondent A06 noted, "Understanding and grasping the properties of Yixing Zisha clay is particularly important, especially the degree of dryness and wetness during production, which determines the quality issue of the finished product."

The craftsmanship involved in Yixing Zisha teapot production represents an invaluable aspect of intangible cultural heritage, carefully preserved and passed down through generations. Moalosi et al. (2007) highlighted the growing academic and practical focus on cultural design over the past decade, a trend reflected in the interviewees' deep reverence for traditional crafts. As Respondent B09 emphasised, "The primary consideration is the craftsmanship. Zisha teapots are famous thanks to their unique moulding techniques, and their value stems from the unique local clay resources and craftsmanship heritage."

The Ultimate Realization of Artisanal Design Forms

In the design process of Yixing Zisha teapots, "information search," "market understanding," and "design construction" constitute the core stages, reflecting the complexity and multidimensional nature of the craft. Information search involves an in-depth exploration of Zisha art history, contemporary design trends, and relevant literature. Respondent B04 highlighted that inspiration may originate from nature, the internet, and everyday objects, illustrating the diverse sources that inform the creative process. Market understanding requires designers to engage with users and consider consumer preferences regarding teapot forms. Respondent A01 emphasised that innovation must align with traditional aesthetics while integrating functionality and sustainability, ensuring that Yixing Zisha teapot design operates within a system that connects "craftsman-product-user."

Design construction serves as the critical phase in materialising concepts. As noted by Respondent A03, this stage involves conceptualisation, sketching, and prototype development, followed by iterative testing and refinements to achieve a finalised design. Designers must navigate the balance between artistic expression and practical considerations, considering elements such as form, size, and ornamentation. Through these three interconnected stages, the design process of Yixing Zisha teapots emerges as a highly intricate and innovative endeavour, underscoring the depth of thought and craftsmanship embedded within this traditional art form.

Preservation of Traditional Design Concepts

Inheritance of Skills

The inheritance of skills emerged as a key theme, highlighting the master's role in transmitting Yixing Zisha teapot-making techniques, which require expert guidance and reflect strong local characteristics (Gowlland, 2012; Hein & Foster, 2023). Respondent A02 noted: "Two teachers trained apprentices for three years. I joined the Zisha factory in 1978, where Mr Gu emphasised learning from the basics." Unlike standard ceramic techniques, Yixing Zisha craftsmanship relies on "self-study and observation," with limited formal design instruction, exposing a knowledge gap. Design decisions are based on personal interpretation, as Respondent A01 stated: "I observe nature, incorporate shapes into designs, and refine them until satisfied."

Traditional Design Elements: During the Interviews

The researcher found that word usage varies across countries. In Yixing Zisha teapot design, "plant" and "line" were the most cited codes, indicating a preference for plant motifs and careful attention to contour lines. Natural themes, including "birds, animals, fish, and insects," were also favoured. Respondent A10 noted, "Masters create bionic vessels reflecting nature, such as plum blossoms, tree stumps, and fruits." Respondent B03 added, "Design starts with outlining the teapot, refining lines, ensuring structural accuracy, and achieving visual harmony."

Traditional Form Design

Respondents also highlighted the significance of colour and structure in their descriptions, indicating that these elements are fundamental considerations in Yixing Zisha teapot design. In discussions of form, geometric shapes – particularly circles – were frequently mentioned. Respondent A04 noted, "I mainly make round wares. My master used to make Shipiao teapots, and these later became classic types that are widely imitated in modern times. I also produce many Shipiao teapots." This response underscores the prominence of round and square shapes as the foundational forms in Yixing Zisha teapot design.

Additionally, the study identified patting moulding and joint moulding as distinctive production techniques unique to Yixing Zisha teapots, particularly well-suited to crafting round and square-shaped designs. The emergence of the code "geometric combined with bionic forms" suggests a design trend that integrates structured geometric forms with

organic, nature-inspired aesthetics. Respondent A06 commented, "It is still mainly geometric wares that are practical and functional. Occasionally, a small amount of decoration is added as embellishment, which is referred to as geometric bionic combination ware." Similarly, Respondent A07 elaborated, "As I mentioned earlier regarding geometric combined bionic ware, I tend to simplify some figurative shapes to create a minimalist style." These insights reflect a dual approach in contemporary Yixing Zisha teapot design: adherence to traditional geometric structures while incorporating subtle organic elements to foster innovation and aesthetic refinement.

Decorative Elements

Form and decoration are inherently interconnected; however, as this study focuses on the design aspects of Yixing Zisha teapot forms, decorative techniques are not a primary area of analysis. To illustrate patterns of creativity and techniques of expression, the researcher identified texture as the most frequently mentioned code in discussions of decoration. Respondent B02 highlighted that design innovation can be achieved through the manipulation of texture, a perspective particularly emphasised in interviews with the academic group. As noted, "The reason why Zisha teapots are called 'sand' is that the texture of the surface will vary depending on the amount of sand content."

Design Rules

Regarding the principles of form design, interviewees frequently referenced the 'principle of equilibrium,' which pertains to the balance between the teapot's spout and handle. This discussion centres on the aesthetics of form, with a particular emphasis on the spatial relationship between the teapot body and its components. The researcher observed that any alteration to these components influences the overall form, leading to perceptible aesthetic variations. As Respondent A05 stated, "The shape of this teapot body must be visually appealing. The components of the teapot should not appear overly peculiar, and the proportions must remain harmonious overall."

Design Methods

Interviewees highlighted bionic and simplification methods as the most frequent design approaches, indicating a lack of diversity in Yixing Zisha teapot design. Respondent B10 noted, "Traditional products are renewed through geometric combinations, bionic design, and abstract simplification." Respondent B04 added, "Zisha clay varies in texture; coarse clay is granular, while fine clay is smooth. Biomimetic design must capture natural forms effectively."

Visual Imagery

In describing the visual impression of Yixing Zisha teapots, the researcher observed that several respondents employed specific adjectives to articulate their perception of these teapots. Notably, terms such as ancient, elegant, thick, and calm were frequently mentioned. Respondent A07 remarked, "It is still important to focus on the understanding of nature, and traditional Zisha teapots should have a rustic and showy style, not too rigid and mechanized." Similarly, Respondent B08 stated, "Then craftsmanship is the means to realise these shapes, to show the traditional style of Zisha teapots, rustic, showy or elegant."

Furthermore, Respondent B05 compared aesthetic impressions across different dynasties, specifically referencing the visual characteristics of Yixing Zisha teapots from the Ming Dynasty: "The Ming Dynasty gives me a feeling of being plainer and simpler, and the Song Dynasty feels more elegant." These responses indicate that visual imagery plays a crucial role in assessing whether a Yixing Zisha teapot aligns with traditional aesthetic principles. This reliance on visual perception has become a defining characteristic of Yixing Zisha teapots as a traditional Chinese artefact.

Ancient Chinese Philosophical Thought

The design of Yixing Zisha teapots is deeply influenced by visual imagery and traditional Chinese philosophies, including Confucianism and Taoism. Respondent B01 noted that Zisha teapots reflect Ming and Qing aesthetics and customs, preserving their traditional essence. Respondent B03 highlighted differences between Chinese and foreign design philosophies, emphasising the enduring influence of Chinese ideals. Respondents A09 and B10 further underscored the role of natural harmony in crafting, aligning with Taoist principles. They also noted that Confucianism enhances elegance, Taoism reflects natural laws, and Mozi's utilitarianism prioritises functionality.

Emergence of Innovative Design Concepts

The Integration of Interdisciplinary Knowledge

In discussing innovation in Yixing Zisha teapot design, respondents highlighted its strong association with multiple disciplines, including literature, utensil design, ergonomics, and calligraphy. The influence of other utensil designs is particularly pronounced, with designers frequently drawing inspiration from bronze and other traditional artefacts for both decorative elements and form. As Respondent A04 noted, elements from other utensils are integrated into teapot design, with certain shapes evolving from these influences. Literary works provide conceptual inspiration, while ergonomic principles ensure the design remains functionally suited to human use. Similarly, Respondent B09 observed that the design incorporates architectural and literary elements, drawing inspiration from artefacts such as bronze and jade objects. Although respondents expressed a clear drive for innovation, their designs remain rooted in traditional aesthetics, ensuring a balance between creative evolution and cultural heritage.

The Comparative Integration of International Knowledge

Innovation in Yixing Zisha teapot design shows limited foreign influence, mainly from Japanese architecture and iron teapots, reflecting a conservative approach. Craftsmen carefully assess the applicability of external elements. Respondent B02 noted that some teachers incorporated Japanese architectural styles in ceramics, while Respondent A04 highlighted his master's study of Japanese iron teapots, particularly their spouts and contours, which shaped his designs.

The Impact of Local Culture

When discussing innovative design concepts, interviewees primarily focused on tea culture, traditional customs, and religious influences. This suggests that craftsmen refine their innovations within the framework of "tradition," emphasising the distinctive cultural

identity of Yixing Zisha teapot design. Respondent A10 highlighted the deep connection between Zisha teapots and tea culture, noting that craftsmen must consider local customs and the psychological expectations of users in their designs. Similarly, Respondent A07 described her creation of a pomegranate-shaped teapot, integrating the auspicious symbolism of pomegranates with the natural colour variations of Zisha clay to produce a piece that harmonises tradition and nature. Across the interviews, participants consistently underscored the significance of local customs and cultural heritage. As Respondent A10 observed, the Zisha teapot embodies elements of the Chinese tea ceremony, religion, and literature, necessitating a thorough exploration of traditional aesthetics in its design.

Discussion

Through individual face-to-face interviews with 20 participants, the researcher captured the core design concepts of Yixing Zisha teapots and explored the underlying design thinking and processes, establishing a foundation for a systematic theoretical framework. The study's three-cycle coding process revealed that the design process encompasses real needs, the constraints of handmade craftsmanship, and the resulting form, forming the basis of Yixing Zisha teapot design principles. The persistence of traditional forms highlights a gradual evolution in Yixing Zisha teapot design. The necessity for innovation within this traditional framework underscores the importance of understanding and preserving historical design concepts. Traditional forms and elements, mentioned 153 and 136 times respectively, indicate that designs predominantly adhere to classical shapes – round, square, and biomimetic – often inspired by natural elements. The aesthetics of Yixing Zisha teapots, described with adjectives such as simple, elegant, and robust, reflect the influence of traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts, particularly Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism. These philosophical underpinnings, combined with visual imagery, define the aesthetic standards of Yixing Zisha teapots. While decorative elements are not central to the design process, they include common techniques such as ceramic seal carvings, clay paintings, relief carvings, and textured surfaces, demonstrating a selective approach to ornamentation. This nuanced understanding of both design principles and aesthetic considerations provides a comprehensive perspective on the current state and historical evolution of Yixing Zisha teapot design.

The study reveals that market dynamics significantly influence Yixing Zisha teapot design trends, with users and collectors maintaining a strong preference for traditional forms and elements. The crucial role of technological heritage, mentioned 91 times, underscores the necessity of mastering the technical processes fundamental to teapot design. Viewed through the lens of intangible cultural heritage, these techniques guide the evolution of form designs. Interviews highlight a strong drive for innovation, supported by cross-disciplinary knowledge absorption, discussed 55 times. This suggests a strategic approach where designers incorporate elements from other fields while adhering to traditional design principles (Yuanyuan & Yang Zheng, 2008). Despite this openness to innovation, tea culture, religious traditions, and customary practices serve as moderating forces, preventing excessive deviation from established design norms. This balanced approach ensures that while Yixing Zisha teapots evolve with contemporary influences, they retain their core identity, harmonising tradition with innovation (Heiss, 2007; Jueming, 2022).

The researcher outlined the Yixing Zisha teapot design process, noting the balanced emphasis on key design facets. Unlike other paradigms, it prioritises functionality over

aesthetics, ensuring practicality in form (Agung et al., 2023; Chow & Chan, 2009; Zainuddin et al., 2012). Yixing Zisha teapots are crafted for user interaction, where tea brewing enhances their appeal. Designers must master Zisha clay and traditional techniques to ensure compatibility (Gowlland, 2009; Wu et al., 2013). This study establishes design principles, providing a comprehensive guide for practitioners. (See Figure 1)

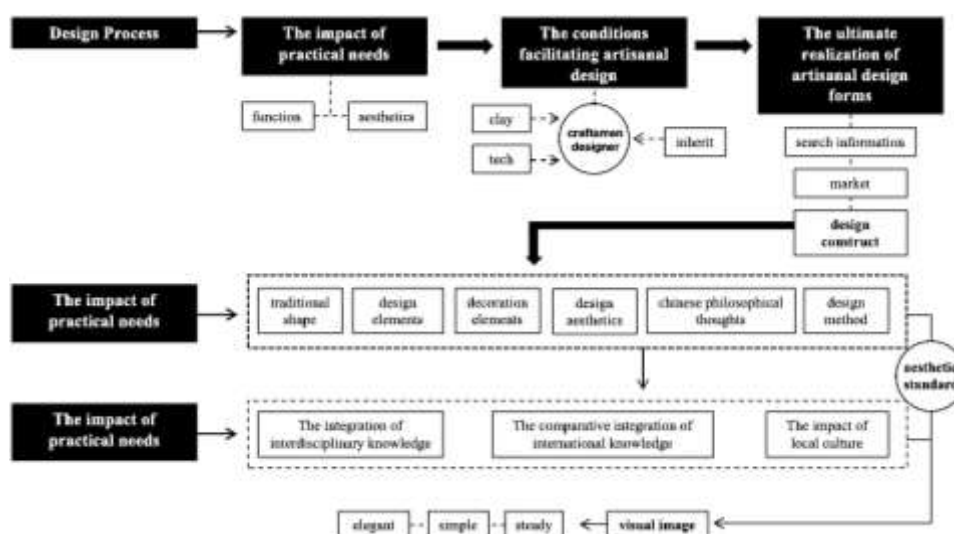


Figure 1: The Framework for the Inheritance and Education of Yixing Zisha Teapot Design Principles.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The craftsmanship involved in creating Yixing Zisha teapots is officially recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. This art continues to be transmitted through oral teachings and skill demonstrations by master artisans. While many novice designers tend to separate "craftsmanship" from "design," the two are deeply intertwined in Yixing Zisha teapot making. Craftsmanship serves as the foundation of design, with the final form realised through specialised artisanal techniques. Existing literature has examined various aspects of Yixing Zisha teapot design from different perspectives, aiming to provide practical guidance. However, the lack of a comprehensive framework for design concepts has left practitioners dependent on learning from experienced artisans or through prolonged practice. This study positions Yixing Zisha teapots as a case study in the broader field of ceramic design, drawing insights from in-depth interviews with 20 Yixing Zisha teapot artisans. Given the "living" nature of heritage transmission, this methodological approach is particularly well-suited for data collection, analysis, and discussion. Using NVivo analysis tools, the research identified six key principles within Yixing Zisha teapot design: design form, method, elements, aesthetics, ancient Chinese philosophical thought, and decorative aspects. By following the design processes and principles outlined in this study, Yixing Zisha teapot practitioners can clarify the logic of design, providing a structured pathway for innovative form development while strengthening knowledge transmission and cultural heritage education.

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