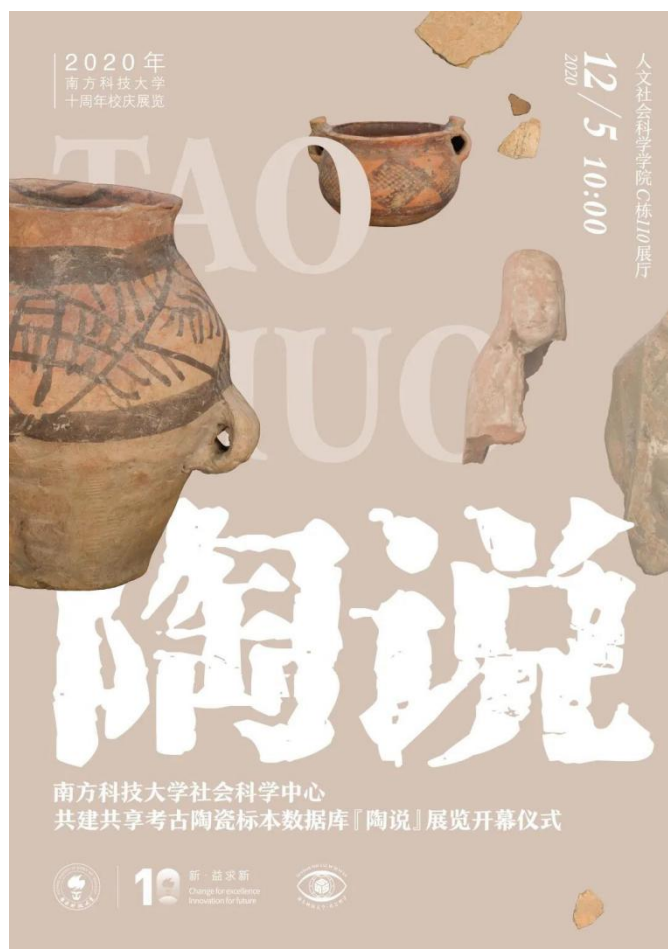


Opening of the “Ceramic Stories” Exhibition at the Ceramic Specimen Collection in the Social Sciences Centre, Southern University of Science and Technology

By Gao Dalun, translated by Anke Hein



Poster announcing the opening ceremony

As the saying goes, “if you plant one seed of millet in the spring, you will harvest ten thousand grains in autumn.” After a year and a half of meticulous preparation, the archaeological ceramic specimen database of the Social Science Center has finally reached a preliminary completion. To display the full cultural and academic value of this archaeological achievement, allow for more people to learn about and make use of the collection to carry out archaeological research, and to stimulate the public's interest in archaeology and history, the Social Center held an opening ceremony for the "Ceramic Stories" exhibition on December 5, 2020. More than 40 researchers from archaeological and cultural institutions across the country gathered at the Southern University of Science and Technology to celebrate the completion of the collection. Among them were Prof. Zhou Yongming, Director of the Center for Social Sciences, Prof. Chen Yuehong, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Southern University of Science and Technology, Prof. Gao Dalun, former head of the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Archaeology and leading director of the Ceramic Specimen Collection at the Social Science Centre, Dr Yegor Grebnev, former doctoral

and postdoctoral student at the University of Oxford and now postdoctoral researcher at the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, and various researchers focusing on ceramic studies, among them Gao Xuyang, DPhil student at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, who assisted in preparing the exhibition.



Invited scholars at the opening ceremony

Pottery is an important witness of the development of human civilization; it is a rich source of historical and cultural information, and it provides important material for archaeological and material culture research. Although many universities and scientific research institutions throughout China have established ceramic research laboratories, most of them are relatively small and not well-integrated in other fields of research at their home institutions. Furthermore, they lack material to use in teaching and for comparative analysis, receiving only small numbers of samples at any given time that they then have to return immediately after conducting a specific analysis. This new national archaeological ceramic specimen collection that is going to be broadened to become international as well thus fills a major gap in this field of research.



Fragments of a Neolithic grey pottery bowl in the process of being restored

The Social Science Center of the Southern University of Science and Technology, adhering to the founding spirit of “Daring to Try, Seeking Truth, Pursuing Innovation, and Striving for Excellence”, established the archaeological ceramic specimen collection. The aim is to preserve ceramic specimens as a resource for research, striving to be comprehensive, systematic, and scientific in collecting and sorting materials for this national collection which is to serve for multidisciplinary research and display. This groundbreaking project has been supported by research institutions from all over China. Since the start of the project in May 2019, ceramic specimens from 20 provinces and cities and 10 countries have been collected, adding up to about 30,000 items, making this the largest collection of its kind in the country. At present, the specimens cover a time from the Neolithic to the late Qing Dynasty, including Neolithic painted pottery sherds from Northwest China and the Central Plains, Shang-period proto-porcelain and earthenware fragments from the South, Song and Yuan period celadon pieces from Hunan, Song period bowl fragments from Jianyang, Fujian, architectural elements (encasings for wooden beams, wall fragments, lime plaster) from Shimao and Tongwancheng sites in Shanxi, and a small number of complete vessels. In addition to items from China, the collection also contains a number of ceramic specimens from other countries including India, Bangladesh, and Jordan, to allow for broad geographic, historical, and cultural comparisons.

During the opening ceremony, Prof. Zhou Yongming, Director of the Center for Social Sciences, emphasized that the completion of the ceramic specimen collection would not have been possible without the strong support from various archaeological and cultural institutions and museums. Prof. Chen Yuehong, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Southern University of Science and Technology,

pointed out that as an innovative university established in the Socialist Pilot Demonstration Zone of Shenzhen in 2011, it was the duty of the Southern University of Science and Technology to establish not only a world-class science and engineering department, but also make full use of the full range of disciplines at the Southern University of Science and Technology and in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area to contributed to the emergence of the "new liberal arts" and promote the cross-integration of technology and humanities. Already in its current state, the ceramic specimen collection established by the Social Science Center has great academic value and research potential, and contains a large amount of research space to be developed further, which they would certainly do, so Prof. Chen promised. The collection, so he emphasized, is a powerful starting point to break the boundaries between disciplines, promote interdisciplinary research, and establish a new type of liberal arts.



At the opening ceremony

Prof. Li Fengliang, Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Southern University of Science and Technology, pointed out that the exhibition "Ceramic Stories" in the archaeological ceramic specimen collection of the Social Science Center was a cultural event that the whole university had been looking forward to. Being timed for the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Southern University of Science and Technology, the "Ceramic Stories" exhibition was carried out under the joint efforts of the Social Science Center and colleagues in the archaeology, cultural and museum circles. This collaboration, so he said, was of great significance and inspiring. Since the establishment of the university, wanting not to be limited to technological and hard sciences, the university had always seen the fostering of campus as a key task, so Prof. Li pointed out. The completion of the archaeological ceramic specimen collection not only adds to the campus cultural facilities, but also enriches cultural and artistic activities on campus. Prof. Li announced that, as an important part of campus culture,

the university will incorporate the archaeological ceramic specimen database into the scope of the Cultural Museum Center at the university and provide further support for this project. It is also hoped that archaeological, cultural, and museum institutions across the country and beyond will continue to support the further development of the collection.

Other people attending the opening also made suggestions for the further development of the collection. Jiao Nanfeng, Director of the Chinese Archaeological Society, said that ceramic sherds were of great significance to archaeological excavations, expressing his hope that the collection would adhere to principles of long-term, comprehensive, systematic, and digital recording. Wang Jiyuan, Head of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology, said that in future, he would continue to support the further development of the collection and strengthen cooperation with the Southern University of Science and Technology. He hopes that the collection can become a ceramic specimen display and research center of material from China and the world.



Gao Dalun, researcher at the Center for Social Sciences, preparing the exhibition

Gao Dalun, curator of the exhibition, initiator of the ceramic collection, and research professor of the Center for Social Sciences, said that the successful opening of the exhibition "Ceramic Stories" and the archaeological ceramic specimen collection would have been impossible without the strong support of the university and various cultural institutions. For such a pottery specimen collection, establishing and growing it was certainly important, so he pointed out, but its greater value lies in sharing its content and opening it for research. In future, so Gao said, they would continue to grow the archaeological ceramic specimen collection, and actively contribute to academic research, public education, and cultural exchange.



Visitors at the exhibition opening

After the opening speeches, everyone visited the “Ceramic Stories” exhibition and engaged in academic exchange on the value of ceramics in archaeological research. Gao Xuyang, a doctoral student at the School of Archaeology at the University of Oxford, participated in the compilation and recording of the ceramic sherds in the collection and the planning and installation of the “Ceramic Stories” exhibition. In the scholarly conference held on the opening day, presentations were given to introduce the ceramic specimen collection, including presentations by Gao Dalun and Gao Xuyang and other scholars involved in the establishing and curation of the collection. The Center for Social Sciences hopes to host many more conferences and other scholarly events, and it is inviting scholars from around the world to get in touch to conduct research on and contribute to the collection.



Research presentations at the Center



Oxford DPhil student Gao Xuyang helping with setting up the exhibition



Presentation by Oxford DPhil student Gao Xuyang