

Style Exploration of Porcelain During Qianlong Dynasty: Tributed by Superintendents of the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln

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Abstract. During the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty, successive superintendents of the Imperial kiln organized craftsmen to pay tribute to the Qianlong Emperor on important festivals of the year, such as the Dragon Boat Festival, birthday of the emperor and queen mother, and the New Year's Festival, etc. At different stages of the Qianlong period, the styles of tribute porcelain were not always the same. The formation of the style of official tribute porcelain was attributed to various factors like economics, politics, and culture. Superintendents of the Jingdezhen imperial kiln during the Qianlong Dynasty also made extraordinary efforts to cater to the preferences of the emperor. To explore the style changes of tribute porcelain during the Qianlong Dynasty, this paper illustrates the characteristics of tribute porcelain in three different phases and the factors of tribute porcelain's innovation and development, indicating that the changes in various aspects cannot be separated from the development of society and emperor's personal preference. For the study of Chinese ceramics' history, it is of great significance to explore the style of tribute porcelain in the Qianlong period.

Keywords: Qianlong, Superintendents of the Imperial kiln, Tribute Porcelain, Style, Exploration.

1. Introduction

During the Qianlong dynasty, China was one of the most powerful countries in the world. With strong economic support, during the Qianlong period, the official kiln porcelain reached the pinnacle of ancient Chinese ceramic history in terms of vessel type, tire glaze, and ornamentation.

As one of the three categories of official kiln porcelain, the imperial tribute porcelain was carefully produced by the pottery supervisor in the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Factory, especially for the emperor's imperial utensils, its quantity is small, the quality is fine, the decoration and the shapes were different from the Dayun porcelain, was the essence of the Qing Dynasty official kiln porcelain.

Since the beginning of the Qianlong dynasty, each imperial tribute porcelain had a list written in Chinese archived, many of the names of the artifacts can correspond to the surviving objects, as important information for in-depth research on the tribute porcelain of the Qianlong period.

This paper will discuss the style of porcelain from the imperial kiln factory of the Qianlong Dynasty selected as the research object. By collating historical documents and taking the existing Tibetan and unearthed cultural relics of the Palace Museum as the physical basis, this paper clarifies the changes in the style of tribute porcelain during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, the relationship between the style and type of tribute porcelain and the personal preferences and court festivals of Emperor Qianlong, and explores the socio-economic, political and cultural factors behind it. This is of great significance to fill the gap in academic research in this area.

2. The Characteristics of Tribute Porcelain during the Qianlong Period

2.1. Early Period (A.D. 1736~1756)

From the first year of Qianlong to the twenty-first year of Qianlong, Tang Ying, as a member of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, successively managed Huaian customs affairs, and Jiujiang customs affairs, and concurrently served as the superintendent of the Jingdezhen imperial kiln [1]. In years 15 and 16 of Qianlong, he managed the custom affairs of Yuehai, and the post of official kiln supervisor was concurrently held by Hui Se, who was also in charge of tax affairs of Jiujiang customs [2].

This period was the early stage of the reign of Emperor Qianlong, and the official kiln had not formed a mature system of paying tribute to the emperor yet. There are 31 times of porcelain tributes by Tang Ying and Hui Se in all. In many of these years, the kiln superintendents did tribute porcelain at all, such as Qianlong 3-5 years, Qianlong 7-8 years, Qianlong 11-13 years, Qianlong 19 years, etc. Till Qianlong 19-21 years, systems of Duanyang tribute, Wanshou tribute, and New Year's Festival tribute initially formed. Although Hui Se's tenure was much shorter than Tang Ying's, only in the 15th and 16th years of Qianlong, he paid tribute to porcelain 7 times, accounting for almost a quarter of the number of tributes paid by pottery officials in the early stage.

2.1.1 Ware types

During this period, the number of porcelain paid tribute by the superintendent Tang Ying was not as much as imagined, and the variety was small. The innovative varieties were also few, most of the wares were made for daily and stationery use. Including porcelain furniture, teapots, lamps, flower pots, braziers, flower arrangements, pen washes, crown frames, wrenches, etc. As well as porcelain shaped in ducks, chickens, geese, and other bionic styles.

During Tang Ying's tenure, he created several new types such as eggplant bottles, auspicious bottles, Taiji bottles, Jiaotai bottles, inlaid porcelain furniture, bonsais, braziers, and other utensils. The most prominent innovations are the delicate rotating porcelain hat shelf and bionic-style porcelain sculptures.

The porcelain paid tribute by Hui Se was also mainly made for daily use as furniture, and stationery, as well as a small amount for religious use. In his short tenure, Hui Se innovated two major types of tribute porcelain, the sedan bottle and the snuff bottle, as well as the Ruyi Zun and the Ruyi bottle. Among them, the sedan bottle was quite in line with the mind of the Qianlong Emperor, who was fond of traveling, and the snuff bottle, as one of the most suitable porcelain rewards, was widely welcomed as a reward or gift for officials. These two types of wares were widely used as imperial tribute porcelain by successive pottery officials and became one of the most numerous types of imperial tribute porcelain. Although these utensils were small, they were extremely delicate and luxurious and had become the unique characteristics of the porcelain of the Taoist officials in the Qianlong period.

2.1.2 Color and ornamentation

Due to the emergence of Famille Rose during this period, the artistic level of the imperial tribute porcelain reached its peak during the Qianlong period.

In the early stage, porcelain for daily use still had the style of the Yongzheng period, without too much decoration, and relatively simple. However, the use of Famille Rose at this time created conditions for the drawing of complex ornaments. The themes of auspiciousness, longevity, and peace began appearing in large numbers. Such as Yangcai Hainai Shengping Shui Cheng, Yangcai Eight Immortals Qingshou Fruit Plate Flower Arrangement, Song Glaze Yangcai Yunfu Bagua Porcelain Chime, Yangcai Jindi Sanyang Kaitai Teapot and so on.

In short, because the tribute porcelain was spontaneously paid tribute to the Qianlong Emperor by the porcelain superintendents, its production was not subject to the intervention of the emperor and the internal affairs government, which created subjective conditions for the two early pottery inspectors to actively innovate the imperial tribute porcelain type, and also created a precedent for the Qianlong period to innovate the tribute porcelain type of the pottery inspector.

2.2. Middle Stage (A.D.1757~1785)

During this period, 8 superintendents of the Jingdezhen imperial kiln were appointed successively, and a total of 145 tributes were paid. Except in year 42 to 44, because of the queen mother's death, the tribute activities were suspended for about three years. In other years, in addition to maintaining Duanyang tribute, Wanshou tribute, and New Year's Festival tribute, there were other auspicious tributes, and there was no gap due to the handover of the two governors before and after.

At this time, the official kiln kept early styling types and created some new types as award, like porcelain belt hooks, toothpick cases, beads, fasting boards, belt plates, etc. Among all these award porcelains, snuff boxes, wrenches, toothpick cases, belt plates, could only be seen in Qianlong Dynasty, and none of them reappeared after that again.

In the middle period, porcelain tributed by kiln superintendents included five categories: porcelain for furnishings, porcelain for daily life, porcelain for study, porcelain for religion, and porcelain for rewards. In addition to porcelain for daily use and porcelain for reward, the number of other porcelains for each type of tribute is relatively rare, usually only a pair or a piece at a time, which makes the tribute porcelain particularly rare.

Compared with the previous period, the number of imperial tribute porcelain in this period was larger, and the colors, ornaments, shapes were extremely rich. The official kiln superintendents continued to move forward and worked hard to make the craftsmanship level of tribute porcelain reached the peak of the Qianlong Dynasty during this period.

It is worth noting that in the second half of this period, the quality and quantity of religious porcelain in tribute porcelain began to improve and increase significantly, especially the porcelain used in Tibetan Buddhism, such as seven treasures and eight auspicious, Benba pot, and Benba vase, which can be inferred that the superintendents knew that the Qianlong Emperor had a strong interest in Tibetan Buddhism.

2.2.1 Ornamentation

In this period, there are ornaments with themes such as fish egg, longevity and longevity, immortal wishes, longevity without borders, and abundant harvest, as well as ornaments that flatter the emperor such as imperial inscriptions. According to the edict of the eunuch on the ninth day of December in the eighth year of Qianlong, the burning of "the New Year's Festival with Sanyang Kaitai, the Shangyuan Festival with the five grains harvest, the Duanyang Festival with the mugwort leaf spirit talisman, the longevity with longevity without borders, the Mid-Autumn Festival with osmanthus fragrance, the ninth day of September with Chongyang chrysanthemums, etc., the ordinary flower appreciation with ten thousand flowers to offer Rui, all of which are made in seasonal patterns." "The pottery official paid tribute to the porcelain, and the ornamentation was drawn according to this will, fully expressing the festive and peaceful scene of the prosperous era.

2.2.2 Color

There are Ru glaze, Song glaze, celestial green, alum red, Ji-green, purple-golden glaze, east green, pine green, brother glaze, Guan glaze, jadeite, brocade ground, green ground, Gong powder ground, yellow brocade ground, yellow ground, beige glaze, glaze red, etc. Covering all the kilns that had ever been seen in the history of China and innovating the richness of the history of never! The colors of these kilns are never seen before.

The period also saw the emergence of imitation bamboo, copper, lacquer, coral, wood, glass, etc. The level of imitation was so high that it could be mistaken for the real thing.

2.3. Late Period (A.D. 1786~1795)

In this period (the kiln superintendent identity was no longer for the Ministry of the Interior officials, but only for local officials. Five local officials were appointed in this period, and a total of 48 tributes occurred, the frequency of tribute is far less than the middle stage. This period maintained the Duanyang tribute, Wanshou tribute, and New Year's Festival tribute in the system.

In addition to this, the number of auspicious tributes was also very rare. It is worth mentioning that at this time, the kiln superintendents would separately tribute to the Buddha Hall in the Imperial Palace.

This period of imperial porcelain could still be divided into furnishings with porcelain, life with porcelain, religious porcelain, reward with porcelain, and literati with porcelain. But the proportion of five categories of tribute than the proportion of pre-significant rise and fall, in particular, the number of porcelain with a great reduction in the number of religious porcelain greatly increased.

2.3.1 Ware type

The types of wares in this period did not change much, but the variety was far less than middle period. Some varieties of religious porcelain in this stage appeared in each tribute list, such as shadow green glaze target bowl, pure gold Tibetan wheel, etc., which was a new phenomenon that did not happen in the two former stages, showing that the Qianlong emperor became more pious faithful in Tibetan Buddhism with the growth of age.

2.3.2 Decoration and color

Tribute porcelain in this period was usually decorated with joyful patterns. But because of too much use of delicate and elaborate decorations, the style seems to be too flashy.

But it is worth noting that, in addition to some religious porcelain, the successive kiln superintendents' decorations rarely repeated or modeled on each other. As for sedan bottle styles, the superintendents paid tribute to 89 kinds in all, with different colors and decorations.

The concentration of multiple colors on a single object is becoming more and more prominent so that the artifacts appear to be more luxurious and gorgeous than ever. In Qianlong year 53, December, the kiln superintendent contributed a gold Tibetan wheel, the effect of copper plating was imitated with gold color, turquoise, and various jewelry was imitated with bright color materials, making it difficult to distinguish between real and fake [3].

3. Porcelain Style in the Qianlong Period

From the 16th to the 18th century, the influence and penetration of overseas culture on Chinese culture was significantly reflected in the porcelain industry of the Imperial Kiln Factory. The tribute porcelain in the Qianlong period showed the characteristics of a variety of cultural fusions.

Became more gorgeous than Yongzheng Dynasty. Resorted and inherited the former color glaze varieties, newly created a variety of color glaze. Inspired by the metal enameling process, imported pigments were widely used at this time.

In tribute porcelain, there was a kind of style that used dense patterns. The emergence of this style was affected by 18th-century European society's popular "Rococo" decorative style, which is a reflection of the influence of Western art on Chinese culture [4]. Governor of the Imperial Tribute Porcelain, decorations show a variety of thematic ideas, such as auspiciousness, longevity, peace, Buddhism, Taoism, and so on. The symbolism of the decoration corresponds to the connotation of the current festival.

The superintendents of ceramics contributed a wide range of porcelain in the Qianlong Dynasty, the number of types far exceeds that of the period of Kang, Yong, reaching more than 500 kinds. Among them, the paper hammer bottle, monk pot, ribbon ear gourd flat bottle, fish basket, garlic bottle, etc. imitated the Islamic country's brass, jade, and pottery modeling, showing the Jingdezhen imperial kiln factory mastered absorbing the ability of excellent foreign culture. Bionic porcelain was a major innovation of the kiln superintendents. Tang Ying contributed a lot of porcelain animals like geese, ducks, chickens, cats, and even conches [5].

4. The Reasons for the Formation Tribute Porcelain Style Analysis

Qianlong period was the peak of the Kang and Qian period, the social stability provided a solid economic foundation for Jingdezhen to produce fine wares for the emperor. Superintendents of ceramics at that time contributed excellent porcelain to cater to Qianlong's inclination.

During the Qianlong period, China had a vast territory and many ethnic groups. To maintain the unity and stability of the country, Emperor Qianlong attached great importance to maintaining relations with Mongolian, Tibetan, Hui, and other ethnic minorities. A large amount of tribute porcelain was used to reward the leaders of ethnic minorities who came to meet the Qianlong Emperor, including the tribute of a large number of Tibetan Buddhist-style porcelain. In addition to the

Qianlong Emperor's own belief in Tibetan Buddhism, some were also used to reward Mongolian and Tibetan religious leaders, becoming one of the tools to maintain the rule.

Due to the huge tasks that the imperial kiln factory was given, the system that the internal affairs department sent officers to station the supervisor of the kiln system. This system, on the one hand, could ensure the quality of porcelain production, so that the tribute porcelain presented a fine and beautiful royal style, on the other hand, due to the governor came from the palace, they were familiar with the aesthetic orientation and habits of the emperor, so that the diversity of the tribute porcelain type and decorative complexity of the magnificence were fully demonstrated.

By the time the Qianlong Emperor was in power, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty had fully established themselves in the traditional Han settlements, China's most economically developed regions, and showed sincere admiration for Han culture. The state lifted the sea ban and opened four ports of commerce along the southeast coast, and foreign contacts and relations became closer. The rulers of the Qing Dynasty had always attached great importance to the education of emperors, and the Qianlong Emperor acquired a high level of artistic cultivation and taste through continuous study. In addition, during the Qianlong period, the country was at peace, the four seas were reunited, and the country's power was unprecedentedly strong, which created a great sense of achievement and pride in the Qianlong Emperor himself, as well as his unique aesthetic orientation in culture and art.

5. Conclusion

Compared with the Kangxi and Yong periods, the Qianlong period of porcelain production technology and design power was unprecedentedly strong, the inheritance of traditional culture and the study of foreign culture provided a solid foundation for the production of imperial tribute porcelain. Tribute porcelain color glaze collection of successive generations of great success, the decorative patterns became more complex. Ware-type variety beyond any era in history. Porcelain tributed by superintendents of the imperial kiln on behalf of the Qianlong period of imperial kilns reached the highest level of porcelain.

The study of porcelain contributed by superintends of the Jingdezhen imperial kilns in the Qianlong dynasty has important historical significance and practical significance. At the end of the Qing dynasty, China's national strength weakened, and a large number of tribute porcelain collections in the Royal Palace were destroyed in the war or flown overseas. So that existing collections are extremely rare, it is difficult to see the full picture of its heyday. To carry out this research, can brush away the dust of history, and help get a better understanding of that period and what brilliant artistic achievements Chinese porcelain achieved. It is hoped that this study will inspire more researchers, especially overseas scholars of ceramic history, to participate in this field of research.

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