

# Painting and Design: A Study of the Color System in Famille Rose Porcelain Decoration

Zou Xiaosong<sup>1</sup>, Zhang Lu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, China

<sup>2</sup>Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, China

**Abstract:** *The color system of Famille Rose porcelain decoration has evolved over 300 years, grounded in the "truth" of color craftsmanship. The "beauty" of its painterly colors and the "good" of its design-oriented colors have been both emphasized and intertwined throughout this development. This article analyzes and organizes the historical development, context, and characteristics of the Famille Rose porcelain decoration color system from the perspectives of painting and design. It raises current practical issues and attempts to explore the value orientation and development direction of the Famille Rose porcelain decoration color system.*

**Keywords:** *Famille Rose Porcelain, Color System, Painterly, Design-Oriented, Value*

## 1. Introduction

Famille Rose porcelain originated in the late Kangxi period, flourished during the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods, and waned in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic era as literati Famille Rose began to rise and develop, continuing to thrive and diversify to this day. It is the most recent and colorful type of overglaze colored porcelain in ancient China, characterized by the strongest color craftsmanship. Its color style can be summarized as "powdery, soft, thick, and elegant", possessing a high artistic aesthetic value. Color is the soul of porcelain decoration and the carrier of emotional expression. It has both the natural attributes of hue, brightness, and purity, as well as the emotional attributes that stimulate human physiology and psychology. It has both the painterly quality of realistically reproducing nature and the design-oriented quality of summarizing and integrating life, making it the most visually impactful and expressive element in ceramic decoration. Therefore, the study of color systems is crucial for Famille Rose porcelain.

## 2. Overview of the Color System in Famille Rose Porcelain Decoration

The formation of the Famille Rose porcelain color system is due to two aspects: first, the inheritance and innovation of Kangxi multicolored porcelain colors, and second, the reference to Western enamel colors and their techniques. The majority of colors,<sup>[1]</sup> other than red (gold), yellow (antimony), and white (arsenic), which are derived from and improved upon enamel materials, are from the multicolored materials of black, red (iron), yellow (iron), blue, green, purple, and ochre color series. Among them, the use of glass white (a lead-containing glass glaze with added strong opacifier arsenic oxide) endows Famille Rose porcelain decoration with elegant "color", soft "feel", powdery texture, and graceful "aura", becoming the representative symbol of Famille Rose porcelain recognition.

There are only about ten basic color materials for Famille Rose porcelain decoration, such as zhuming, yanghong, dalue, snow white, and glass white, but thousands of colors can be obtained by mixing them together. The theory of color harmony was summarized in "Huainanzi•Yuandaoxun" written by Liu An in the Western Han Dynasty: "The number of colors does not exceed five, but the changes of colors are endless."<sup>[2]</sup> Famille Rose porcelain color harmony also has records: "Choose high-level painters, mix various colors, first paint on white porcelain and fire to test the color properties and temperature."<sup>[3]</sup> The harmony allows for a rich variety of colors and a vast color space, providing a considerable range of choices for the application and expression of painterly and design-oriented colors in Famille Rose porcelain decoration.

### 3. Artistry and Design in the Color System of Famille Rose Porcelain Decoration

#### 3.1 The "Beauty" of Artistic Colors

Artistic colors pertain to painting and are influenced by factors such as pigments, tools, and techniques. Hegel referred to painting as "Romantic Art", with its aesthetic value surpassing its utilitarian value, primarily reflecting the artist's emotions and artistic taste.



Figure 1: "Red Rhyme" Zhang Xiaojie

Traditional Famille Rose decoration resembles traditional Chinese painting, emphasizing the charm of brush and ink. The coloring principle follows "color assignment according to category", with differences in "categories" affecting color variations. This refers not only to types of rocks, plants, and trees but also to seasonal climates and postures. For example, the colors of vibrant and withered lotus leaves are entirely different. Modern Famille Rose decoration incorporates elements of Western modern painting, such as abstraction and expression, presenting a diverse and innovative painting world. For example, Zhang Xiaojie's Famille Rose work "Red Melody" combines elements of traditional Chinese and Western abstract paintings, reconfiguring them in an artistic space and expressing a musical rhythm and cadence. (Figure1)

#### 3.2 The "good" of Design-oriented Colors

Design-oriented colors relate to function and are constrained by the utility of the vessel and the aesthetic preferences of the user. They serve both decorative and practical purposes, demonstrating the creator's thought process and design intent. They reflect more of the use value and moral value, enhancing human life and evolving with changes in human lifestyles.



Figure 2: Qing Yongzheng - Famille Rose peach bat plate (partial)

The design-oriented colors of Famille Rose manifest in two aspects: pattern color design and comprehensive decorative color design. The term "pattern" was the translation of "Design" in the early 20th century, already implying a design concept. Patterns can be natural or geometric, with traditional Famille Rose patterns primarily featuring natural flora and fauna. The matching color patterns designed are passed down through generations, highly replicable, and can be called "formulaic colors" or "artisan colors", often carrying metaphorical and symbolic meanings, such as the red-colored bat symbolizing "fortune." (Figure2) Comprehensive Famille Rose decoration flourished during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty and is highly popular in contemporary times. The former emphasizes "technical beauty", prioritizing technical aspects, while the latter highlights "artistic beauty", combining design thinking with the unique craftsmanship of Famille Rose porcelain colors. It fully utilizes color theory elements, color harmony, and color psychology to cater to the aesthetic and practical needs of society and the times.

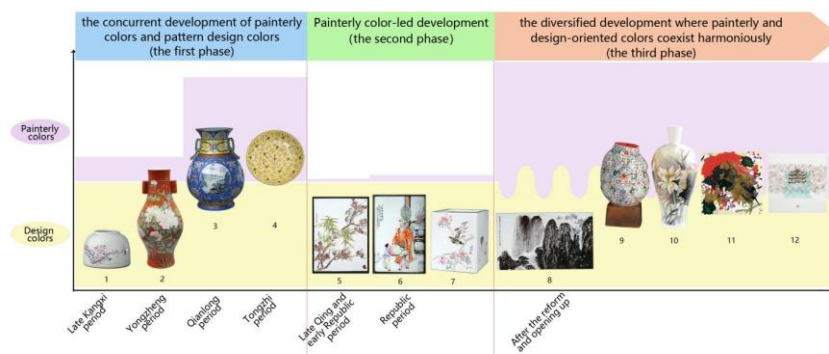
### 3.3 The Relationship Between Artistic Colors and Design-oriented Colors in Famille Rose Porcelain Decoration

Ceramic painting is the main form of Famille Rose decoration, "exhibiting both the characteristics of decorative design and the features of painting art." [4] Ceramic painting enhances the aesthetics and artistry of porcelain, making it an integral part of Famille Rose product design. Artistic colors possess a strong spiritual aesthetic function, and aesthetic function itself is a type of function, with function being the core of design. In addition, painting involves composition design and color design, making the artistic colors of Famille Rose inherently design-oriented. At the same time, the design-oriented colors of Famille Rose porcelain share technical aspects with artistic colors, requiring the use of Famille Rose pigment techniques, painting and coloring processes, and color-firing processes to showcase color beauty. Particularly during the painting and filling stages, various brushes are used, such as painting brushes, picking brushes, filling brushes, oil brushes, washing brushes, and patting brushes. This is enough to demonstrate their craftsmanship and artistic characteristics. Therefore, the design-oriented colors of Famille Rose also possess a certain artistic quality.

In summary, the relationship between artistic colors and design-oriented colors in Famille Rose porcelain decoration is one of mutual inclusion, where "you are in me, and I am in you." They are interdependent and mutually transformative, making it unreasonable to create a divide between the two.

## 4. The chronological development and causation of painterly and design-oriented colors in the Famille Rose color system

In the development timeline of Famille Rose porcelain color systems, there are roughly three phases, delineated by the emergence of light rouge colors and the reform and opening up. (Figure 3)



1 Qing Kangxi, Famille Rose porcelain flower butterfly pattern water cheng./2 Qing Yongzheng, Famille Rose porcelain coral red peony pattern ear bottle./3 Qianlong, Famille Rose porcelain Open Light Landscape Neck Bottle./4 Qing Tongzhi, Famille Rose porcelain yellow plum sparrow pattern plate./5 Republic of China, light color peach blossom double damse bird porcelain plate Jin Pingqing./6 Republic of China, Famille Rose porcelain Fugui Shou Kaotu porcelain plate Wang Dafan./7 Republic of China Famille Rose porcelain flower bird diagram square pen holder Liu Yucen./8 Famille Rose porcelain Huangshan Xihai porcelain plate Wang Xiliang./9 One of the new words of Famille Rose porcelain ancient bottles Huang Huanyi./10 Famille Rose porcelain warm day lotus style bottle Zou Xiaosong./11 Famille Rose porcelain one of the autumn waltzes Ning Gang./12 Famille Rose porcelain metamorphosis Series 11 Yu Jianjiang.

\*Image source: 1, 3-10, quoted from Zou Xiaosong. Chinese Cultural Context: Chinese Ceramic Art. Famille Rose Porcelain [M]. Harbin: Heilongjiang Fine Arts Publishing House, 2013; Fig. 2, Zhang Lu at the Palace Museum, Beijing; Figure 11, from the network; Figure 12, courtesy of Yu Jianjiang

Figure 3: The chronological development of painterly and design-oriented colors in the Famille Rose color system

### 4.1 The development stage of painterly colors and pattern design colors

#### 4.1.1 Qing Dynasty official kilns - Court aesthetics.

(1) Late Kangxi period -The innate nature of the painterly gene. Famille Rose porcelain can be attributed to the early Qing "court painting" system and Western painting styles' influence, which led to

a more delicate and soft approach to multicolored porcelain decoration and improved painting materials. Consequently, the Famille Rose color system's origins incorporated a painting gene and simultaneously blended the simplicity and transparency of multicolored porcelain with the vibrant and multi-layered temperament of enamel colors.(2)Yongzheng period - The pinnacle of painterly aesthetics.It entered the maturation of the Famille Rose porcelain color system in Yongzheng period.It's decoration exhibited "a rich variety of painting techniques, such as flat painting, rendering, boneless method, washing, cun, dotting, etc., encompassing both meticulous and freehand styles, and embodying the essence of Chinese painting." [5] The "boneless method" by Yun Nantian was highly appreciated by the court. Simultaneously, Emperor Yongzheng revered the delicate and refined charm of Song Dynasty porcelain, and Famille Rose decorations displayed a preference for leaving white spaces, light and elegant colors, rich color layers, and a fresh and graceful style.(3) Qianlong period - A combination of pattern design and painting.During this period. At this time, employing the combination of "embroidered ground with flowers" and "open light" for decoration, with intricate yet harmonious colors.The interior of the open light is a painterly color, and the outside is a color ground pattern design, and the colors are complex and not chaotic.(4) Jiaqing and subsequent periods - Prominent pattern design colors during the Tongzhi period.Only the pattern design colors of some Famille Rose porcelain pieces, such as the "Tihe Hall" mark from the Tongzhi period, stood out with their tender yellow, deep green, and bright colors. However, most other pieces lacked fresh colors.

#### **4.1.2 Qing Dynasty Folk Kilns - Lively painting with export custom design.**

(1)Lively folk kiln Famille-Rose porcelain painting - Aesthetic Appreciation of the Masses in. The growth of the commodity economy facilitated the dissemination of painting techniques and color usage. During the middle and late Qing Dynasty, sales of folk woodblock New Year pictures reached their peak. For instance, Yangliuqing New Year pictures inherited refined and delicate techniques and colors from court painting traditions dating back to the Northern Song Dynasty. The widespread use of New Year pictures influenced Famille-Rose ceramics as well. Additionally, around the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the wealthy Huizhou merchants entered the Jingdezhen porcelain industry on a large scale, taking advantage of their geographic location. Dong Qichang, considered the "orthodox lineage of literati painting" at the time, had close exchanges with these merchants, and with their support, literati painting became the primary decorative style for Jingdezhen folk kiln porcelain.[6] (2)Export customized Famille-Rose porcelain design - Western aristocratic aesthetic.A large number of private export orders have enlivened the market in Jingdezhen, they are mostly heraldic porcelain. As a symbol of the recognition of companies, families and other groups, the content and color have regulations and standards, and the cognitive function also determines its design characteristics of simple patterns and bright colors, in which gold is used a lot to increase the gorgeous temperament of the nobility.(Figure4)



*Figure 4: Qing dynasty pastel heraldic plate (from Belgium)*

## **4.2 The Development Stage Dominated by Painterly Colors (Literati Aesthetics)**

### **4.2.1 Late Qing and early Republic period - Towards painterly purity.**

The emergence of light famille-rose marked a crucial turning point in the painting style of Famille-Rose porcelain. The subject matter shifted from craftsmen to literati artists, while the painting medium transitioned from three-dimensional containers to flat porcelain panels. These changes collectively contributed to a greater emphasis on painterly colors.The creators of light famille-rose porcelain often exhibited high cultural literacy and a deep understanding of Chinese painting. They drew inspiration from the light ochre and light ink color styles of the Xin'an School and the Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty. By moving away from the previously "rich and gorgeous" red, yellow, and purple, they adopted "light and muted" colors like light ochre and light ink. However, while these decorative material

innovations facilitated painterly expression, they revealed a flaw in the craftsmanship: the susceptibility to peeling. Consequently, this color process was abandoned by history, but its painting form was preserved and passed down.

#### ***4.2.2 Republic period - A new realm of painterly color.***

The "New Famille-Rose", represented by the "Eight Friends of Zhushan", inherited and developed the light famille-rose's integration of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and colophons. They continued the traditional Famille-Rose craftsmanship from the Qing Dynasty, incorporated foreign art techniques, and introduced new color pigments. The color system transitioned from "light" back to "rich", incorporating more intermediate and transitional colors, resulting in fuller and more three-dimensional colors and a more precise and accurate depiction. Innovations such as "ground mining" and "water-dotted peach blossoms". Consequently, the literati aesthetic of Chinese painting in porcelain decoration has become the mainstream of Famille-Rose porcelain decoration, continuing to this day.

#### ***4.3 Diversified Development: Integrating Painterly and Design-oriented Colors***

During the 1980s and 1990s, Famille rose porcelain was influenced by Western art trends. Increased various artistic glazes, Western painting colors, compositional design elements, abstract sculptures, and irregular porcelain plate shapes gave rise to a diverse aesthetic characterized by the fusion of painterly and design-oriented colors.

##### ***4.3.1 The Academic School - A multi-faceted harmony of pictorial and design colors.(Modern Literati Aesthetics).***

Creators are often skilled in painting, design thinking, and have a comprehensive artistic literacy. They mainly inherit the essence of traditional Chinese painting decoration while integrating modern art aesthetics. They boldly innovate based on the "new famille rose", using rich and vibrant colors, textures, and forms, as well as simple and elegant designs that showcase strong conceptual, experimental, and exploratory qualities.

##### ***4.3.2 The Folk School - Strive to break through the color limitations of traditional painting.(Traditional Craftsman Aesthetics).***

Most inheritors of the "new famille rose" and imitators of Qing Dynasty famille rose belong to this group. The freedom to innovate in terms of subject matter and color usage is relatively limited for these traditional folk artists, as they bear the responsibility of upholding the orthodox inheritance of traditional artistic symbols. Consequently, painterly colors continue to dominate their work. But breaking through the composition, color and porcelain modeling of traditional painting has also become the inheritor's pursuit of freedom in the limit.

## **5. Real-life Challenges of Artistic and Design Elements in the Color System of Famille Rose Porcelain**

### ***5.1 The Paradox of Aesthetic Value***

Firstly, the richness of colors and the powerful artistic expressiveness of famille rose porcelain, particularly following the introduction of subtle rouge shades, have led to a focus on painterly expression through "using porcelain as paper" and "using pigments as ink." This perspective has caused some to overlook the craftsmanship and functional beauty of famille rose porcelain. By absolutizing "using porcelain as paper", the aesthetic sensibilities of painting replace those of decorative design, which in turn weakens the close relationship between form and decoration.<sup>[7]</sup> Secondly, the abundant and diverse color system of famille rose porcelain has encouraged a small number of color-focused theorists to blindly pursue the formal beauty of decoration. This approach often results in haphazard color application, disregarding the cultural significance and professional knowledge behind the decoration, lacking logical design thinking, and ultimately severing the unity between content and form.

Outstanding works should represent a harmonious blend of content and form, as well as an integration of various cultural elements. By correctly and sensibly employing the artistic and technical characteristics of famille rose pigments, we can better showcase the visual aesthetic value, cultural value, and craftsmanship value of artistic and design elements in the color system of famille rose porcelain.

## 5.2 The Practical Value Dilemma

Traditional famille rose pigments conceal hidden "dangers" behind their alluring colors: the potent toxicity of arsenic compounds, the severe excess of lead dissolution, and the release of toxic elements such as antimony. These issues pose significant negative impacts on the creators, users, and ecological environment of famille rose porcelain.<sup>[8]</sup> The complexity of the production process also limits the widespread use of famille rose porcelain in daily life. In the market, only a small number of high-end hand-painted tea sets and porcelain tableware with decals are available, along with a few decorative items like lamps, vases, and boxes. However, "design value is the world of life"<sup>[9]</sup>, and from this viewpoint, the design aspect of famille rose porcelain's colors loses its meaning.

Notably, glass white pigments have gradually transitioned from using arsenic as an opacifier to zirconium or tin, but "lead" remains the primary flux. Research on the color and material properties of new eco-friendly pigments is still in the experimental stage and has not been commercialized. When they reach the industrialization stage, new issues may arise: some scholars question whether such arsenic-free and lead-free eco-friendly pigments can rival the artistic effects of traditional Famille Rose. It remains to be seen whether the change in material quality, unlike the innovation in light red porcelain pigments, can still be called "Famille Rose."

## 6. Conclusion

In Famille Rose porcelain decoration, the painting-like colors represent "beauty", design colors embody "goodness", and color craftsmanship reflects "truth." Only the combination of these three elements can achieve the aesthetic value of the Famille Rose porcelain color system based on "utility." In other words, meeting the demands of the new era requires supplementing the use value and moral value of Famille Rose porcelain on the basis of aesthetic value. By enriching the connotation of the painterly color system, there is an urgent need to genuinely improve and optimize the design color system of Famille Rose porcelain decoration, enabling Famille Rose porcelain to be inherited and developed in a healthier and more sustainable manner. This presents an opportunity to enhance Chinese values and strength in a context marked by multi-dimensional design value-addition and robust cultural confidence.

## Acknowledgement

Funded Project: 2022 National Social Science Foundation Post-funding Project (Project No.: 22FYSB025), Project Name: The Apex of Porcelain: A Study on the Qing Dynasty Official Kiln Porcelain System.

## References

- [1] [Qing] Tang Ying. *Taoye Tushuo* [M]. Beijing: China Bookstore, 1993, the 17th article, round polished yangcai.
- [2] Guo Lianfu, Mao Yanheng. *Chinese Design Theory Collection (Revised Edition)* [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu Phoenix Fine Arts Publishing House, 2017, p. 490.
- [3] Lia Y, Zhua J, Jic L, et al. *Study of arsenic in Famille rose porcelain from the Imperial Palace of Qing Dynasty, Beijing, China*[J]. *Porcelain*, 2018, 44(2):1627-1632. DOI:10.1016/j.ceramint. 2017. 10. 084.
- [4] Zhang Yalin, Gao Xiangkun. *Art in Craftsmanship - A Discussion on "Ceramic Decoration" and "Ceramic Painting"* [J]. *China Ceramics*, 2020, Vol. 56 (No. 5), p. 92.
- [5] Kong Liqing. *History of Chinese Ceramic Painting Art* [M]. Nanjing: Southeast University Press, 2003, p. 288.
- [6] Yan Chongnian. *A Thousand Years of the Imperial Kiln* [M]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2017, p. 186.
- [7] Zou Xiaosong. *Chinese Cultural Context: Chinese Ceramic Art. Famille Rose Porcelain* [M]. Harbin: Heilongjiang Fine Arts Publishing House, 2013, p. 21.
- [8] Cao Chun'e, Chen Yunxia, et al. *Research on Famille Rose Porcelain and Non-toxic Famille Rose Pigments* [J]. *Journal of Ceramics*, 2011, Vol. 32 (Issue 4), pp. 506-511.
- [9] Li Lixin. *Theory of Design Value* [M]. Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press, 2011, p. 183.