

Analysis and Study of Porcelain Art in the Ming Jiajing Period

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Abstract: Taoism is the most pure and indigenous religious sect in China, and one of the most representative aspects of Taoist culture is the art of porcelain. In the late Ming Dynasty, as the Jiajing emperor revered Taoism, porcelain decorations were strongly Taoist. This paper analyzes the historical background of Chinese porcelain development in the Ming-Jiajing period and analyzes the reasons why porcelain patterns were influenced by Taoism; from an artistic perspective, it classifies porcelain patterns by subject matter and scope of application and analyzes their artistic characteristics; from an anthropological perspective, it analyzes porcelain patterns under the influence of Taoism in the Ming-Jiajing period and deciphers the aesthetic implications of Taoist culture.

Keywords: Ming Jiajing Period; Taoist Culture; Religion; Porcelain; Pattern Art

1. Introduction

Taoist culture is one of the cores of traditional Chinese culture. Taoist culture has a wide influence on China, and Taoist aesthetic thought comes from Taoist culture, and much of the later understanding of aesthetic and artistic creation comes from Taoist aesthetics, which advocates natural inaction and natural beauty, a pure aesthetics that breaks through social norms and political and ethical constraints. Porcelain is one of the products of the influence of Taoist aesthetics. In the history of Chinese ceramics, the decoration of ceramics in each historical period has different characteristics of the times, and the motifs are also influenced by folk customs, religious beliefs, and the background of the times, with a rich variety of compositions, forms, and cultural meanings [1]. In this paper, we try to look at the aesthetic and artistic ecology of the Ming dynasty under the influence of the Ming Jiajing emperors, and hope to contribute to the study of art theory by taking Ming Jiajing blue and white porcelain as an example.

2. A Study of the Historical Background of the Development of Porcelain in the Ming Jiajing Period

According to historical records, Ming Jiajing period, the Jiajing Emperor Zhu Houchuan since childhood intelligent, read and recite, the early reign of some action, but after experiencing the "Imjin Palace Change" will be discouraged, disinterested in the government, ignoring the lives of the people, the construction of large, arbitrary spending. The important matters of the court are left to the control of the traitor Yan Song, resulting in constant wars, the people do not want to live, the country is in jeopardy. But Jiajing Emperor still pursued the enjoyment of life, especially for porcelain is quite fond of. According to the recorded information, "In the sixteenth year of the Jiajing reign (1537), 2000 new ritual objects were manufactured for the Seven Imperial Ming Tombs. In the seventeenth year of the Jiajing reign (1538), a total of 1510 white porcelain plates were fired for the Changling and other tombs in Raozhou Prefecture. In the thirty-seventh year of the Jiajing reign (1558), a total of 30,000 pieces of porcelain were produced in Jiangxi for use in the inner halls" [2]. From the records we can learn that Jiajing its reign of forty to fifty years have a large number of records of firing into porcelain every year, decades without interruption. Wang Shimao also described the scene of official kilns firing porcelain in his book "Er Wei You Tan." He wrote, "Porcelain from kilns all over the country gathered here, and the people were prosperous. This province was the wealthiest. Porcelain was transported here multiple times under the supervision of officials, and the sound of porcelain-making was loud. Porcelain was even fired at night, with the flames illuminating the sky, making it so bright that people couldn't sleep" [3]. This indicates that porcelain production during the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty reached an unprecedented level of prosperity.

Due to the shortage of official kilns in Jingdezhen, the measure of "official firing" was adopted, and the official specified the firing standards to the private kilns instead of firing, so the firing of the private kilns was strictly controlled in terms of quality, style, and details, which in turn promoted the development of the private kilns and greatly shortened the gap between the official kilns and the private kilns. In the late Jiajing Dynasty, the firing level of the private kilns was very close to that of the official kilns. However, the excessive firing of porcelain, not without delicacy and roughness, but also objectively show the prosperity and development of porcelain in the Jiajing period, for the development of Chinese porcelain in pattern type and shape laid a deep foundation.

In addition, the reign of the Jiajing emperor, revered Taoism, with the consolidation and strengthening of the imperial position, the late for Taoism more worship and obsession, religious activities increasingly close, they no longer care about government affairs, in the palace to engage in jiao-festival activities. Jiajing period, a large number of fired porcelain is for the emperor's jiao, many of these porcelain is used as a sacrificial apparatus, so the influence of Taoism, prompting the Chinese porcelain patterns and shapes are pervaded by the Taoist style.

In history, Taoism is based on the ideology of Daoist philosophy, and therefore, its aesthetic connotations also derive from Daoist aesthetic thoughts. Daoist aesthetic thoughts have had a significant influence and contribution to Chinese aesthetics. Daoism advocates the concept of "following the natural course" and the unity of heaven and humanity. It does not restrict artistic aesthetic creation activities and does not confine beauty to only elegant objects. It believes that beauty and ugliness do not have a direct opposition. Therefore, the ceramic patterns influenced by Taoism possess unique aesthetic characteristics. From an artistic perspective, Emperor Jiajing's devotion to Taoism also further stimulated the development of Taoist ornamentation

3. Interpreting porcelain art under the influence of Taoism in the Ming Jiajing period

During the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, Taoism was revered and became unprecedentedly popular because of the emperor's belief in Taoism, and a large number of Taoist motifs appeared on official and folk porcelain. These patterns include cloud and crane motifs, gourd motifs, Tai Chi Bagua motifs, blue dragon motifs, qilin motifs, lotus motifs, etc. These motifs embody different cultural connotations of Taoism in figure painting, landscape painting, and bird-and-flower painting, becoming expressions of Taoist art in ceramics. The patterns range from figurative to abstract patterns, with composition and allegorical meaning, coupled with the different occasions and different uses of Ming Jiajing Taoist porcelain, making the porcelain of the Ming Jiajing period quite elaborate, highly religious features and artistic connotations, giving people a visual and spiritual sense of infinite beauty.

3.1 Artistic classification of porcelain patterns

Therefore, this paper categorizes and analyzes porcelain patterns during the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, and finds that Taoist motifs are mainly divided into figurative patterns and abstract patterns. The porcelain patterns are divided according to the composition of the subject matter, which can be divided into the following major categories in the broad dimension: plant patterns, animal patterns, figure patterns, and geometric patterns. The different types of patterns are divided into sub-categories, and the porcelain patterns are characterized by different styles and rich meanings, which are of great research value.

(1) Plant motifs:

During the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, there was a wide variety of ceramic patterns, which can be categorized into floral patterns, tree patterns, and fruit patterns based on their plant-based motifs and themes. Extensive data analysis indicates that the most commonly used floral pattern was the lotus flower motif. The lotus flower is a traditional floral pattern in China, dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, where it was used as a decorative motif symbolizing purity and elegance. It is praised as a symbol of a noble person who remains untainted by the muddy world. Taoism also regards the lotus flower as its symbol. The intertwined lotus vine motif, in particular, represents the epitome of ceramic decoration and is widely employed. The compositional forms often feature undulating waves, "S"-shapes, and whirlpool-like patterns, symbolizing continuous and uninterrupted flow (Figure 1).

Ming Jiajing period porcelain tree pattern, pine pattern, bamboo pattern, etc. The most commonly seen in porcelain is the "three friends of the year" pattern (Figure 2), from the beginning of the historical

and cultural sources, the three friends of the year has a unique symbolic meaning different from other patterns and close relationship with Taoist culture. Pine, proud of the frost and snow, is an important symbol because of its longevity, and does not wither through the winter, and is used to wish for longevity, while the original symbolism in Taoism becomes immortality [4]; Bamboo has been a symbol of unwavering strength and resilience since ancient times. In Taoism, the interconnected and hollow structure of bamboo is often associated with the essence of human vitality and spirit. It signifies that to embody the spirit of bamboo, one must maintain openness and purity within, allowing the smooth flow of vital energy and fostering an indomitable spirit. The phrase "The fragrance of plum blossoms comes from bitter cold" reflects the qualities of plum trees that have been praised throughout history. These qualities align with the ascetic practices and teachings of Taoism. Taoism associates plum blossoms with the virtues of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness," fulfilling the moral conduct required in Taoist philosophy. The combination of these three motifs gives rise to the "Three Friends of Winter" pattern, symbolizing noble ideals and pristine qualities.

Fruit patterns include grapes, peaches, pomegranates, etc., and the most commonly used decoration on porcelain of the Ming Dynasty is the peach pattern, which occupies an important position in traditional Chinese plant patterns. The peach motifs on blue-and-white porcelain of the Jiajing period mostly had the meaning of longevity, well-being and good fortune.



Fig. 1 A blue-and-white jar with a lotus pattern



Fig. 2 A blue-and-white dish with a pine, bamboo and plum tree pattern



Fig. 3 A blue-and-white basin with a peach pattern, Ming Dynasty, Jiajing

(2) Animal motifs:

The porcelain patterns of the Ming Jiajing period are categorized by subject matter with animal characteristics, and according to the attributes, animal patterns can be divided into four strong patterns, five animal patterns, phoenix and bird patterns, fish patterns, and other patterns. Four strong patterns: four strong refers to dragon, tiger, wolf, leopard and other patterns. Five animal patterns: Five animal patterns refer to horse, deer, sheep, cow and camel patterns. Fenghuang pattern: refers to the pattern with bird-shaped class, such as: phoenix, peacock, mandarin ducks, dancing crane pattern, etc. Fish pattern: including all figurative and abstract patterns with fish pattern. Other patterns: In addition to the above five types of patterns, other patterns belong to the patterns that do not have obvious classification characteristics, such as: bat patterns, dragonfly patterns, etc. The most common animal patterns in porcelain are the dragon pattern in the four strong patterns, the sheep pattern in the five animal patterns, the crane pattern and the phoenix pattern in the phoenix bird pattern, and the bat pattern in the other patterns are also commonly used, but not alone, often combined with the peach pattern, etc., as an auxiliary decorative pattern.

In Taoist culture, dragons can assist Taoist priests to communicate with the gods and go to heaven and earth. As history developed, the symbolic meaning of dragons was gradually extended to the extent that it later evolved into the ability of the true ruler to summon and drive away dragons, so dragons are one of the frequently expressed motifs in Taoism, and thus are often reflected in porcelain of the Jiajing period (Figure 4).

The auspicious meaning of the sheep motif comes from Taoist culture, and there are many records of sheep in Taoist trigrams. "Yang" to indicate the vigorous growth of all things in the world, meaning longevity. Since the Jiajing dynasty, the words of the three yang kaitai are the auspicious words of the three sheep, and the auspicious words have been expressed in the blue and white porcelain with specific ornamental images, which is obviously an aesthetic preference of the Jiajing emperor himself (Figure 5).

The crane is the sacred bird of Taoism, which attaches great importance to the cultivation of life and the pursuit of immortality, and the crane is the mount of the Taoist priest after ascending to heaven and becoming immortal. Taoism also called the crane longevity immortal, such symbolism is the Taoist warlock according to its cultivation theory to imagine and create, the image of the crane symbolized as

the ideal of immortality, as the Jiajing emperor obsessed with longevity, the crane preference, often done in the palace on the "call the crane" of the jiao-festival activities. Therefore, the crane pattern appears in a large number of porcelain decorations, crane pattern has a single appearance to do auxiliary decoration, but also a number of circling and dancing to do the main decoration, common cloud crane pattern, cloud crane bagua pattern, cloud crane talisman pattern, etc. (Figure 6)



Fig. 4 Blue and white blue jar with clouds, dragons, cranes and phoenixes



Fig. 5 Blue and white blue bowl with three sheep and a tilting bell



Fig. 6 Jiajing blue and white plate with clouds and cranes

(3) Figure pattern:

The porcelain figures of the Jiajing period are significantly more than those of the early Ming period, with a rich variety of subjects and types. The figures of the early Ming period are more restrained in image and metaphorical in emotional expression, presenting a kind of immortal style; while the figures of the Jiajing period change the metaphorical style, presenting them enthusiastically and outlining them freely, with Taoist teachings throughout; the Ming dynasty entered the late period since the Jiajing, due to the development of the budding capitalism and the popularity of opera and novels. Artistic storytelling was more prominent, which was expressed in art as the image of many gods and goddesses, and porcelain decoration in the Jiajing period gave specificity to the gods and goddesses, giving them clear physical characteristics for better dissemination, thus increasing the strength of the influence of Taoism in society [7]. The images of the deities depicted in the decoration were distinctive and unique, and people were bound to admire and love them when they saw the specific images of the deities, thus truly accepting Taoist ideas (Figure 7).



Fig. 7 Bowl with five-color group of immortals

(4) Geometric Patterns:

Jiajing period porcelain geometric patterns are mainly divided into text patterns and runic patterns. Text patterns drawn in porcelain can express personal thoughts, is the emotional output, direct blessing. The most significant number of Jiajing-period porcelain with text patterns are "longevity," "auspiciousness," "jin yu mantang," and other texts, mostly related to the Jiajing emperor's reverence for Taoism and the pursuit of immortality. Most of them are related to the Jiajing emperor's reverence for Taoism and his pursuit of immortality (see Figure 8). These symbols are very special in shape, embodying a combination of script and graphics, such as gossip and charms, whose script resembles seal script or resembles wild cursive, mixed with clouds and air. It is very beautiful in abstract decoration (Figure 9). In short, geometric patterns became a decorative element of porcelain, promoting an alternative decorative style in ceramic aesthetics.



Fig. 8 Gourd vase with auspicious chant in blue and white



Fig. 9 Double-ear stove with eight trigrams

3.2 Characteristics of the range of application of porcelain

Daoist ceramics of the Jiajing period show various forms from emergence, development to maturity, a reflection of the rhythm and complete process of the life of religion in ceramics. Here ceramics are the utensils that serve religion and are the bearers of religious ideas and concepts. We follow the rhythm of religious growth, take the religious function of ceramics as the standard, and follow the unified approach of history and logic to classify the Daoist porcelain of the Ming Jiajing period as follows[5].

(1) Ritual porcelain:

Human religious activities have never been to the supernatural power worship, sacrifice for its characteristics as the beginning, is a way of survival in the face of unmeasured control of human power. Jiajing Taoist activities are no exception, according to the "History of Ancient Chinese Architecture" records "Jiajing time to change the sacrificial hall for praying for the Valley altar, down to the summer sacrifice place. As documented in "A History of Ancient Chinese Architecture," during the Jiajing period, significant architectural changes took place in the realm of sacrificial rituals. The large hall originally used for these ceremonies was transformed into the Qigu Altar, and a Round Altar was established specifically for worshiping the heavens. Moreover, the construction of the Sun Altar and Moon Altar took place in the eastern and western outskirts of Beijing, respectively. These activities were manifested in ceramics through sacrificial rituals, encompassing religious reverence for celestial bodies, natural elements, and geographical features such as mountains and rivers. Consequently, a substantial quantity of sacrificial ceramics was produced during the Jiajing period. With historical records of the Jiajing period ceremonial porcelain in addition to the amazing number, Jiajing ceremonial porcelain also has a variety of types, according to the shape can be divided into: ovens, jars, jars, bottles, bowls, plates, etc., as far as the type of furnace, for example, there are "three-legged furnace, barrel-shaped furnace, drum nail furnace, cupola furnace, flat round three-legged furnace, etc." [6].

(2) Porcelain with immortal words:

In the early Jiajing period, Taoism was emerging, but it had not yet developed into a mature stage. The early Taoist rituals, which belonged to the primary stage of religious development, were based on sacrifices to heaven and earth, ancestors and natural objects, and were reflected in the appearance and prosperity of various ritual porcelains on porcelain. In fact, the rituals of heaven and ancestors are still preserved to this day as a New Year's custom for the people. However, the development of religion itself, necessarily requires the emergence of human gods. In other words, at a certain stage of religious development, myths emerge. In the case of Taoism, mythological activities are mainly taken from some folk mythological stories and legends, legends of ancient religious gods, folklore stories and legends of immortality, and legends of the gods and goddesses believed in by the people, etc. Mythological activities are presented on porcelain, which is the fairy-tale porcelain, such as "Eight Immortals crossing the sea", "Nwa" and other fairy tales porcelain, meaning good luck and praying for good fortune.

(3) Vessel porcelain:

If the role of "Immortal Porcelain" in the "deification" stage of religious development is considered important, then "Offering Porcelain" serves as the demarcation line between the realm of gods and the realm of humans, where gods are revered and worshipped by people and are perpetually offered. Images of various deities are molded and fired into porcelain statues or depicted through porcelain prints,

resulting in the creation of offering porcelain. For instance, the renowned porcelain carving artist He Chaozong (1522-1620), during the Jiajing to Wanli periods, created the statue of Emperor Wen Chang, which is currently housed in the Fujian Provincial Museum. Relatively speaking, offering porcelain or porcelain prints have lower educational requirements for the general public, yet they contain a wealth of information that surpasses that of written texts. Belief serves as an excellent tool for preaching, and offering porcelain represents one of the indispensable stages in the development of religion.

4. The Aesthetic Implications of Ming Jiajing Period Porcelain

The Chinese traditional culture takes "harmony" as the first priority, avoiding "one single show". The "harmony" in the arts and humanities refers to "integration", in addition to the evolution and promotion of Confucianism, Taoism and other Zen thoughts, but also to the integration and interchange of various ethnic cultures, thus evolving into an important spiritual core of Chinese civilization. Ming Jiajing period porcelain contains decorative connotations, color symbols, as well as reflect the reverence for religious spirit and artistic connotations can reflect its unique beauty, which in turn contributed to the "spiritual" heritage of Chinese porcelain and "rhyme" development.

From the development of porcelain in the Ming Jiajing period, we can appreciate the spiritual connotation of reverence for the unity of heaven and man, and the profound influence of Taoist teachings on art. Porcelain creators take inspiration from heaven and earth, cultivate the body and temperament, cultivate the personality, insight into the human condition, to achieve the "thing I for one" state of art. The aesthetic consciousness of "both the form and the spirit" gives more connotation than the object itself.

Confucianism and Taoism are significant pillars of traditional Chinese culture, and the ceramic art of the Jiajing period developed within the historical progress of these two religions. Taoist philosophy similarly incorporates various elements from traditional ideologies, combining Confucianism, Buddhism, ancient religions, and practices related to immortals, among others. This illustrates the open and inclusive attitude of Taoism. The aesthetic thought resulting from the fusion of Confucianism and Taoism saw tremendous development during the Ming Dynasty. Confucianism emphasizes "li" (principle), while Taoism focuses on cultivating one's "ming" (life or destiny). Both philosophies are deeply rooted in the soil of Chinese traditional culture, mutually influencing and blending with each other, and further enhancing and refining themselves. The interplay of Confucianism and Taoism is reflected in the ceramics of the Jiajing period, imbuing the decorative patterns of that era with greater aesthetic depth.

5. Conclusion

The development of Chinese ceramics not only requires aesthetic beauty but also demands a pursuit of life values that encompass both form and spirit. From the perspective of Taoist aesthetics, a good artwork possesses a soul. The ceramic art of the Jiajing period in the Ming Dynasty represents a significant aspect of Chinese history. Excellent ceramic works require the elegance and harmony of their forms, a well-balanced color palette, and a rich artistic expression through the comprehensive ornamentation of ceramics. The author's understanding of religious culture and ceramic art remains limited. However, through the analysis and study of ceramics influenced by Taoism during the Jiajing period, it is hoped to contribute to the appreciation of the aesthetic aspects and related classification systems of Jiajing ceramics, thereby promoting a more objective understanding of the aesthetic style of art during the Jiajing period.

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