

The Beauty of Song Dynasty Porcelain —Taking Song Dynasty Porcelain for Daily Use as an Example

Yumeng Lu^{1,2}

¹School of Humanities, Tongji University, Chifeng Road, Yangpu District, Shanghai, China

²School of Art discipline, Jiangsu Second Normal University, Beijing West Road, Gulou District, Nanjing, China

Abstract: *Song Dynasty porcelain is a peak in the history of ceramics, a milestone in technology and aesthetics. The aesthetic style of the Song Dynasty is mainly based on interest; that is, it emphasizes the aesthetic ideal of plainness, elegance, and beauty. This is also clearly presented in the ceramic design of the Song Dynasty. The beauty of Song Dynasty porcelain not only reflects the social style and lifestyle of the people of the Song Dynasty but also reflects the exquisiteness in the elegance, the incredible beauty in the plainness, and the cultural quality of life in the shape and design of porcelain in the Song Dynasty. These characteristics are well demonstrated in the daily necessities of Song Dynasty porcelain.*

Keywords: Song Dynasty Porcelain Image Aesthetics Ceramic Design.

1. Introduction

The Song Dynasty was a relatively prosperous era in developing Chinese culture and art. Art emphasizes the meaning, that is, the meaning and interest of artistic aesthetics. It is the freehand aesthetic style for artistic creation, which is also the case in ceramic design. From the perspective of the history of ceramics in the Song Dynasty, there are specific differences between official kilns and folk kilns, between practicality and appreciation, and between cultural consumption concepts of different classes. Although these differences are problems and phenomena that will appear in every era, they are also the status quo that often recurs in the history of ceramic design. This may be why the Song Dynasty is particularly typical.

Ceramics were necessary for ancient people's lives and an indispensable living object for the literati and scholar classes. This continuous cultural tradition more objectively reflects the residing scenes of ancient people. At the same time, the appearance and shape of these porcelains can be used to examine the ancients' living habits, tastes, and elegance. This is the reason for writing this article and the starting point for thinking.

2. Aesthetic Characteristics of the Ceramic Design of Daily Necessities in the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty was an era of relatively prosperous literature and art, and it can even be summarized as "rich in literature and art." Such a relatively large era of prosperous literature and art will inevitably permeate all aspects of life. Among them, ceramic design is also related to many aspects of social life at that time because it can be associated with the specific life of that era so that objects can restore the life and customs of the time. This may be a situation of seeing people from objects, and it is also a method of literary narrative.

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical aesthetics, Song porcelain presents an elegant aesthetic style. Its shapes are mostly

ancient or imitative, simple and concise, with smooth lines, balanced and harmonious overall proportions, and rich rhythm. Most of the glaze colors are blue and white monochrome glazes. The warm and delicate glaze is clear and indifferent, elegant and intriguing. The most representative Song Dynasty artifact is the Ru kiln lotus bowl, whose shape is a refined summary of the lotus in nature, with smooth lines, harmonious proportions, light glaze, elegance and beauty, and quite oriental aesthetic charm [1]. This is indeed the case about the overall aesthetic characteristics of Song porcelain. These design aesthetic characteristics can be seen in Song Dynasty porcelain.

Song Dynasty ceramic design focuses on two aspects. One is the elegant life of literati and scholars, which is the materialization of their aesthetic ideals. The other is the secularization of life, which is mainly reflected in the practicality of ceramic design. In short, ceramic design can accommodate two aspects, namely elegance and vulgarity. Ceramics must first consider the functional characteristics of practicality, which is the basis of ceramics as a craft. In addition, ceramics also have ornamental or decorative functions, which is the pure artistry of ceramic design. Although the two can be compatible, there are still differences for ceramic designers. The article mentions that "the art of life" is specifically manifested in the fact that aesthetic activities and the aesthetics of the scholars in the Song Dynasty, art, and personal daily life are more closely related than in the past. The scholars in the Song Dynasty pursued the enjoyment of daily life and the elegance and poetry conveyed in the process of life. The Yaozhou kiln ceramics of the Song Dynasty integrated natural beauty into the living environment through daily utensils, forming an aesthetic style, presenting the aesthetic characteristics of "art of life" and "art of life" different from the current consumer culture context [2]. From the perspective of the art of life, the life of the people in the Song Dynasty, especially the literati and scholar class, such as tea tasting, drinking, burning incense, flower arranging, hanging paintings, etc., can better reflect the aesthetic style of the literati in the Song Dynasty. Judging from the porcelain used for making tea, the Song people were very particular

about tea drinking. Some tea cups were mainly lotus-shaped, with a six-petal arched mouth. Holding it in your hand, it felt like a lotus. The colors were white and green. The shapes of teapots were also rich and varied. Some were pumpkin-shaped, some were garlic-shaped, and some were similar to wine pots. Since ancient times, tea and wine have been inseparable. Tea-making in the Song Dynasty was significantly developed, so teaware design was also critical. Teaware that can be examined from the history of ceramic development includes tea support, tea grinders, covered bowls, barrel-shaped small boxes, dreg buckets, flat-bottomed bowls, copper trays, and tea and soup bottles. These can be porcelain or other materials, such as pottery and copper. Whether it is teaware or wineware, the aesthetic design of the Song Dynasty can be revealed by interest and intrigue. As for the shape and style of arts and crafts, Li Zehou proposed two aesthetic ideals: intricately carved gold and clear water lotus. Although many researchers believe that the ceramic design of the Song Dynasty tends to be as beautiful as a lotus emerging from clear water, which can be seen from the ceramic design works of the Song Dynasty, the design style of intricately carved and gilded still exists, mainly in the ceramic design used in the palace. It seems that we can roughly conclude that the two design styles of intricately carved and gilded lotus emerging from clear water not only have apparent differences in the ceramic design of the Song Dynasty but also the ceramic design of later generations such as Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, and even today can be summarized as these two aesthetic categories.

The ceramics in the palace not only meet the practical purpose first but also are beautiful and generous and reflect the prominent status and dignity of the royal family's wealth and glory, which is a severe consideration to ceramic design, a world of different from ordinary folk kilns. Although the status of the literati and scholars in the Song Dynasty was higher than that of previous dynasties, the practicality of ceramics was still different from the royal ceramics used by the emperors and nobles in the palace. Of course, in addition to the ceramics given by the emperor to the literati and scholars with higher status, most of the official kilns were specially designed and produced for this purpose. In short, there are differences in design and artistry between official and folk kilns. These differences are due to the different service groups ceramic designers face and the technical problems themselves. Specifically, there are also general differences between the official kilns and folk kilns in the Song Dynasty regarding the design and production of porcelain, which requires further research and analysis.

3. Aesthetic Differences between Official Kilns and Folk Kilns in the Song Dynasty

The social culture and artistic pursuits of the Song Dynasty were different from those of the Han and Tang Dynasties. This is mainly because each dynasty had its historical circumstances. Some researchers have argued that "the Song Dynasty society valued culture over military affairs, Confucianism flourished, and Neo-Confucianism and Zen Buddhism were deeply rooted in the people's hearts. The overall social atmosphere was restrained and self-disciplined, and the social and cultural cultivation level was very high. People pursued a life of elegance and tranquility. Therefore,

the modeling characteristics of Song Dynasty porcelain are similar to those of the Six Dynasties. The lines of the appearance tend to be slender and upright. They all pay more attention to the inner charm of the modeling and prefer simple and quiet models [3]." This can broaden Song Dynasty porcelain's overall modeling and aesthetic characteristics, but there are also subtle differences in different regions or kiln sites.

Although the official kiln and the folk kiln are only one word different in terms of literal meaning, they differ regarding artistic craftsmanship and aesthetic value. There are relatively significant differences, whether from the specific kilns in history or the value estimation of the current porcelain collection community. The official kiln is a kiln specially opened by the government for the needs of life. In contrast, the folk kiln is relative to the kilns specially set up by the government, mainly for civilian use. The official kiln also primarily includes the imperial kiln, the imperial porcelain in the palace. In short, the difference between the official and folk kiln is evident and worthy of continuous exploration and research. Among them, there are specific differences in the overall aesthetic characteristics of ceramic art. For ceramic art, aesthetics is a visual experience and a general visual experience given by ceramics in terms of shape. Although it may not be related to the practical problems of ceramics, such discussions are more common. There is a question of aesthetics and practicality. For modern design, aesthetics also belongs to the category of practicality. In other words, aesthetic considerations are also needed to meet practical functions. Otherwise, the ancient ceramic art design would have been inherited and developed differently, although the function of ceramic art, especially the function of folk kilns, is mainly practical. From the porcelain displayed in major museums, it can be seen that it is not only helpful but also aesthetic. Even in the difficult living conditions of ancient society, designers or people still have aesthetic needs. Of course, aesthetics itself has the characteristics of transcending utilitarianism. Although there is a particular gap between the official and folk kiln designers and artisans, they must carry out the necessary inheritance and research on their skills and aesthetics. However, there will be different understandings and inheritance methods between them. In addition, the artisans of the official kiln and the folk kiln will have a small number of exchanges and even communicate and work with each other. For example, the artisans of the official kiln should be skilled craftsmen from the folk or technicians with more exquisite craftsmanship in the folk kiln. Such examples may be more common in ancient society. Some scholars have pointed out, "The inheritance of traditional ceramic sculpture skills means the inheritance and protection of traditional techniques and crafts. By learning traditional sculpture techniques and crafts, ceramic artists master traditional modeling language and aesthetic concepts and maintain traditional ceramic sculptures' unique charm and style. At the same time, the inheritance of traditional ceramic sculpture skills also requires ceramic artists to conduct in-depth research and explore traditional crafts to explore their potential and innovation space. Innovation is an important means to achieve contemporary technical aesthetics. Based on traditional ceramic sculpture skills, ceramic artists can use modern science and technology elements to innovate and create works that align with the times [4]."

Developing new works based on inheriting tradition is necessary for today's ceramic art design. In fact, for ancient societies, the difference between style and aesthetics in ceramic design was the most significant difference between official and folk kilns. At the same time, there is a particular gap between official kilns, and the same is true for folk kilns. Ding Kiln in history is a very vivid example. Initially, it mainly produced white porcelain and was also a folk kiln. However, later, the court intervened in Ding Kiln and sent designers and skilled artisans to join, thus realizing the transformation from folk kilns to official kilns. This is the role and significance of Ding kiln in the history of ceramics, which also has the same effect on the relationship between practicality and aesthetics of ceramic art.

The practical function of ceramics is mainly to hold items and eat. Tea tasting is one of the critical uses of ancient porcelain, primarily due to the integration of tea and ceramic cultures. Tea tasting and ceramics have also become two important carriers of Chinese traditional culture, and even these are constituent elements of Chinese traditional culture. For this reason, some scholars have put forward some views and opinions on this. Whether it is a historical official kiln or a folk kiln, for the needs of life, tea-tasting and drinking utensils can be selected as the main objects of investigation, and it is also limited to the length of the article.

4. The View of life in the Aesthetics of Ceramic Design in the Song Dynasty

The ancients attached great importance to life and death, which is the core issue of human existence. For people, life and death are only once, and the time and things experienced between life and death are the whole meaning and value of human life or the reality of human existence. The ancients must have thought deeply about the practical meaning of life. These signs can be seen in life and at funerals. In particular, the ancient funerary objects show the ancients' expectations for the deceased. They hoped that the deceased could live forever and even expected that the deceased could live better. The living here is different from the living when they were alive. In short, the soul is believed to be immortal, which is very important for ancient culture and art. Some researchers have pointed out that: "In the Song Dynasty, people seemed to have a stronger desire for "life" and attached great importance to their destination after death. The "soul bottle" as a bridge between "death" and "life" is of great significance to the Song people. The Song people, especially those in the southern region of the Song Dynasty, even entrusted their most important wishes after death to the soul bottle. Therefore, the Song Dynasty soul bottle must also carry the Song people's "view of life and death [5]." This is the cultural purpose of the Song Dynasty soul bottle and the concept that designers need to consider first. Life and death are the ultimate meaning of life. Suppose this philosophy is grasped in ceramic design. In that case, ceramic design is the most relevant to philosophy and thought, not just about appreciation and practicality in general. The porcelain design of the Song Dynasty is related to the immortal soul of human beings, which should be the ultimate goal of art. From this, we can think that, in the ancient ceramic design examined in this way, ceramics cannot be regarded as a tool in life. The way of ceramic design is broad and meaningful, but the skills corresponding to the way are

also worth studying. The technical elements should be paid more attention to in ceramic design because the skills are the carriers of the way and the place where the way is presented. The soul bottle of the Song Dynasty is so great because it is the bottle of the soul, and the noble soul must have the character of a gentleman when he is alive. In ancient society, comparing the gentleman to jade was a fashion. From this, we can see that jade became a carrier and a symbol of noble personality. Similarly, some researchers pointed out that "jade has become the carrier and embodiment of truth, goodness, and beauty. The ultimate goal of the Song Dynasty soul bottle is to have a glaze that is "like jade," which fully reflects the Song Dynasty's praise of the beauty of gentlemen and the use of jade's "meaning" to convey the Song Dynasty's aesthetic concepts [6]." The design of Song Dynasty porcelain also pays special attention to the presentation of texture, with jade as the goal. Confucianism emphasizes that gentlemen are as virtuous as jade. "Like jade" has become an essential feature of the texture of Song Dynasty porcelain. This is a technical issue and a guiding issue of aesthetic concepts. The combination of the two is the real reason why the texture of Song Dynasty porcelain is like jade.

From the above discussion, we know that the Song Dynasty was an era of great prosperity in culture and art, and porcelain is an indispensable tool in life that combines practicality and aesthetics. The design of these ceramics is not only particularly sophisticated in satisfying the practical functions of life but also pursues aesthetic entertainment in terms of visual senses. Although this is a complete and relatively comprehensive presentation in Song Dynasty ceramics, is it the same if we change our perspective or thinking? For example, people who appreciate Song Dynasty ceramics do not know or are familiar with the cultural heritage of Song Dynasty ceramics but only analyze the cultural characteristics and aesthetic trends of the era by appreciating Song Dynasty ceramics. If this can be comprehensively examined, it can be summarized as a restoration phenomenon in design aesthetics or a reproduction of life in design aesthetics. It is not easy to restore history or life because things are fleeting. First of all, how do we return to the origin of things? Although phenomenology has such academic ability and thinking possibilities, how is Song Dynasty ceramics possible? This may be regarded as an unobstructed situation, and ceramics are now in the precise state of history. Hence, the unobstructed state of ceramics itself appears, thus revealing the many artistic conceptions that Song Dynasty ceramics can present. This is what Song Dynasty ceramics can be associated with in design, and it will also summon more information and signs when being gazed at.

References

- [1] Chen Qian: "Design and Application of Daily Ceramic Products Based on Minimalist Aesthetics" Master's Thesis of Jingdezhen Ceramics University, May 30, 2023, page 9.
- [2] Gao Li, Chen Yalan "Research on the Aesthetics of Song Dynasty Yaozhou Kiln Ceramics from the Perspective of Life Aesthetics" "Journal of Ceramics" February 2023 Issue 1, page 180.

- [3] Zhang Yalin, Jiang Anfei: "History of Chinese Ceramic Design" Nanchang: Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2015.12, page 168.
- [4] Wang Deng: "Using Ceramic Sculpture as a Medium to Shape Contemporary Technical Aesthetics" "Foshan Ceramics" Issue 3, :2024, page 132.
- [5] Li Ruisheng: "Cultural Signs and Aesthetic Connotations of Ceramic Soul Bottles in the Song Dynasty" "Ceramic Research" June 2023, page 26.
- [6] Ibid., page 27.