

Analysis of the influence of Ming Dynasty Royal religious culture on the style of porcelain kiln

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Keywords: Ming Dynasty; Religious culture; Kuan Yao porcelain

Abstract: The Ming Dynasty is an important period for the development of the history of Chinese ceramics, porcelain kiln continued to flourish in this stage. Its development is not only influenced by social economy and politics, but also influenced by religious culture, such as Islam, Taoism, Buddhism and so on. According to the religious and cultural factors in the Ming Dynasty porcelain kiln in the analysis of inquiry, and tried to find the correlation of the two from the artistic style and history.

1. Introduction

Judging from the overall development of the Ming Dynasty religion, it generally follows the policy formulated by the Zhu Yuanzhang, which is protecting and promoting restrictions. However, the following emperors after Ming Hongwu have not carried out their ancestral training because of their different religious emotions. This has led to major changes in the various religious factions with the change of the age, advocating or neglecting, usually due to the emperor. Moreover, because of the differences in the emperor's endowment and cultivation, the emotions of their religious beliefs often reflect different aesthetic orientations, and can be reflected in the corresponding artifacts. For example, during the period of Ming Chenghua and Hongzhi, the emperor believed in Tibetan Buddhism, and the porcelain was full with corresponding Buddhist motifs and styles. Emperor Wuzong favored Tibetan Buddhism and Islam together. Although he was not in office for a long time, there were also a large number of porcelains with distinctive religious features during his reign. Emperor Shizong preferred Taoism and ignored the political affairs for decades. He concentrated on the harem and raised the Taoist priests. That's why large number of porcelains that reflect the theme of Taoist culture were made during the period of his reign. We can see that the official kiln porcelain in Ming Dynasty not only represents the emperor's aesthetic preferences, but also reflects the characteristics of religious development.

2. The Influence of Islam on the Style of the Ming Dynasty's Official Kiln

Despite the overall strategy of restraint and development, the emperors of the Ming Dynasty seem to have different emotional preferences for various religions. Such as the great ancestors Zhu Yuanzhang and the Emperor Zhengde paid special attention to Islam. You can notice from the religious policy and things done by Zhu Yuanzhang. One is that many Muslims who believe in Islam are among the most important ministers who have helped the Ming Dynasty to seize power. Lots of them are Muslims. The "Ten Major Hui Generals" rumored by the people are all senior generals who made great contributions in the early Ming Dynasty. Second is that Zhu Yuanzhang built a mosque after ascending the throne. It can be seen that Zhu Yuanzhang's attitude toward and respect for Islam is fully reflected in the official kiln porcelain in the same period.

2.1 The Embodiment of Islamic Cultural Elements in the Blue-and-White of the Official Kiln in the Early Ming Dynasty

As a foreign sect, the communication and development of Islam are naturally inseparable from the exchanges across the territory. The important reason why Islam flourished in the early Ming Dynasty was that Zheng He went to the Western Sea and created the Maritime Silk Road. Commodity trade had promoted the exchange of culture, religion and art, which had a huge impact on the porcelain industry at that time. The local porcelain-making technology began to combine with foreign cultural elements. In the meanwhile, the need of overseas trade made up for the shortage of local porcelain-making technology. Especially the raw materials and technologies introduced from Islamic countries have greatly improved the porcelain making process during the Yongle and Xuande periods. In the blue-and-white flower process, the imported green material Samarra-blue (also known as Su Bo mud blue) was introduced, which has revolutionized the development of traditional blue-and-white flowers in China. According to the comparison test results of the Shanghai Institute of Silicate Research on the composition of blue-and-white and native blue-and-white buds in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, the content of iron in domestic green materials is lower, while the proportion of manganese is higher. And the result is exactly opposite in the blue-and-white of Mingyong Xuanqin. This method has been usually used in the identification of blue-and-white. This also proves from a scientific point that the green material of Yongxuan blue-and-white from the mainland is impossible, and the only way to import the material is to bring it back when Zheng He went to the West.

Except the technical aspect, in the decoration of porcelain, the religious and ethnic decorative motifs that are common in Islamic countries are also applied to porcelain making, which makes the blue-and-white in this period have an exotic feeling in style, ornamentation and color. A the Islamic countries worship the only Allah, no other idolatry, so all the religious elements are more uniform. In the local mosque, the decorative patterns are almost all plants and geometric patterns, no characters or animals. Local artists have ingeniously presented Arabic letters and geometric patterns in a vivid and flexible form in the temple. The theme of a single plant ornamentation is transformed into a soft, dynamic, and lawful pattern, which is combined by winding, staggering and other methods to form a complex entangled pattern, showing a kind of soft curvaceous beauty. At the same time, it is highlighted in the form of light on the main body of the picture, with the fruit as a pattern. These plant patterns have been reflected in the image of Yongxuan blue-and-white, typically the blue-and-white three fruit pattern pot of Ming Xuande, the blue-and-white tangled lotus bottle of Ming Xuande, etc. In the same period of ceramic living utensils, usually accompanied by the appearance of characters, such as Persian and Arabic. All these are all powerful evidences of Islamic cultural elements.

Zheng He's seven voyages to the West, countries in the route are also affected except promoting economic and cultural exchanges between the Arab countries, the Persian and Ming dynasty. The princes and ambassadors of various countries came to China and brought advanced materials, technology, resources, and more diverse cultural exchanges. Yongxuan blue-and-white is gradually rejuvenated in such frequent cultural exchanges, and it is more refined in craftsmanship. It draws on style and absorbs a large number of exotic Islamic styles, patterns and designs.

2.2 The Embodiment of Islamic Cultural Elements in the Official Kiln Blue-and-White of Zhengde

Emperor Zhengde's conviction of Islam is not less than that of Zhu Yuanzhang. Although he has believed in Islam and Tibetan Buddhism during his 17 years' office, his belief in the former is unprecedented in other dynasties. Record of Ming History says that in the 14th year of

Zhengde, the emperor issued a decree, which was in addition to cattle and sheep, it is about to be sacrificed, not allowed to feed and easy to sell and slaughter. This ban is in line with the tradition of Islam. In addition, many of the confidants around the Emperor Zhengde also believe in Islam, including ministers, prostitutes, monks, etc. In this way, the emperor's aesthetic taste is naturally biased towards Islamic religious characteristics.

On the whole, the highlights of Islamic cultural characteristics during the Zhengde period are mainly reflected in the use of text symbols, including Persian and Arabic. Surely, the text of the Yongxuan period is only used as an embellishment decoration, while in the Zhengde period, the entire section of the Qur'an was copied to the porcelain, its religious significance is more clear. This is unprecedented in the decoration of porcelain in the past. Besides, the style of the ornamentation inherits the Islamic characteristics of the Yongzheng period in the early Ming Dynasty, and the geometric ornamentation is more abundant, such as the horn star pattern, the pointed star pattern, the opening round heart pattern and the diamond pattern, etc. The corresponding utensils mainly are living utensils, such as bowls, plates, bowls, saucers, candlesticks, pen holders and placards, etc. Also include some rituals like incense burners, incense sticks, etc. Typically as the Blue-and-White Arabic Candlestick of Zhengde, the outer wall is painted with tangled lotus, filled with diamond-shaped lines, and the central column and base of the candlestick are decorated with Arabic characters in the form of opening. It is worth noting that the Islamic style kiln porcelain of this period also began to imitate the typical living utensils of Islamic countries, such as glassware, metal products, etc. In order to make these exotic styles loved by the royal aristocracy, most of the ornamentation incorporates the traditional Chinese cultural elements, which forms a Chinese-Western combination style.

3. The Influence of Taoism on the Blue-and-White of Official Kiln in Ming Jiajing Period

When the Ming Dynasty developed into the Jiajing period, the social contradictions became increasingly prominent. As the emperor was obsessed with Taoism, he ignored the political affairs, which led to the power of the ministers, the people's livelihood terrible, and the treasury emptiness. And with the scourge of natural disasters, the taxation is heavy, the lives of the people are miserable, and the peasant uprising is repeated once and for all. The enchantment of the Emperor Jiajing on Taoism reached a level of madness. He set up the dojo in the harem and concentrated on practicing medicinal herbs, he cared nothing about the affairs of state. What's better on the top, what's worse on the bottom? Despite the decline of national strength, the bureaucrats still burned a large number of Taoist-themed porcelain for the royal family. Since this period began to adopt the method of officials and people burning, the firing of the official kiln blue-and-white is obviously worse than before. According to the statistics of the existing Jiajing period cultural relics, the official kiln blue and white with typical Taoist decorative style features account for about one-fifth of the porcelain used in this period, which shows the degree of credit of the Emperor Jiajing to Taoism.

4. The Influence of Buddhism on the Blue-and-White of Official Kiln in the Late Ming Dynasty

In the late Ming Dynasty, the decay of the Ming Dynasty had entered a period of ruthlessness. Although the emperor tried to turn things around, he was unable. The troubled people in the deep waters can only hope for religion, especially Buddhism. Therefore, the theme of Buddhist characters appeared in large numbers in this period. However, due to the severe economic recession, the official kiln porcelain made has been far less abundant in terms of styling, ornamentation and style than the previous Islamic and Taoist themes. The only common figures are Dharma, Luohantu and Hanshan Picking, etc.

In addition, another kind of independent development is Tibetan Buddhism. In order to consolidate the stability of the northwestern frontier region, the Ming Dynasty adopted some policies to protect the country. The court often decorated the motifs with distinctive Tibetan Buddhism on the official kiln porcelain to put this policy into practice better. In the later period, these patterns gradually merged into the Han nationality's local decorative elements, and also opened up more diverse new ideas for the porcelain craftsmen, which promoted the development and innovation of the official kiln blue-and-white of Ming Dynasty.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the Ming Dynasty official kiln blue pattern is under the influence of various local and exotic religious cultures, showing several characteristics as below: Firstly, at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He's voyages to the West promoted the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures. At the same time that the porcelain craftsmanship was significantly improved, the innovation and blending of the ornamentation was also greatly developed. In particular, the involvement of Islamic style subjects has had an important impact on the kiln blue-and-white in the Yongxuan and Zhengde periods. Secondly, during the Jiajing period, the Emperor's belief in Taoism influenced the characteristics of the official kiln in this period, and the Taoist motifs became mainstream. Thirdly, in the late Ming Dynasty, Buddhism became an important religion to carry the people and the royal family. Buddhist ornamentation also became an important decorative theme for the official kiln blue-and-white. Finally, the theme of Tibetan Buddhist ornamentation was incorporated into the official kiln blue and white as a political meaning, which embodies the ruling class's policy of enthusiasm for Tibetan and Mongolian border areas. In short, various religious factions have infiltrated the Ming Dynasty cultural system from political, economic, cultural and other aspects, which influenced their porcelain style. This wide and far-reaching influence has promoted the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures, and also injected new vitality into the development of the Ming Dynasty kiln blue-and-white.

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