

Research on the Figure Themed Convert Bottle from the 10th to the 14th Century in Kilneyes of South China

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Abstract—From the 10th to the 14th century, China's southern region saw a peak in porcelain industry, when the "duisu" craft tended to mature. During that time, lavish burials prevailed, so the burial culture was reflected in the exquisite skills of convert bottles (bottles made by "duisu" craft) then. This paper focuses on exploring the techniques and types of convert bottles in the extremely characteristic Wuzhou kiln and blue and white porcelain kiln with great characteristics in the kilneye of South China, and divides the themes of characters in the convert bottles into three categories: secular scenes, fairy land and zodiac figures. It analyzes the theme and characteristics of the figure themed porcelain, and the Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism culture reflected in them, so as to analyze and explain the belief system and folk customs of civil society in the south of this period.

Keywords—the 10th to the 14th century; kilneyes in the south; convert bottle; the theme of figures

I. INTRODUCTION

The period from the 10th to 14th century was the golden age of the development of China's ceramic technology. There were many kilns in different parts of the country, and in the southern region, Jiangxi, Zhejiang and other regions were at the top of porcelain production. The integration of profound folk belief system and religion contributed to the emergence of "duisu" craft with characteristics in the kilneyes of the south. During this period, the convert bottle is a kind of funerary ware popular among folk people in south China, with a function of keeping the tomb owner's abundance and enjoyment, and keeping his soul. It features complex yet unaffected patterns, of full variety yet in great order. The modelling figures on its surface have various shapes and different postures, with flexible and vivid, exquisite and delicate artistic flavor. Focusing on the figure themed convert bottles, this paper analyzes the development features of convert bottles in the southern kilneyes represented by Wuzhou kiln and blue and white porcelain kiln from the 10th to 14th century, and conduct in-depth research on the craft characteristics and cultural forms of convert bottles of figure theme.

II. SOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONVERT BOTTLES

The profound funeral culture has a long history in China. Since the Han Dynasty, there has been a written funeral system. There were a large number of funeral objects with great variety. Among them, the convert bottle was a popular funeral ware in ancient tombs in southern China, closely related to the national customs and religious beliefs of China. The convert bottle was called granary pot at first due to its function of storing grains. In the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms Period, the granary pots evolved into five-link pots in Jiangsu and Zhejiang area. The reason was that five-link pots had the meaning of "good harvests of the five grains". The "five grains represent food, and the prevalence of the "five grains" theory was also influenced by the "five elements" thought [1]. Therefore, the grain was placed in five-link pots, expressing the wish that the tomb owner would live a prosperous life after his death. The model of five-link pot is a big deep-bellied tank with four little pot on it. In addition, the number of the little pots was different in the evolution, with three-link ones, five-link ones and six-link ones, etc. In the Western Jin Dynasty, with the development of celadon molding and firing technology in Yue Kiln and the prevalence of lavish burials, the little pots on five-link pots were gradually replaced by pavilions and towers, immortals and Buddhas as well as spirit animals and livestock. The exquisite decorative buildings, lively and vivid figures and animals were all made intricately made and delicately presented. Such extremely full decorations represent the life state of the tomb owner in the society or the afterlife he wished for. From Sui, Tang, the Five Dynasties to the Early Song Dynasty, dish-mouth pot, dragon convert pot, and polygonal pot, and other kinds of pots used as burial objects as a replacement of granary pots.

During the 10th-14th centuries, with the southward movement of China's administrative center, the southern kilneyes began to prosper, and the development of convert bottles embraced another peak after Wei and Jin Dynasties in which a unique style has been formed. In wartime, people place their hopes for a better life in the wonderland of the afterlife; in peacetime, they present their wishes in wonderful secular life pictures. These convert bottles of various themes were made to meet the spiritual needs of leading the soul to

heaven of the tomb owner. Figures, spirit animal and Chinese zodiac images of this period were concentrated on the belly or neck of the convert bottles, while pavilions were rarely seen. Apart from the Yue kiln, Longquan kiln, and Wuzhou kiln, and other celadon kilneys, the bluish white porcelain kilneys with Jingdezhen, Jiangxi as the center abounds with convert bottles. In Yuan Dynasty, there were once blue and white glazed convert bottles with red inside. To the early Ming Dynasty the convert bottles began to decline.

III. TYPE AND DECORATIVE ARTS OF CONVERT BOTTLES IN THE KILNEYES OF SOUTERN CHINA DURING 10-14TH CENTURY

During the 10-14th century, there were many kilns producing convert bottles in southern China. Among them, Wuzhou kiln is close to the green and white porcelain kilneye in Jiangxi Province in terms of geographical location and as well as technology and theme. At the same time, combined with their local cultures, the convert bottles were produced with characteristics of the two places.

The Wuzhou kiln is located in the Jiangshan area of Jinhua-Quzhou in today's central and western Zhejiang. It got its name because the place was called Wuzhou. The Wuzhou kiln began in Han Dynasty, flourished in the Tang and Song Dynasty and declined in Yuan Dynasty. The convert bottles in the Wuzhou kiln of the 10-14th century can be blue glaze, brown glaze and milky glaze, with a height of 30-45cm. Their bodies are usually not large, with a variety of modellings. The commonly seen ones can be roughly divided into bulging-belly type and slim type (as can be seen in "Fig. 1" and "Fig. 2"). The bulging-belly type has its decorations on the top of the cap, the belly or over the body; slim type has its decoration on its belly, shoulder, neck or its cap.



Fig. 1. Convert bottle, Northern Song Dynasty (Zhejiang Museum Collection).



Fig. 2. Convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Quzhou Museum Collection).



Fig. 3. Convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Fuzhou Museum Collection).



Fig. 4. Convert bottle of 12 zodiacal animals, Yuan Dynasty (Jingdezhen China Ceramic Museum Collection).

Bluish white porcelain convert bottles are mostly from the Jingdezhen Kiln, Nanfeng Kiln and Jinxili Kiln in Northeast Jiangxi [2]. Bluish white porcelain convert bottles (as can be seen in "Fig. 3" and "Fig. 4") can also be divided into two types. One is slim, with vibrant glazing color and slim neck. The heights of this type are generally above 40 cm, with some even up to 90 cm. The decorations of convert

bottles of this type are mostly around the neck. The other type is stocky with high cover and round belly. Its height is under 40 cm, with decorations around the belly mostly.



Fig. 5. Part of the Convert Bottle (Song Dynasty Fuzhou Museum Collection).



Fig. 6. Part of the Play Music and Dragon Lantern of Brown Glaze Convert Bottle, Song Dynasty (Wuyi Museum Collection).

The two places inherited and developed the early "granary" *duisu* technique. They improved the level of porcelain image molding in the prosperous development of porcelain industry and showed a mature performance in *duisu* techniques, creating a sense of beauty with the combination of transcendent wisdom and handwork, dexterity and simplicity [3]. Among the techniques, kneading model, pasting model, dish model, molding, pressing, coining, and design engraving, etc. were used with ease, making the modelled pictures lively, novel and fantastic. The "embossed decoration" and "molding" are the basic decorative techniques for making the convert bottles. The morphological characteristics were grasped only after the craftsman fully mastered the feature of the mud and use kneading model, dish model, pasting model, etc. with his hands. Since there was a need of different dynamic states in different scenes on the convert bottles of Wuzhou kilns, the technique of kneading model was usually used. In addition, since there were many repeated figures in the convert bottles of Wuzhou kilns and bluish white porcelains, the method of modelling was used (as can be seen in "Fig. 5"), which greatly improved the work efficiency. And the model with slim body like snake, dragon and tiger, as well as flame, etc. could be obtained through the technology of dish model, which made it smarter. The craft of coining and design engraving can be used to express the details, characters and wavy edging on the costumes of characters and the body of animals (as can be seen in "Fig. 6"), making the decorations unified yet rich in variation.

IV. THE FIGURE THEMED CONVERT BOTTLES OF THE 10-14TH CENTURY AND THEIR FEATURES

The decorative images on the convert bottles of the 10-14th century can be holding a funeral procession, playing music and dancing, bending knees and making a bow with hands folded in front, drumming and playing dragon lanterns, sideshows and acrobatics, Taoist immortals, Bodhisattva in rosette, tomb figure of armed warriors and zodiac figurines, etc. Meanwhile, the dermatoglyphic patterns such as the moon and sun *moiré* mythical creatures like dragon and tiger, fowls and beasts as well as lotus petals show the stylized decorative elements on convert bottles of the time. According to different themes, convert bottles from the 10th to the 14th century are divided into three categories: secular scenes, fairy land and zodiac characters.

A. Secular Scenes

The scene of secular figures is mainly divided into two types of funeral scene and life entertainment, funeral scene is mainly the picture of singing and dancing at the funeral, and the daily entertainment scene can be acrobatics, drumming and singing, music and dance accompanied by music as well as other entertainments. The convert bottle of this kind is rich in images, with different number of figures and dynamic states. In "Analects of Confucius · Weizheng", it is said that "when parents are alive, one should serve them according to the rite; after they die, hold the funeral for them and sacrifice them according to the rite." Among the schools of Zhou and Qin dynasties, the Confucian school talks most about funeral [4]. It can be seen that China's Confucianism has been advocating filial piety and attaching great importance to the etiquette system since the ancient times. For this kind of convert bottles, ceremonial funeral, playing music and dancing are the most important rites in the process of a funeral. Therefore, the most characteristic secular figures should be in the scene of attending a funeral procession or mourning in the green or brown glaze of Wuzhou kiln. The picture of such kind of convert bottles centers on the figures and dragons. Usually, the spiraling dragons are around the neck and there are three layers from top to bottom. The embossed decoration of figure statues around the belly of the bottles mostly restores the funeral scenes such as mourning, carrying the coffin, lifting the offerings, playing music and dancing, etc., with a large number of people. The scenes of the figures playing music include: pipe-blowing, playing sheng, playing bamboo flute, playing zither, playing pipa, knocking a gong, drumming and playing allegro. There are also zodiac animals, rare birds and beasts in the pictures; on the bottle cap, there can be modelled figures, lotus leaf and gourd pagoda, and on some bottles there can also be the auspicious words like "longevity with wealth and honor, prosperous offspring", etc.



Fig. 7. The funeral procession of brown glaze convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Wuyi Museum Collection).

The funeral procession of brown glaze Convert bottle exhibited in the Museum of Wuyi (as can be seen in "Fig. 7") represents the scene of funeral procession in the funeral ritual system. A curled-up dragon is molded at the top of the cap, and around are five figures back on to the cap center, with palms together devoutly as they are praying. The bottle is divided into upper and lower layers. On the upper layer are dragons end to end. On the lower layer, with wavy lotus leave patterns at the bottom, figures are molded above. There are two coffin carriers at both sides of the coffin, with their heads tilted to each side, shoulders carrying the coffin, bodies cowering and legs stepping, three mourners clothed with long linen upon their heads, dressed in mourning dress, one worshiper and seven dancers playing the harp. With vividness, different people wear different headwears and attire and are in different dynamic state, with nearly no similar action of the heads and hands. From this can one see the dexterous manual skill and sharp observation of the ancient Chinese craftsmen who made the figure so lively after the process of duisu. On the altar are the ewer, cups and sacrificial offerings, and above the ware is a molded cloud, presenting a scene of song and dance at the funeral, with incense smoke curling up.



Fig. 8. The people play of brown glaze convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Wuyi Museum Collection)

According to "Meng Liang Lu · Arts of Acrobatics", "At the year of offering sacrifice to heaven and earth when the decree for pardon was announced at the Lizheng Gate, the players of "Tinong", a kind of acrobatics, were hired to erect a golden rooster pole and climbed it up to vie for the golden rooster. In addition, acrobats can do somersaults, walking on stilts kicks, walking on the wire, doing cartwheels, getting off the wire, carrying water on the wire, dressing up as a ghost on the wire, making fun of the Dark Justice, chopping the shield, passing a knife gate, and burrowing through the ring of fire, etc." From the above record, it can be seen that in Song Dynasty, acrobatic performances were very popular among the recreational activities, and with a great variety, they were extremely flourishing at a time. "The people play of brown glaze Convert bottle" (as can be seen in "Fig. 8") of that time reproduces the real scene of the folk amusement in southern China from 10th to 14th Century. On such convert bottles, there are people playing stick, walking on stilts, handstanding, playing balls, music playing, dancing, playing the zither, playing acrobatics, snake charming and other performances. The figures are in different dynamics, with their arms and legs fully stretched, relaxed and lively. They are so vivid with exaggeration. Besides, the figures are interspersed with animals, birds, fish and crabs in various poses, which are pictures of joy in a busy world.

The theme of music and dance had been famous since the Three Kingdoms Period. From the 10th to the 14th century, this kind of traditional theme was inherited and developed. At this time, sideshow and funeral scenes were also added, which indicated that the southern government was relatively stable, and the civil society was open, the life in the marketplace was comfortable, and the entertainment items were rich and colorful. Among them, scenes of funeral procession with music and dance share the largest proportion. Among the 19 convert bottles the author photographed in the museums, 12 are funeral music and dance themed, indicating that the filial piety culture was popular and highly valued in the society of south China at that time. After the Tang and Song Dynasty, the guard of honor with drum music was

popular among the folk. The drum music at a funeral was gradually available to ordinary households, which has become a custom that still lives on today. The music and dance on the occasion of funeral is commonly seen in convert bottles, reflecting that music and dance performance on funeral was no longer a privilege of high officials and dignitaries, and was promoted in the folk.

B. Fairy Land

On the convert bottles from the 10th to the 14th century, there are many images of fairyland, with flying dragons in the sky and fairy figures, spiritual animals, clouds, lotus petals, etc. These fairy figures included different images of Taoism and Buddhism, and formed a system of fairy figures in the process of development.

The fairyland on the convert bottle from Wuzhou kiln (as can be seen from "Fig. 9"), are often colored with the opacified glaze and brown glaze, and the thick pacified glaze often produces blue kiln change, which makes the vessel body rich in color change yet in uniform. The celestial beings are often molded on the bottle cap, showing the meaning of fairyland in the cloud. The small and delicate figures are in dignified manner, with jade tablet in crossed hands. With high crown on head and in dress robe, the immortals have their wide cuff fall down naturally, with smooth line of the belt, and some of them even have light behind them. The statue named "Heavenly God blesses the people" of the Song Dynasty were made in strict accordance with the head garments, robe, leather belt and the fish wearing system for officials of the Song Dynasty [6]. The images of fairies in convert bottles of this period are very similar to that of officials in Song Dynasty and the character image has the obvious characteristic of secularization. Around the bottle belly are molded curl-up dragons, which can sometimes be moved to the belly, with the characters of "福" and "寿" made by pasting model (as can be seen in "Fig. 10").



Fig. 9. The celestial being and dragon of Opaque glaze Convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Jinhua Museum Collection).



Fig. 10. The Chinese character "Fu" of Opaque glaze Convert bottle, Song Dynasty (Wuyi Museum Collection).



Fig. 11. Convert bottle of figure, Yuan Dynasty (China Ceramic Museum Collection).

Among the bluish white porcelain convert bottles of the same theme, decorations are mainly on the wavy lotus leaf around the neck. Under the neck is generally a ring of modeled fairies on display, ranging from 6 to 13, among which 12 are fixed. The tomb figures corresponding to the traditional twelve two-hour periods, also know as zodiac figures, are the "twelve earthly branches" in the funerary wares related to the superstition of Yin and Yang, and have the function of counteracting evil force and defending the tomb [7]. This kind of tomb figures is the statues of the twelve gods of traditional twelve two-hour periods which are adapted from the twelve zodiac figures. But the shape of them are slightly different from the zodiac figures. With slim figures, they can be crossing their hands, or having hands fall apart on both sides, or holding a tally. The number and form of these twelve gods gradually developed and changed during the molding process of different kilnmen and in different kilns, but the meaning of their duty to guard the time did not change. In most cases, a pair of upward-facing and down-bending figures is placed among the zodiac figures, to pray for the soul to ascend to heaven. Around the bottle neck is a dragon nose to tail, and different figures are besides it. There are a lotus bodhisattva with his hands clasped praying for peace; a warrior figure are armed, guarding the tomb; and a fairy riding the dragon (as can be seen in "Fig. 11") standing on the back of the dragon, with jade tablet in his slim hands, is made very vividly with his costume, a hat on the head, in a long gown with its cuff

nearly touching the ground and a jade belt around the waist, from which the gradation of drapes can be seen clearly. Such figures are religious images of the same type with the immortals on the convert bottles from Wuzhou kiln. With very similar costumes, both hold jade tablet. This kind of figures should be Taoist gods.

Matured in the Han Dynasty, the decoration with the theme of immortal figures are very common in stone reliefs, portrait bricks, paintings on silk, lacquer paintings and mural paintings. This theme can also be seen used in the convert bottles from the 10-14th century in south China. In the process of applying this theme, different glaze colors and composition forms were used to form convert bottles with different visual styles of Wuzhou kiln and bluish white porcelains. Their similarity is that both of them take the dragon as the bond, or select images of the same religion to make in-depth depiction and shape a complete, exquisite and realistic form. Yet there are also differences: on the bluish white porcelain convert bottles, most figures are on the same level with the dragon or under it, among them are some mythical beasts and birds, while those from the Wuzhou kiln have the immortal beings modeled on the top, dragon at the middle part and auspicious words are inserted between sometimes. Then wide application of Buddhist and Taoist elements in this them shows the prevalence of Taoism and Buddhist culture in the southern folk areas during this period. On the one hand, the rulers strongly supported the development of Taoism and Buddhism. They funded the construction of Taoist temples, and selected Taoist officials and do the same to Buddhism, managing and supporting Buddhism and building temples [8]. On the other hand, wars and diseases in the early years deepened the suffering of the people, and Taoist masters' spirit symbol and Buddhist concepts of cause and effect, good and evil, and reincarnation of life and death catered to the psychological needs of the people. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why there are different spirits of Buddhism and Taoism on a single convert bottle. It is because Buddhism and Taoism coexisted and integrated with each other in the spread and development at that time.

C. Zodiac Characters

The Zodiac Culture were first mentioned probably in the "On Balance · the Momentum of Things" by Wang Chong, a philosopher of the Eastern Han Dynasty. According to this book, the Chinese zodiac matches the earthly branch. Since ancient times, the twelve zodiac animals have been closely connected with people's production and life, food, clothing, housing and transportation, and expressed people's reverence for nature and good wishes [9]. In the ancient society with low productivity, the ancient laboring people kept close contact with animals by raising livestock, farming and hunting. With such familiarity facilitating the memory, they naturally got to use the twelve animals to record hours and years. Zodiac culture is the embodiment of harmony between man and nature. To the Song Dynasty, the figures of zodiac animals were adapted to the gods of traditional twelve two-hour periods. The arrangement modes serve the purpose of showing the alternation of years and hours, so that the gods

can take turns to protect the tomb, so that the soul of life and vitality, along with the four spirits, guarding the four sides and the hours, warding off evil and bad luck and maintaining the eternal peace of the tomb owner. As a combination of folk belief system and religious culture of the same period, the zodiac figures on the convert bottles reflect the continuous evolution and enrichment of the cultural connotation of the Chinese zodiac from dynasties to dynasties in the southern region.



Fig. 12. Zodiacal figure, Song Dynasty, Jingdezhen China Ceramic Museum Collection.

The zodiac-themed covert bottles in the 10-14th century can also be classified separately according to their decorative methods. The shapes of such covert bottles are basically the same, with short neck, round belly, an obconical cover and string patterns on it. A regular decorative technique have been formed in such covert bottles: the decoration of zodiac figures are around the ring of the largest diameter; some of the covert bottles have the inscriptions indicating month, and around the part above the zodiac figures, are the pasting model of the four gods, namely blue dragon, white tiger, rosefinch and tortoise. Around the lower part of the belly are mostly engraved designs, usually cross arrangement of lotus or lotus petals. The twelve zodiac animals in the zodiac figures are twelve animals in accordance with the earthly branches, namely Rat, Ox, Tiger, Hare, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Boar. Its concrete manifestation in covert bottles mainly includes three types: crowned human body and robe holding animal head, animal head person and crowned zodiac animal. In early tombs and the same period, there were often individual zodiac figures (see "Fig. 12"), which provided a good reference model for the theme of the Chinese zodiac in covert bottles of this period. The zodiac figures (see "Fig. 4") on the covert bottles have a balanced and full composition. Around the shoulder, they line up, with an equal height and interval, neatly and in a pleasant order. With vivid heads, the zodiac figures are in robes, with hands crossed ahead. Those holding animal heads or wearing hat also look like the image of civil officials of the time.

V. CONCLUSION

During the period of the 10th to the 14th century, the mature and complete porcelain making techniques in southern China, the ingenious conception of the artists and reasonable layout led to the development of convert bottles towards the direction of complicated decorations and diversified forms, forming a unique artistic style in the convert bottles of civilian kilns. In this period, the different themes, secularized forms, variant features, unique scenes and forms of the figures and statues in the convert bottles provide an important evidence for researchers to explore the folk characteristics, folk social beliefs, religious culture and secular features of the southern region in this period. The convert bottles of the southern kiln of the 10-14th century is an important form of folk art, the craft characteristic and culture form of which is worth in-depth study.

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