

Analysis on Porcelain Inlay Decoration in Traditional Buildings in Chaozhou

Yanling Cao^{1,*} Yanjun Lu¹

1 South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

**Corresponding author. Email: 1292417924@qq.com*

ABSTRACT

Lingnan traditional architectural decoration has a unique artistic style, distinctive regional characteristics, and unique cultural connotations and aesthetic values. As a gem of Lingnan architectural decoration that integrates cultural aesthetics, folk customs and social environment, Chaozhou porcelain inlay contains the unique characteristics of the decoration art of Lingnan. This article mainly analyzes the decorative techniques and characteristics of porcelain inlay art from the perspectives of craft sources, craft techniques, and craft characteristics.

Keywords: Porcelain inlay, Art, Decorative features.

1. INTRODUCTION

Li Zehou put forward in the book "Four Lectures on Aesthetics": "Beauty is the unity of subjective consciousness, emotion and objective object." [1] This sentence reminds people that studying the aesthetic characteristics and aesthetic value of objects requires excavation and exploration from the aspects of human subjective consciousness, thoughts and emotions, and the natural attributes, social environment, and manifestations.

Tracing back to the development history of the porcelain inlay art in Chaozhou, it is known that porcelain inlay in Chaozhou originated in the Ming Dynasty and was widely developed during the Qing Dynasty. It enjoys the reputation of "one of the three traditional architectural decoration crafts in Chaozhou, Lingnan". Porcelain inlay is an architectural decoration art based on creative techniques such as painting and sculpture, using a variety of brightly colored tiles to cut and inlay to form various patterns and themes.

In the Chaoshan area, which is the "ocean of folk art", folk handicrafts are flourishing in Chaoshan and there are various types. Chaozhou porcelain inlay art was nurtured and developed on

this fertile soil of folk art. Porcelain inlay art and many folk crafts in Chaozhou are mutually tolerant and integrated. At the same time, they draw inspiration from regional culture, folk customs and stories, and a traditional architectural decoration art with unique characteristics of eastern Guangdong is formed. Therefore, the porcelain inlay art embodies the decorative style and artistic characteristics of traditional handicrafts and traditional architectural decoration art in the Chaozhou area of Lingnan in terms of materials, crafts, techniques and subjects. The architectural decoration value of Chaozhou porcelain inlay is not only a form of artistic expression, but also a spiritual cultural behavior. This behavior has unique regional characteristics and is derived from the unique decorative art characteristics of Chaozhou. Therefore, the exploration of porcelain inlay art should start from the decorative techniques and characteristics.

2. THE INLAY PROCESS OF "CHERISHING AND LOVING MATERIALS"

Chaozhou craftsmen's sense of identity and cherishment of the material itself is an important spiritual foundation for the formation of the unique porcelain inlay craftsmanship of Chaozhou. At the same time, the regional and national spirit of porcelain inlay craftsmen who have the courage to

*Fund: The 13th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Guangzhou (2020GZGJ34).

explore and create has led to the emergence of porcelain inlay art.

2.1 Saving Materials and Using Them to the Best of Their Abilities

The aesthetic attributes of architectural decoration are embodied in the adaptability of architectural decoration, that is, the adaptability of the aesthetic attributes of architectural decoration art to the subjective needs of people, the attributes of objective things and the natural environment [2]. The production and development of porcelain inlay art are inseparable from the development of the ceramic industry in Chaoshan area, as well as the local natural environment, social life, and folk culture. Chaoshan craftsmen who were born in farmers brought the spirit and emotion of farmers to cherish goods and festivals into handicraft creation and production, just as the saying of Chaoshan farmers — "cherishing property for all". Each place has its streams in from all over the country. Chaoshan is narrow in land and dense in population, which makes the contradiction between natural environment resources and social material demand prominent. The fierce competition environment has subtly affected the people's thinking and created the spirit of diligence and thrift of local people. According to the "thin" characteristic of Chaoshan porcelain, the occasional collisions during the production process of porcelain result in some defective porcelain products. When there is colorful defective products of "Rao Porcelain", the artisans of Chaoshan will show the cherishment of the material. In the process of turning waste ceramics into treasures, local craftsmen ingeniously combined the high-temperature and corrosion-resistant physical properties of "Rao porcelain" with the natural climate, such as local acidic rainfall and the erosion of salty wet sea wind. The gorgeous color attributes of the porcelain itself are combined with the architectural decoration, and the two physical attributes of "Rao porcelain" are used to make up for the shortcomings of the original architectural decoration, forming a unique porcelain inlay process.

2.2 Making Good Use of Materials and Having the Courage to Bring Forth New Ideas

The functional view of Chinese traditional craft aesthetics of "examining the situation and taking advantage of each other's suitability" [3] mentioned

by Professor Hang Jian in the book "History of Chinese Arts and Crafts" is in line with the principle of "making good use of materials and having the courage to bring forth new ideas" of the Chaoshan porcelain inlay craftsman. The reason for the spirit of making good use of materials and being brave in exploring and innovating is closely related to the local natural climate and regional culture. There is also a record in "Book of Diverse Crafts": "There are seasons, climates, materials and crafts, forming the good." [4] This sentence also explains the mutual influence among craft creation, natural environment and material itself. Chaoshan belongs to the eastern part of Guangdong. It has a unique geographical environment, intertwined rivers, scattered hills, and frequent natural disasters. Due to livelihoods, Chaoshan people must seek a variety of ways of living. Some use the seaside advantage to make a living by the sea, some turn to the trade development to make a living by the business, and some take participate in farming to seek survival, which cultivate Chaoshan people's spirits of being smart, dare to competition, innovation and exploration. Under the influence of such a regional and humanistic character of making the good use of materials and being daring to explore, the porcelain inlay craftsmen continue to explore the functions of porcelain inlay, take advantage of the various colors of porcelain inlay, and adopt new architectural decoration techniques. Using gray plastic as a blank and inlaying waste ceramic pieces on it not only makes up for the shortcomings of gray plastic that is easy to be corroded, but also takes advantage of the bright colors of the ceramic inlay art, and explores and innovates in Chaoshan folk crafts from the technique, craft, subject matter, and external form, so that porcelain inlay will always be beautiful in Chaoshan architecture.

3. "EXQUISITELY-CRAFTED" DECORATIVE PERFORMANCE

Chaoshan culture has an important feature of "elaboration" [5]. As the representative of Chaoshan folk handicrafts and traditional architectural decoration, Chaoshan porcelain inlay also deeply penetrates the spirit of "being exquisite" into the decorative expression of porcelain inlay. With continuous development and progress, the porcelain inlay process has developed into expression techniques and shaping methods based on flat inlay, floating inlay, and three-dimensional inlay [6].

3.1 *Being Full and Strong, Precise and Complicated*

There is a record about the architectural characteristics of Chaoshan ancestral halls in the book "Chenghai County Chronicles": "Large and small ancestors compete for the construction of ancestral halls, compete for magnificence, and do not hesitate to pay." [7] It can be seen that Chaoshan people pay attention to luxurious scenes when building ancestral halls. The various clans competed to build ancestral halls, and used the complexity of architectural decoration to highlight their status and the psychological worship and praise to ancestors. The porcelain inlay art also developed and prospered, and gradually formed an artistic style of being ingenious, full and strong, magnificent and complex. From the cutting of materials and the overall modeling style, the "full and strong, fine and complex" style tone of porcelain inlay art can be seen. Taking the phoenix, a commonly used subject for porcelain inlays, as an example, ("Figure 1"), the scales and wings of the phoenix are made by trimming and inlaying tiles of various colors and shapes according to the feathers and scales of the phoenix in traditional paintings and sculptures ("Figure 2"). Its elegant phoenix tail and wings are usually composed of small and pointed tiles. ("Figure 3") In order to express the realism of its feathers and scales, the overall shape of the phoenix is composed of hundreds of small porcelain pieces stacked on top of each other. The colors are strong and full when seeing from a distance, and the shapes are well-defined, fine and complex when seeing in close-up distance [6]. ("Figure 4") The fine and luxurious level of Chaozhou architecture is influenced by the social ethos of advocating luxury. The construction of residential houses and ancestral halls requires architectural decoration. Therefore, the finely-crafted, full and complex porcelain art style has become an important part of the architectural decoration expression of Chaozhou area.



Figure 1 Porcelain inlay - phoenix.



Figure 2 Porcelain inlay - phoenix.



Figure 3 Porcelain inlay - phoenix.



Figure 4 Porcelain inlay - phoenix.

3.2 *Flexible and Changeable Forms of Expression*

There are various manifestations of porcelain inlay, which can be divided into three main manifestations according to different expression techniques. Among them, the expression method of inlaying brightly colored broken tiles on the plane of the gray plastic embryo is called flat inlay. This form of expression has the artistic characteristics of flatness and smoothness, and the irregular splicing technique of broken porcelain pieces forms a strong contrast with the clean and smooth porcelain surface, forming a unique visual effect. The method of inlaying the broken ceramic pieces on the original basso-relievo and embossed gray plastic embryos is called embossing and three-dimensional inlay, respectively, which gives people a visual experience of different lengths, concavities and

convexities, and a strong sense of three-dimensionality [8]. Each piece of porcelain inlay art is hand-cut by porcelain inlay craftsmen, forming a variety of different forms. The form of expression is more flexible, and the final porcelain inlay works are often unique. At the same time, the inlay is combined with other handicrafts, and the expression techniques are combined with the shaping techniques of other Chaozhou sculptures. Various forms of expression are used to shape the inlay works with themes such as flowers, baskets, dragons and phoenixes, and figures. In terms of color, the color of Chaozhou embroidery is integrated, with red, blue, green and other colors as the main colors for the creation of works [6]. Drawing on traditional Chinese painting for modeling, it pays attention to large shapes while elaborately carving parts and details, and applies various forms of expression to porcelain inlay works. In the appearance form, the realistic concrete echoes with the abstract porcelain pieces. In the visual space, the combination of the virtual and the real creates an artistic effect of "bright appearance and fine carving". As shown in "Figure 5", the porcelain inlay for character modeling mostly adopts the combination of three-dimensional inlay and floating inlay, and the expression and posture complement each other. As shown in "Figure 6", the modeling methods of flowers, vegetables and fruits are mostly combined with floating inlay and flat inlay, with exquisite shape and bright color. Flexible forms of expression and molding techniques in porcelain inlay art has been incisively and vividly displayed. It can be seen from the above that the decorative characteristics of porcelain inlay art are fully displayed in the flexible porcelain inlay techniques.



Figure 5 Porcelain inlay - characters.



Figure 6 Porcelain inlay - flower.

4. THE HUMANISTIC SYMBOL WITH "VARIOUS SUBJECTS"

There are many kinds of porcelain inlay themes and patterns, among which historical allusions, drama novels, folk customs and other themes are the main ones. The porcelain inlay shapes are mostly realistic and concrete, with a strong sense of story and picture.

4.1 *Historical Allusions and Dramatic Novels*

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the development of chapter novels prevailed. It was born in the period when chapter novels prevailed and in the Chaozhou area where Chaozhou Opera was popular. Based on novels and heroes of Chaozhou Opera, the porcelain inlay art theme has the characteristics of public education. "There is gable, there is drama" [9]. In the gable of Chaozhou architecture, it mainly chooses historical allusions, drama novels and other characters' stories, such as the well-known folk characters' stories of "Guo Ziyi's birthday", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", and "Xue Dingshan's expedition to the west". For example, it takes the fragments in the novel as the theme, such as "Water Margin" and "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" [10]. A large number of historical allusions and dramatic novels with heroic themes reflect the decorative metaphor culture of Chaoshan porcelain inlay. The porcelain inlay art themes are wide and diverse, which contains rich Chaozhou folk culture. Although the craftsmen engaged in porcelain inlay art have not received good and systematic art education, they draw rich artistic inspiration from the local rich folk culture, with the characters of oral literature, historical

allusions, dramas and novels as the theme. And then, it has formed a variety of porcelain inlay decorative images, thus promoting the continuous development and prosperity of Chaozhou porcelain inlay art. From historical allusions and novels and Chaozhou Opera, porcelain inlay works draw a lot from family love and patriotic hero stories, convey the spiritual implication of benevolence, filial piety, courtesy, loyalty, friendship and bravery against the enemy, so as to establish the hero worship and let Chaozhou people realize the excellent traditional virtues of the Chinese nation. In the process of imperceptibly influencing the Chaozhou people to establish correct values, a good social atmosphere and noble spiritual and cultural quality will be formed. Chaozhou porcelain inlay craftsmen present the subjects with positive value to Chaozhou people through the traditional architectural decoration carrier of inlay porcelain, which not only has the significance of public education, but also reflects the unique aesthetic habits and folk cultural image of eastern Guangdong. Against the background of the traditional agricultural era and the interaction of regional culture and social environment, Chaozhou porcelain inlay has become the portrayal and expression of its important regional humanistic value by citing historical allusions, dramas and novels to express the cultural connotation of decorative metaphor.

4.2 The Embodiment of Folk Customs

Chaozhou's diverse topography, farming culture and marine culture are prominent. Various real estate resources give birth to Chaozhou's rich product resources. Chaozhou's daily flowers, plants, vegetables, fruits, birds, animals, poultry, marine life, etc., unique regional culture and rich natural resources provide a wide range of creative materials and inspiration for porcelain inlay art.

Influenced by the traditional Chinese secular moral concept and the concept of picking an auspicious day, auspicious patterns are used in the creation of porcelain inlay art, mainly in the form of patterns and homophony. Among them, the most common patterns are dragon and Phoenix, which express Chaozhou people's long cherished wish that their son will become a dragon and their daughter will become a Phoenix. The common forms of homophony are bat, deer and peach, representing fortune and longevity, and expressing the moral of Chaozhou people's wish for happiness, longevity and health. The homonym of "grain, bee, lantern pattern" is "abundant grain", expressing Chaozhou people's wishes for a great harvest of grain and other auspicious meanings [10]. The theme elements of these patterns and homophony are intended to imply the family happiness, wealth and longevity, happiness and well-being, reflecting the rich imagination and creativity of Chaozhou people, and conveying the pursuit and love of Chaozhou people for a better life.

Among Chaozhou folk beliefs, Buddhism and Taoism are believed by the people. Under the influence of folk belief, the God and Buddha are applied to the creation of porcelain inlay.

Taking the auspicious theme of "two dragons frolicking with a pearl" as an example, ("Figure 7") it is the most typical subject of Chaozhou building ridge decoration. The subject of "two dragons frolicking with a pearl" takes the symmetrical composition of the two dragons at the left and right ends, with a dazzling pearl embedded in the middle as the symmetry center. The dynamic beauty of flying clouds is built and a magnificent atmosphere with strong visual effect and bright colors is created, being dynamic viewing from the distance and lifelike from the close, and expressing the good wishes of Chaozhou people.



Figure 7 Porcelain inlay - two dragons frolicking with a pearl.

Life, auspiciousness and folk belief are selected as the themes of inlay art. The themes are diverse, which reflect the traditional Chinese virtues of hard work and simplicity of Chaozhou people from different angles, and reflect the close correlation between the contents of inlay art and Chaozhou regional folk culture.

5. CONCLUSION

Chaozhou porcelain inlay art is a kind of architectural decoration technology formed and developed on the basis of the mutual adaptation of Chaoshan people's demand for a better life and artistic aesthetic concept. The unique decoration technology, rich regional characteristics and wide range of subjects reflect the aesthetic connotation and national spirit of Lingnan traditional architectural decoration. Under the pressure of fast-paced life and the visual fatigue of stereotyped industrial products, modern people tend to have the psychological need to return to nature and return to the truth, as well as the aesthetic taste of frank and colorful appreciation. The unique visual expression and decorative technology of porcelain inlay art coincide with people's pursuit of local culture and simple and pure artistic conception. It is believed that more people will find and appreciate it in the future. The decorative art of porcelain inlay is an important part of the cultural aesthetic consciousness of Lingnan area, which has an important enlightenment and guidance for modern architectural decorative art of exploring the national local culture and establishing the cultural and creative product design concept of national self-confidence.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yanling Cao made the revision and design of the paper, and Yanjun Lu participated in the writing and data analysis.

REFERENCES

- [1] Li Zehou. Three Books on Aesthetics [M]. Tianjin: Tianjin Social Science Press, 2003. (in Chinese)
- [2] Zheng Xiaolu. Research on the decorative aesthetics of traditional architecture in Chaozhou-Shantou region [D]. Guangdong: South China University of Technology, 2008. DOI:10.7666/d.Y1385091. (in Chinese)
- [3] Li Yuquan. The artistic characteristics and humanistic value of Chaoshan Qianci [D]. Shantou University, 2011. (in Chinese)
- [4] Zhang Daoyi. Work specification and craft literature of warring states period [M]. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House, 2004. (in Chinese)
- [5] Lin Lunlun, Wu Qinsheng. The Grand View of Chaoshan Culture [M]. Huacheng Publishing House. 2001. (in Chinese)
- [6] Zou Hua. Analysis of porcelain inlay art in Chaoshan area [J]. Foshan Ceramics, 2017,27(12): 41-44. (in Chinese)
- [7] Zheng Lixin, Qin Bo. Probe into Art Uniqueness of Cutting-out Decoration in Chaoshan Architecture [J]. Chinese Ceramics, 2008(06): 68-70+76+57. (in Chinese)
- [8] Zeng Wanchun. The texture beauty of Chaozhou porcelain inlay [J]. Art Review, 2016(05): 146-148. (in Chinese)
- [9] Wu Zefeng. The Influence of Popular Needs on Chaoshan Porcelain Inlay Workmen's Skill and Style [J]. Decoration, 2013(02): 88-90. (in Chinese)
- [10] Chen Lei. Porcelain Inlay of Chaoshan Area in Building : Kaiyuan Temple in Chaozhou as an Example [J]. Foshan Ceramics, 2015, 25(12): 53-56. (in Chinese)