

On Generation and Evolution of Traditional Ceramics Blank-Leaving Decoration Art

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Abstract—From primitive society to modern civilization, circular device has been the main modeling style of the traditional ceramic arts. Circular device triggered out partition decoration, and consequently gave rise to blank-leaving decoration in form of horizontal ribbon and vertical geometry partition. From germination of blank-leaving unpainted potteries to its modern evolution of traditional ceramics, blank-leaving witnessed the changes of the times and of its evolution from utensils to artistic devices in all previous dynasties. This paper intends to study blank-leaving, its generation, evolution, characteristics and traces of development in order to justify that “Changing with the evolution of shape of utensils” and “The unification of utensils and Dao” are the main internal causes of blank-leaving, its generation and evolution.

Keywords—blank-leaving decoration; Dao and Utensils; traditional ceramic arts

I. INTRODUCTION

We have found through research that almost all utensils have decorations. Circular device is the main modeling features of traditional ceramic arts. The modeling style aroused the way of partition decoration, which means partition infinity circular surface into a number of portions. Blank-leaving decoration is creature of horizontal ribbon and vertical geometry partition. What is called “blank-leaving”? Professor Kong Liu Qing wrote in his work *Traditional Antique Colored Decoration Type and Composition Point of View*, “what we call blank-leaving is that we leave blank parts of various shapes in the vessels in contrast with background color, or squeeze blank area by intensive pattern, or leave blank as the picture in colored or designed base. [1]” Professor Fang Fu says in his work *The Theory of Antique Colored Decoration in Porcelain Garden*, “Dou Fang is also called blank-leaving, which means to draw a certain shape frame with thicker line before the basic decoration, and then foil the shape of blank by background pattern. [2]” We can learn from the scholars’ views that blank-leaving is a decoration method that we usually set aside or draw a certain shape of space for following decoration works. The development of blank-leaving accompanied by ceramic art has been more than seven thousand years since the infancy of neolithic age on the painted pottery to the application of modern ceramic art. Blank-leaving has experienced the bud

period of a primitive society to the development witnessing a turning point of the Song dynasty and the peak of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Blank-leaving style was becoming clearer and more complicated gradually. The inner causes may be attributed to the original shape and function of painted pottery.

II. ON INFANCY AND GENERATION OF PAINTED POTTERY BLANK-LEAVING DECORATION ART

Friedrich Von Engels, a well-known German philosopher, claims in his work *The Family, Private Ownership and National Origin*, “Pottery manufacturing is due to the establishment or painted wooden vessel of clay to refractory. In so doing, people soon discovered that, molding clay can be used even without the container inside. [3]” It’s visible that to meet the application and the production of tableware is the initial purpose of ceramic, and then circular shape is the best form of combined function of cooking utensils and tableware. Our primitive ancestors, therefore, created painted pottery for aesthetic demand on pottery decoration. “Painted pottery art is a remarkable achievement of Yang Shao Culture, it is painted in pottery before being burnt into the threads that is fixed on the clay surface not easy to fall off. [4]” In observing the transformation and distribution of the figures such as birds, frog, fish and the geometric pattern of the image on painted pottery, we can parse the generation of partition decoration and “Blank-Leaving”.

A. Function of application

In the primitive society, combination of both utensils and tableware gave birth to the horizontal ribbon partition style on painted pottery. Because the bottom of the vessel need to be wrapped in mud or direct heating when cooking food, its decoration had to be painted on vessels’ outside wall. Pots, bowls, bottles, for instance, of Yang Shao Culture age usually broke up a horizontal strip on the outer wall, and drew fish, frogs, dot, line, etc. In the inside of utensils in geometric patterns, the lower parts of which are blank. Painted potteries are usually in shape of drum abdomen small foot, obviously in purpose of increasing the volume and easy to cook, at the same time, the three-legged tripod and by so that can support the cooking function of early potteries.

B. Function for vision

It is due to the way of our ancestors' sitting on the floor that aroused horizontal ribbon and vertical geometry partition on potteries.

Firstly, there is a blind area of the bottom of painted potteries when they were seated on the floor in watching them, so their vision focus was generally placed on the middle portions. For example, they drew on the inside and outside above wall of exposure-mouth plate and bowl, while painting small convergence-mouth pot and urn on the outer wall part. For example, in "Dance lines painted pottery basin" "Fig. 1". They drew inside several groups of patterns on the inner wall of the pot of strip from the top of the mouth to the middle part, each group with a pair of people hand-in-hand pattern and several lines like parentheses around arc, and the rough sketch of parentheses is similar to "blank-leaving". Integration and echo of the pattern can be found between strips of the banding decoration, continuous pattern composed of broken line along the mouth and the three parallel port of outer wall along the mouth trip. At the same time, however, all kinds of spiral, vortex pattern can only been seen in painted potteries of "Majia Kiln Culture", a mature period in history, drawing on objects outside wall area.

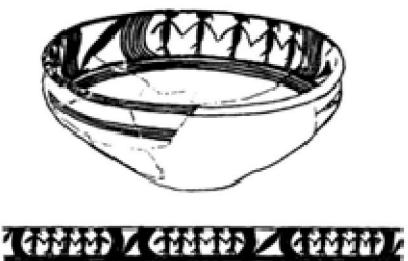


Fig. 1. Dance lines painted pottery basin. (Neolithic)

Secondly, the overlooking perspective of users when seated on the floor triggered emergence of the horizontal, vertical segmentation combination forms, for instance, in "Mid-levels painted pottery tank (overlooking)" "Fig. 2". Looking down from the top we can find here in a horizontal strip in the mouth as the center to the launch of the four verticals far outside the region, form the sense of equilibrium. It is very close to its typical shape.



Fig. 2. Mid-levels painted pottery tank. (overlooking)

C. Consequencet of Circular Device

It's inevitable to produce partition decoration and blank-leaving when attempting to compose a picture on full round painted pottery.

First of all, the decoration of a round pottery requires the neat shape of the horizontal ribbon partition on its mouth along the parallel wall. Secondly, the difference of composition between round vessel and a vertical one lies in the difficulty of the curved wall drawing and the infinite possibility. The primitive divided earthen vessel into several small regions, so that the small area is more smooth and easy to be drawn on. Thirdly, the characteristic of circular infinite loop matches the partition decoration methods. "Blank-Leaving", therefore, is a kind of solution for ware composition technique which can give consideration to integrity and continuous cycle of picture when vessel rotates. Many other material vessels also applied blank-leaving adornment, to name a few, a number of lateral ribbon partition on the bronze ware drawn inside some rich life scenes, the gold and silver ware of Tang dynasty with anaglyph gimmick express various objects.

D. Consequence of Intersection

Painting is now recognized as the earlier form of art, but pottery was invented for utility. The behavior of drawing animals, people, and the geometry on the painted pottery, can be incorporated into the creation of the production and living tools, and it also embodies the culture its transaction and mixture. If the ancestors' partition decoration is the beginning of object "intersection" on the painted pottery, then blank-leaving is the offsprings inherited from and development of the intersection. For it can cross time and space, and fuse many countries their areas of arts, decoration style, glaze skin texture, etc. For instance, various pictographic (sunflower, good shape, etc.) with blank-leaving silhouette was borrowed from the shape of other objects the exported Clark porcelain of Ming dynasty is a blend of blue-and-white technique and Islamic culture, and "the blank-leaving of the grain on color background" in Qing dynasty porcelain to a large extent was influenced by the production process of western "copper foetus enamel painting" and the realistic style in composition.

Among all the factors above, the circle device is the precondition of blank-leaving decoration. Decoration according to the vessel shape, is the key to the partition decoration and "blank-leaving" form. From primitive society to the modern civilization, circular device has been still the main modeling style of the traditional ceramic art, etc. "From the perspective of grace for the vessel surface decoration, to follow the shape of vessels on the surface of ups and downs for apt pictures to decorate is the most as well as the basic requirements. In other words, to be suitable for surface vessels in turning stereo type as a decorative fit is different from the most basic characteristics of surface painting in paper composition." The features of traditional ceramic decoration changed due to its shape generated horizontal zonal composition and the radial composition so that generated blank-leaving adornment.

III. BLANK-LEAVING AND CERAMIC PARTITION DECORATION DEVELOPED SYNCHRONOUSLY

A. Horizontal Ribbon Partition and Abdominal Blank-leaving of Vessels

Horizontal ribbon partition is the main form of ceramic decoration, usually surrounding outside wall of vessel and parallel of mouth, and then emerged the design. According to different bone strip shape, it could be divided into landscape type and topical blank-leaving type.

1) Landscape composition.

It refers to the landscape, its plot, its characters, etc. drawn in the blank-leaving shape. It forms a complete picture that often painted in abdomen. More often to be seen in blue-and-white potteries of Yuan dynasty, such as "Xiaohe chases Hanxin in the moonlight" "Fig. 3", using the craft of blue-and-white to reproduce the classical historical stories.



Fig. 3. Xiaohe chase Hanxin in the moonlight of yuan dynasty.

2) Blank-leaving composition.

Blank-leaving composition focuses on the performance of one or several areas to highlight the theme. Specific practices are:

a) *amplificate area*: Such as using sunflower blank-leaving shape of style to occupy the entire perspective Cizhou kiln plum bottle of Song Dynasty "Fig. 4".



Fig. 4. Cizhou kiln plum bottle of song dynasty.

b) *Several blank-leaving areas to be drawn*: Several blank-leaving has uniform distribution based on the content area to be drawn, such as "Blue-and-white four love figure plum bottle of Yuan Dynasty" "Fig. 5".



Fig. 5. Blue-and-white four love figure plum bottle of yuan dynasty.

c) *In comparison*: Comparing the decoration inside and outside of blank-leaving to highlight the theme, as Blue-and-white, and underglaze red decoration cover pot of yuan dynasty" "Fig. 6". It's more prominent that the flower of sunflower shaped blank-leaving in abdominal decoration by blue-and-white and underglaze red.



Fig. 6. Blue-and-white and underglaze red decoration cover pot of yuan dynasty

Horizontal ribbon partition, appearing alone or integrated, makes a record of the historical style and features of the times. Most of painted potteries, for instance, are single banded composition in Yangshao culture, those banded area with over two horizontal ribbons in Majia kiln culture, and those with several kinds of geometric lines coexisting in the formation of multi strips in from Song Dynasty. The viewpoint changed along with the changes of sitting position from that of sitting on the ground to that of sitting with foot dropping, location of the main composition was also transferred from shoulder to the abdomen. Blank-leaving grew to be common practices of the performance of the main content.

B. Radial Patterning on Disk and Geometric Even Blank-Leaving

Radial patterning is composed by round topic blank-leaving and annula side decoration on the edge, and forms the bone radiates from middle to the around. The edge shape is composition of continuous and interval type. The blue-and-white plate of Yuan dynasty are often painted with flowers, fish, deer, etc. In the middle of it and with continuous twined flowers in most edges. Themed graphics such as landscapes, flowers and birds, characters, animals on most of clark cermics blank-leaving exported in Ming dynasty, edges composed of several annular portions then the longitudinally splitted into a number of even numbers to paint the patterns. The effect of interlocking and airtight decoration embody the characteristics of Islamic culture. The abdomen is similar to flat bottle blank-leaving composition, usually with horizontal strip composition on bottle neck.

IV. THE LAW OF DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL CERAMIC BLANK-LEAVING

Some certain rules of traditional ceramic arts decoration can be summarized from the development of the above two kinds of ceramic composition forms. The application of blank-leaving was initially transformed from unconscious to conscious. The original inhabitants were not trained in painting, therefore painting pottery was a kind of a spontaneous and unconscious creation. When it was accepted, more of it was a conscious application, especially it was officially named in Song dynasty. Its wide application on ceramic was based on humans' previous accumulation and creative activities according to its experience. Just as professor Fei Xiaotong wrote in his work Culture and cultural consciousness, that is, "when we look into the human world separately, each component is the individual in society with its natural aptitude created, people in dealing with the natural formation of the generation after generation that accumulate over a long period. While these innovations once accepted by the masses, they went into the connotation of the humanities world, which do not belong to any individual. [6]"

A. Changes of Blank-Leaving Profile from Obscurity to Clarity

Geometric profile grew to be the element of the blank-leaving in the course of its development, in Tang dynasty, the infancy period, point-dotted lines on painted pottery to partition on Changsha kiln colored pot in Song dynasty lotus profile with willful lines on Cizhou kiln potteries, and clear blank-leaving profile lines on blue-and-white ceramic and colored pottery in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. "Clear line drawing geometric profile" almost became the typical feature of blank-leaving.

B. Level of Blank-Leaving Gradient from Simplicity to Complexity

The blank-leaving evolution of ceramic arts have been becoming more and more mature and complex, to name a few, we can see the changes of neolithic "Human face fish

basin" during New Stone Age with simple lines in the basin heart "Fig. 7", then there three layers rounding partition on "Colored drawing pottery" in Han dynasty "Fig. 8", and then application of multiple layers rounding blank-leaving "Blue-and-white cloud shoulder and complex treasure tray" of Yuan dynasty "Fig. 9", to incessantly over-elaborate blank-leaving colored pottery in Qing dynasty. We found that the level of dedication became more and more complicated, reached its peak of development during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It was gradually and largely influenced by the aesthetic concepts of the rulers and the western culture.



Fig. 7. Human face fish basin (Neolithic)



Fig. 8. Colored drawing pottery" (Han dynasty)



Fig. 9. Blue-and-white cloud shoulder and complex treasure tray

V. EVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL BLANK-LEAVING IN MODERN CERAMIC ARTS

When coming to modern times, blank-leaving technique continuously developed itself in stylized patterning and drawing mode, for example, common themes appeared on twisted peony or branch lotus. The artists in Jingdezhen often cut paper into a fixed shape, to draw by copying, blank-leaving contour are always drawn to be symmetric geometry such as fixed heart shapes, round shapes and lotus shapes, etc.

The continuously circulating and patterned, stylized features along with this model are inconsistent with modern aesthetic. The wide application of blank-leaving in modern ceramic arts can integrate the characteristics of the times, the main changes can summarized as follows:

A. The changes from decoration to painting

Blank-leaving enriches the decoration on pottery, but decorative style also hinders its development. The artists in late Qing dynasty took part in ceramic creation from the concept of light crimson decoration and brought painting into ceramic arts. The artists uses ceramic materials as a media for painting. Most of the application of blank-leaving was implemented on bottles and disks, less on porcelain plates. They drew traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, watercolor, etc, most of which traditional Chinese paintings.

The change from the decoration to the painting improved ceramic aesthetic taste and artistic value.

B. Application Changes from Drawing to Comprehensive Decoration

If the line drawing blank-leaving outline of Cizhou kiln profile is the key to its development, then it is inheritance and innovation that our modern ceramic arts fuse comprehensive decoration glaze, texture, carving and so on. As a reference of “leaving or drawing a shape on a position of pottery”, the technique of “highlight a shape” in modern ceramic blank-leaving is more various. For example, carving in green glaze to set aside a certain shape on the white porcelain, a region of overglaze decoration appears on the green glaze works, a certain craft blank-leaving is formed on color glaze skin texture, etc.

Comprehensive decoration uniting a language of modern thought and traditional ceramic culture can better explain the era of aesthetic and emotion.

C. From the Formula to Free Creation

The “blank-leaving” in modern ceramic arts broke the traditional geometry and the overall segmentation mode is more freedom. Huang Huanyi’s work “Desk No.2” “Fig. 10”, for instance, makes a strong visual impact by the contrast of coarse and fine, quiet blue-and-white and ornamentation on twisted mud.



Fig. 10. Desk No.2 ” (made by Huang Huanyi)

Cuidi’s work – “White snow in windy spring” “Fig.11”, for another example, uses modern way to restructure the horizontal strip division, draws flower and bird painting of Song dynasty after fan-shaped “ blank-leaving ” on pottery, clearly has rich level. These applications of blank-leaving combine arts design elements, focuses on the expression of thoughts, and makes the traditional thought of symmetries. Its balance coexists with modern aesthetics, and gives us more comprehensive aesthetic vision.



Fig. 11. “White snow in windy spring” (made by Cuidi)

VI. CONCLUSION

Our primitive ancestors created blank-leaving methods on painted pottery, and developed into veins of decorative arts in use today. Traditional ceramic blank-leaving decoration has experienced the green shoots of a primitive society to the turning point of Song dynasty and into the peak of Ming and Qing dynasties. Its form developed from obscurity to clarity, from simplity to complex, and then formed a conscious fixed mode. From germination of blank-leaving on painted pottery to later development and modern evolution of traditional ceramics blank-leaving in all previous dynasties, we can explore its causes, characteristics and traces of its development, and it demonstrates that “Changed by utensils” and “The unification of utensils and Dao” is the main internal cause of blank-leaving generation and evolution. The change of blank-leaving its shape formed mainly according to the utensils outline. Dao is its change rule, the unification of “Dao” and “utensils” of traditional ceramics produced symmetric neat geometry. And modern ceramic art freely changed the modeling of giving birth to the informal personality with free application of blank-leaving. In proceeding perspective, blank-leaving, as a unique technique, has witnessed the changes of times and embodied multicultural coexistence of tradition and modernity, decoration and painting, utensils and arts, which, therefore, deserves further related research.

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