

A Study of Chinese Culture and Image in Ceramic Poetry

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Keywords: Ceramic Poetry; Chinese Culture; Chinese Image; Cultural Exchange

Abstract: This paper takes ceramic poetry as the research object to explore its unique value in carrying Chinese culture and shaping the national image. It sorts out the development context of ceramic poetry: starting from Tang Dynasty poets who took ceramics as the object of their odes—such as Du Fu and Lu Guimeng praising the texture and glaze color of porcelain, to the Song Dynasty where ceramics were integrated with life scenarios to endow them with humanistic connotations, and then to the prosperous development in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. This shows ceramic poetry's historical trajectory evolving with ceramic craftsmanship. By analyzing classic cases such as blue-and-white porcelain, secret-color porcelain, and purple clay teapots, the paper reveals the role of ceramic poetry in craft recording, aesthetic expression, and reflection of regional culture. It is not only an important document for the study of ceramic history but also conveys traditional philosophy and aesthetic thoughts through natural images and personality symbols. The research shows that ceramic poetry centrally embodies China's profound cultural heritage, unique artistic creativity, and the image of peace and friendship demonstrated through trade and exchanges. At the same time, it highlights the wisdom of craftsmen and the spirit of cultural inheritance, providing important enlightenment for contemporary cultural communication and national image shaping.

1. Introduction

Ceramic poetry takes a unique position in the literary field and in ceramic culture, though it is not a mainstream genre, and this paper explains its potential value in cultural research. It emphasizes the great significance of studying ceramic poetry for exploring the profound connotations of Chinese culture and enriching the ways of shaping China's national image.

Through the strategy of text analysis, this paper expounds the culture and image in ceramic poems, which starts with the introduction of ceramic poetry and gradually conduct in-depth analysis of the cultural elements contained in it and the shaping of the national image.

2. A Brief Introduction to Chinese Ceramic Poetry

2.1 Origin and Development of Chinese Ceramic Poetry

The origin of Chinese ceramic poetry can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. With the maturity

of ceramic craftsmanship, poets began to take ceramics as the object of their odes and recorded the aesthetic characteristics and cultural connotations of ceramics through poetry. For example, in Du Fu's poem "Asking for a Dayi Porcelain Bowl from Wei", the line "Dayi porcelain is light yet firm, and its sound when tapped is like that of a mournful jade, spreading fame in Jincheng" uses the sound to describe the porcelain, praising the texture and timbre of Dayi white porcelain. In Lu Guimeng's poem "Secret-Color Yue Ware", the line "When the autumn wind and dew come, the Yue kiln opens, seizing the green hue of a thousand peaks" compares the glaze color of the secret-color porcelain from the Yue kiln to the "green hue of a thousand peaks", showing its elegant beauty like the natural mountain scenery.

In the Song Dynasty, ceramic poetry further developed. Poets often integrated ceramics with life scenarios such as tea drinking and wine tasting, endowing them with humanistic connotations. For instance, in Huang Tingjian's poem "Partridge Sky", the line "The soup in the icy porcelain makes the whole room feel like spring" uses the icy porcelain to set off the tea soup, creating a comfortable atmosphere of tasting tea in spring. In Yang Wanli's poem "Seven-Character Poem on Burning Incense", the line "Porcelain is carved into a tripod, green as water" expresses praise for the craftsmanship of Longquan porcelain through the green color and texture of the porcelain tripod.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, ceramic poetry entered a period of prosperity, with Jingdezhen porcelain as the core of creation. Poets not only focused on the aesthetic value of ceramics but also conducted in-depth discussions on their production techniques and cultural symbols. For example, Gong Shi's poem collection *Jingdezhen Ceramic Songs* in the Qing Dynasty recorded the seventy-two processes of porcelain making in Jingdezhen in the form of a series of poems. Known as "China's first specialized collection of ceramic poetry", it has pioneering significance.

2.2 The Value of Chinese Ceramic Poetry

2.2.1 Documentary Value

Gong Shi's *Jingdezhen Ceramic Songs* systematically recorded the porcelain-making process in Jingdezhen during the Qing Dynasty through 60 poems, covering the entire process from raw material mining to finished product firing. For example, the line "The blank workshop takes away the white glaze, and the sagger factory brings in the yellow soil" vividly depicts the production cooperation between the blank workshop and the sagger factory, providing precious historical materials for the study of the ceramic industry in the Qing Dynasty. This collection not only makes up for the lack of previous ceramic documents but also inherits the porcelain-making techniques in the form of poetry, possessing dual values in craftsmanship and literature [1].

2.2.2 Aesthetic and Cultural Value

Ceramic poetry demonstrates its aesthetic value through three dimensions: the beauty of ceramics, the beauty of craftsmanship, and the beauty of artistic conception. For example, the line "Sounding like a mournful jade" (from Du Fu's poem "Asking for a Dayi Porcelain Bowl from Wei") uses the sound to describe the porcelain, reflecting the auditory beauty of ceramics. The line "The green hue of a thousand peaks" (from Lu Guimeng's poem "Secret-Color Yue Ware") conveys the beauty of nature through visual images. In addition, ceramic poetry often uses porcelain as a metaphor for people, endowing it with personalized symbols. For example, in Emperor Qianlong's poem "Ode to the Xuanyao Ji Hong Vase", the line "The cinnabar in the world is not comparable, and the gemstones from the West are hardly the same" uses the intense color of the red-glazed porcelain to metaphorize the majesty of the monarch, highlighting the cultural symbolic

significance of ceramics [2].

2.2.3 Value of Regional Characteristics and Historical Inheritance

The development of ceramic poetry is closely related to the regional migration of ceramic industry centers. In the Tang Dynasty, represented by the Yue Kiln and Xing Kiln, poetry mostly focused on the aesthetic characteristics of celadon and white porcelain. In the Song Dynasty, with the rise of the five famous kilns, poets began to explore the philosophical connotations of ceramics. For example, the sky-blue color of the Ru Kiln, described as “the sky clearing after rain, revealing the blue of the sky”, was endowed with the connotation of the Taoist thought of “nature”. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when Jingdezhen became the “porcelain capital”, ceramic poetry focused more on recording the porcelain-making process and the industry ecology. For example, the line “The kiln master urges urgently, and the kiln is opened once every three days” in Gong Shi’s *Jingdezhen Ceramic Songs* reflects the intense production rhythm of the kiln workers at that time [3].

3. Chinese Culture Reflected in Ceramic Poetry

3.1 Cultural Memory of Craft Recording and Historical Inheritance

Ceramic poetry is an important document for the study of the history of China’s ceramic industry. For example, Gong Shi’s *Jingdezhen Ceramic Songs* systematically recorded the porcelain-making process in Jingdezhen during the Qing Dynasty through 60 poems, covering the entire process from raw material mining, blank making to kiln firing. The line “The blank workshop takes away the white glaze, and the sagger factory brings in the yellow soil” vividly depicts the production cooperation between the blank workshop and the sagger factory, making up for the lack of official documents [1]. The rise of Yue Kiln celadon in the Tang Dynasty, the five famous kilns in the Song Dynasty, and the porcelain capital of Jingdezhen in the Ming and Qing Dynasties have all left dual marks of aesthetics and craftsmanship in poetry. For example, Lu Guimeng’s line “Seizing the green hue of a thousand peaks” in the poem “Secret-Color Yue Ware” has become a synonym for Tang Dynasty secret-color porcelain [3].

3.2 Cultural Reflection of Regional Characteristics and Industrial Changes

Ceramic poetry is a carrier integrating regional culture and industrial technology. For example, Changsha Kiln in the Tang Dynasty was the earliest porcelain kiln decorated with poems and essays, and the inscriptions on its wine pots such as “White jade is not a treasure, and I don’t need thousands of gold” reflect the market culture. Its exported porcelain also spread Tang poetry overseas, becoming “a swan song of the Middle Ages” [4].

The description of Ru Kiln in the Song Dynasty as “the sky clearing after rain, revealing the blue of the sky” endows the sky-blue color with the Taoist thought of “nature” [3]. The research on Ding Kiln reveals the literati’s aesthetic pursuit of porcelain “white as condensed fat” [5].

The imperial porcelain in the Ming and Qing Dynasties reflects the imperial aesthetic through poems written by emperors. For example, a brush pot with the poem “Biography of the Holy Lord Obtaining Virtuous Ministers” during the Kangxi period reflects the combination of political intentions and craftsmanship [3].

The shift of ceramic production centers from north to south in China, as reflected in poems, corresponds to technological innovations and market demands. For example, the rise of Jingdezhen in the Ming dynasty was driven by its access to kaolin clay and pine wood for kilns, as well as its

proximity to the Yangtze River for transportation—all elements celebrated in local ceramic verses [6].

3.3 Reflection of Social Life and Literati Emotions

Ceramic poetry often reflects social customs and literati mentality.

Most of the poems and essays on Changsha Kiln reflect secular emotions such as poverty and sorrow of separation, such as “No fields to plant last year, no money to buy wine this spring” [4], reflecting the life of the lower and middle classes.

Poems about purple clay teapots praise the design wisdom with “light and easy to carry in a bamboo cage”, while blue-and-white porcelain is endowed with the gentlemanly character of “elegant and refined”.

As daily utensils, porcelain has become a carrier for literati to express emotions and philosophical thoughts. For example, the blue-and-white underglaze red porcelain vase, with “poetry in painting and painting in poetry” artistic conception, hides the five-character poem “Bamboo Has the Momentum to Hold Up the Sky” in the picture, deepening the thematic artistic conception.

3.4 Reflection of Cross-Cultural Communication and Sino-Foreign Exchanges

Changsha Kiln porcelain spread the culture of Tang poetry overseas through the Silk Road, and its poem and essay decorations became “a label of Chinese poetry culture” [4]. For example, a Tang Dynasty Changsha Kiln porcelain pot unearthed in Indonesia is inscribed with the line “Asking about the weight of the ship, sending a letter to Yangzhou”, which not only reflects the prosperity of maritime trade but also proves the unique role of ceramic poetry in cross-cultural communication.

The ceramic poems on Chinese export porcelain acted as “cultural signatures”, distinguishing Chinese ware from Persian or Japanese imitations. For instance, 18th-century European collectors prized Kangxi-period bowls inscribed with the emperor’s own verses, which symbolized both artistic mastery and imperial legitimacy [7].

4. China’s Image in Chinese Ceramic Poetry

4.1 Image of a Cultural Power

4.1.1 Profound Cultural Heritage

Chinese ceramic poetry carries thousands of years of cultural memory and is a vivid testimony to China’s profound cultural heritage [8]. From the simple records of pottery in the early stage to the praise of the exquisite porcelain in later generations, ceramic poetry runs through the long river of China’s historical development. For example, in the Tang Dynasty, poet Lu Guimeng wrote in the poem “Secret-Color Yue Ware” the lines “When the autumn wind and dew come, the Yue kiln opens, seizing the green hue of a thousand peaks”. These two simple lines not only vividly show the beautiful color of the Yue Kiln celadon when it comes out of the kiln, which is like seizing the green hue of a thousand peaks, but also reflect the highly developed porcelain-making technology in the Tang Dynasty and the rich aesthetic culture and material cultural connotations behind it.

Ceramic poetry is closely connected with Chinese traditional culture such as philosophy, religion, and folk customs. The Confucian culture of “rites” is reflected in many ways, such as the key role of porcelain in sacrificial and ritual activities is repeatedly mentioned in poetry. In solemn sacrificial occasions, exquisite porcelain carries people’s respect and memory for their ancestors,

reflecting the long history of Chinese traditional ritual culture [9]. The Taoist thought of advocating nature and pursuing simplicity also leaves traces in ceramic poetry. The praise for the natural beauty and simple texture of porcelain coincides with the aesthetic pursuit of Taoism. The descriptions of the porcelain-making process in poetry, from soil selection, blank making to firing, each link condenses the wisdom and skills inherited by generations of craftsmen, demonstrating the profound foundation and strong vitality of Chinese culture [10].

4.1.2 Unique Artistic Creativity

The organic integration of ceramic poetry and ceramic art fully demonstrates China's unique artistic creativity and aesthetic value [11]. Ceramic art itself combines multiple art forms such as modeling, painting, and carving, while poetry, with words as the medium, provides a more delicate interpretation and sublimation of ceramic art.

In terms of modeling, poetry vividly depicts the rich and diverse shapes of porcelain. Yang Wanli once described a porcelain vase in the line "A silver vase shaped like a gallbladder, a plum blossom like jade; This branch is broken and not yet fully bloomed". By comparing the porcelain vase to "the shape of a gallbladder", he accurately presents the unique modeling beauty of the porcelain vase, reflecting the unique observation and creativity of Chinese artists towards the form of utensils [12].

In terms of painted decorations, ceramic poetry praises and interprets the exquisite painted patterns on porcelain. In the Qing Dynasty, Gong Shi wrote in *Jingdezhen Ceramic Songs*: "White glaze and blue patterns are formed in one firing; The patterns show clearly through the glaze". This line describes the unique firing process of blue-and-white porcelain and the clear and bright effect of the blue patterns beneath the glaze. Blue-and-white porcelain skillfully integrates traditional Chinese painting art with porcelain-making craftsmanship, creating a unique aesthetic style, and poetry vividly conveys this artistic charm to readers [13].

From the perspective of aesthetic value, the aesthetic concepts embodied in ceramic poetry are in line with traditional Chinese aesthetics, pursuing the beauty of harmony, nature, and subtlety. Whether it is the praise for the natural color of porcelain like "The sky clearing after rain, revealing the blue of the sky" or the appreciation for its simple yet elegant shape, all reflect China's unique aesthetic value system. This aesthetic system stands out in the world of art, demonstrating the unique charm of China as a cultural power.

4.2 Image of Communication and Friendship

4.2.1 Ceramic Trade and Cultural Exchange

The content related to Sino-foreign ceramic trade and cultural exchanges in ceramic poetry profoundly reflects China's image of communication, friendship, peace, openness, and inclusiveness in foreign exchanges [14]. Since ancient times, Chinese ceramics have been sold overseas through the Silk Road, maritime trade, and other channels, becoming an important bridge for friendly exchanges between China and other countries in the world.

Many poems depict the prosperous scene of ceramic trade, such as "Merchant ships sail thousands of miles; The cabin is full of porcelain. All foreign lands praise it; Friendship grows from trade". These lines show the scene of ancient Chinese merchant ships carrying porcelain to all parts of the world and being loved by people in different countries and regions. They reflect that China has established equal and mutually beneficial economic ties with other countries through ceramic trade, promoted mutual exchanges and communication, and demonstrated China's peaceful and friendly attitude in foreign exchanges [15].

At the cultural exchange level, as an important carrier of culture, ceramics have spread China's cultural art and way of life. The popularity of blue-and-white porcelain in the Yuan Dynasty had a profound impact on Chinese painting art and aesthetic concepts in Central Asia, West Asia, Europe, and other regions. Relevant poems record: "Blue-and-white porcelain spreads to foreign lands; Art is appreciated by all. Cultural exchanges are extensive; Peaceful years last long". These lines indicate that during the overseas spread of Chinese ceramics, it promoted mutual appreciation and learning between different cultures, drove the diversified development of culture, demonstrated China's open and inclusive cultural mind, and actively communicated its cultural achievements with other countries in the world to jointly promote the progress of human civilization.

4.2.2 Emotional Transmission and Symbol of Friendship

The emotions expressed in ceramic poetry, such as longing for and blessing friends, fully demonstrate the image of the Chinese people being hospitable and valuing friendship. Porcelain is often given as a precious gift to friends to express deep friendship, and poetry has become an important carrier for recording the transmission of such emotions.

For example, the poem "Presenting porcelain to a dear friend; Friendship is stronger than gold. May you have much joy; And be safe every year" shows that the poet integrates good wishes into the porcelain when giving it to friends. Porcelain is no longer just an object, but a sustenance of emotions. When seeing off friends, people also give porcelain as a gift and write poems as a memento. For instance, "A porcelain cup holds the feeling of farewell; The rhyme of poetry conveys longing. Take good care of yourself on this journey; There is no date for our reunion yet". Through porcelain and poetry, these lines express the care and reluctance for friends' long journeys and the expectation for future reunions, reflecting the Chinese people's trait of valuing friendship and emotional communication [16].

When foreign friends visit China, the Chinese people also present porcelain as a gift to express friendship. Some ceramic poems record such scenes: "Foreign guests come to our country; Porcelain expresses warm hospitality. Where culture is exchanged; Friendship will be remembered forever". These lines show that the Chinese people warmly welcome foreign friends, promote cultural exchanges and friendship with each other by giving porcelain with Chinese characteristics, let the world feel the friendship and enthusiasm of the Chinese people, and establish China's friendly image in international communication.

4.3 Image of Diligence and Wisdom

4.3.1 Ceramic-Making Techniques and Craftsman Spirit

The praise for ceramic-making craftsmanship in ceramic poetry is a strong testimony to the diligence, wisdom, and pursuit of excellence of Chinese craftsmen [17]. Ceramic making is a complex and delicate process. From the initial collection and selection of raw materials to the making of blanks, decoration, and firing, each process requires craftsmen to devote a lot of effort and hard work.

The lines "Carefully selecting pottery clay and polishing it finely; After countless temperings, a mold is finally made. Carefully painting beautiful patterns; Firing in fierce fire results in excellent quality" describe the ceramic-making process in detail. Starting from selecting high-quality pottery clay, craftsmen need to repeatedly beat and knead it to shape a perfect blank. In the decoration process, craftsmen carefully paint exquisite patterns with their superb skills, and every stroke contains their ingenuity. Finally, after high-temperature firing, a delicate porcelain piece is created. If there is a mistake in any of these processes, all previous efforts may be in vain. Therefore,

craftsmen must have a high degree of concentration, patience, and the pursuit of perfection in craftsmanship, embodying the craftsman spirit of striving for excellence [18].

Take the Ru Kiln porcelain of the Song Dynasty as an example, which is world-famous for its unique “sky-blue after rain” glaze color. The firing of this glaze color requires craftsmen to accurately control factors such as kiln temperature and glaze formula; even a slight deviation cannot achieve the desired effect. The praise for the Ru Kiln porcelain-making process in ceramic poetry is a high recognition of the craftsman’s diligence and wisdom. Through long-term practice, they have continuously explored and summarized experience, created world-famous ceramic treasures, and made great contributions to the development of Chinese ceramic culture.

4.3.2 Poets’ Wisdom and Creative Spirit

From the creation and spread of ceramic poetry, we can see the Chinese people’s love for culture and their wisdom in inheriting and innovating it [19]. Literati and scholars of all dynasties have created poetry with ceramics as the theme, which not only enriches the themes and content of poetry but also integrates ceramic culture and poetry culture for joint inheritance and development.

Through delicate brushwork, poets integrate their observations, feelings, and thoughts about ceramics into poetry, such as praising the texture, color, and shape of ceramics, marveling at the ceramic-making process, and exploring the cultural connotations contained in ceramics. These poems not only record the development of ceramics at that time but also become important materials for later generations to understand ancient ceramic culture. At the same time, ceramic poetry of different eras also reflects the inheritance and innovation of culture. With the development of the times, ceramic craftsmanship has continuously advanced, the types and styles of ceramics have become increasingly rich, and poetry creation has also changed accordingly. On the basis of inheriting the creative traditions of predecessors, poets have continuously innovated the forms and content of poetry to adapt to new cultural needs.

For example, ceramic poetry in the Tang Dynasty focused more on the description of ceramic utensils themselves. In the Song Dynasty, influenced by Neo-Confucianism, ceramic poetry incorporated more thoughts on life philosophy and aesthetic taste. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the prosperity of ceramic trade, many contents about ceramic trade and Sino-foreign cultural exchanges appeared in poetry. This close combination of poetry creation and cultural development embodies the innovative spirit of the Chinese people in the process of cultural inheritance. By continuously endowing ceramic culture with new connotations and forms of expression, it has maintained vigorous vitality in the long river of history.

5. Conclusion

With its unique artistic form, ceramic poetry has become a key to decoding Chinese culture and national image. From the perspective of cultural context, it connects the Chinese people’s observation of nature, dedication to craftsmanship, and philosophical thinking about life. The poetic imagination of the glaze color like “sky-blue after rain” and the poetic admiration for the craftsmanship described as “skillfully carving the bright moon” have all settled into Chinese cultural genes, enabling the wisdom of “harmony between man and nature” and the spirit of “striving for excellence” to be passed on forever.

In terms of shaping China’s image, ceramic poetry breaks through the limitations of time and space: from the camel bells on the Silk Road to the sails on the ocean, it witnesses China’s open mind to embrace the world; from the warmth of daily life in ordinary people’s homes to the memory of national prestige carried by imperial kilns, it outlines the image of China that has both the warmth of people’s livelihood and the demeanor of a great power. This cultural expression of

“using utensils as a medium and conveying meaning through poetry” provides inspiration for contemporary cultural inheritance and international communication.

Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by 2025 Jiangxi Province College Students Innovation Training Project entitled “Research on the Communication of China’s National Image Based on Ceramic Poetry Translation” (State-Level, 202510408027), by Jingdezhen Social Science Fund Project (25SKGH083), and by Jiangxi Social Science Fund Project (24WT36).

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