

AESTHETIC EXPLORATION OF DECORATIVE AND PAINTED EMBELLISHMENT ON CHINESE CERAMICS WARES

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ABSTRACT

The uniqueness in Chinese decorative and painted ceramic wares is aesthetically outstanding. The wares serve both utilitarian and aesthetic functions but the study is focusing on the aesthetic aspect of the wares. Chinese ceramic wares are referred to as artistic or aesthetic, since the creative application of elements and principles of design cut across the forms, shapes and general surfaces of the wares. The decorations and plantings on the wares attract the consumers and passers-by as well as affect the environment positively. Chinese ceramics wares are enjoyed mostly because of the decorations and paintings on the wares which enhance aesthetic aspect of the wares, as they depict the Chinese cultural environment. Description research design was used in the study, while facts were collected through primary and secondary sources such as internet, books, observation and discussion. It worths noting that the making of decorative and painted Chinese wares involves hardware, diligence, creativity and constant practice to yield a high level of aesthetics. In this research ten (10) visional images of Chinese ceramics wares were selected and evaluated with a focus on aesthetic values of the wares. Assessment of the state of beauty of the Chinese wares in consonance with their ability to reflect on the purpose of the subject matter was given attention. The motif such as dragon, sea, design, tiger gold fish and camel are features found in potters cultural environment as they are used in embellishing of the ceramic wares. The cultural influence of the Chinese people has been a boost to the aesthetic implication of decorative and painted Chinese ceramics wares

Key: Aesthetics, visual image, decorative, cultural, utilitarian, painted, potter, creativity, hard work, observation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chinese Ceramics

The art of pottery and visual expressions on the surfaces of such wares is an important aspect which requires serious attention. The forms and shapes of ceramic wares give rise to the functionality of the ceramic wares with

consideration to the surface decoration of the same wares. This study looks at the impact of the surface decoration on ceramic wares with a focus on Chinese paintings on the surface of ceramics or pottery wares. It is undoubtedly known that china had very long time ago been engaged in the practice of ceramics before other parts of the world started involving in this venture.

Peters (2016) stated that “the Chinese produced ceramics wares about 1,500 BC and continued with the entrepreneurship in ceramics and the spirit of entrepreneurship. The Chinese ceramics wares are flooding the international market and every part of the world since they never allow their entrepreneurship spirit to die”. It is therefore necessary to note that the unique decoration of Chinese ceramic wares through painting technique give the Chinese ceramic products peculiar standing among the various ceramic products from other cultures globally. Bryant (2001:1) observed that from the time of the cave paintings, prehistoric man has used certain pattern, shapes and images to symbolize important ideas. When we look at these patterns and images painted on prehistoric pottery we can only appreciate the work as form and ornament”.

The embodiment of different aspects of Chinese ceramic paintings symbolize useful thought relevant to the people and as well as enhance the beauty’ of the ceramic wares. This assertion confirms the view of Rawson (1971:174) that “No ceramic decorator of course, ever employs any motif for the sake of mere pictorial completion. The pictorial imagery is employed for its positive symbolize value” Chinese wares are and noted among the most significant development since the pre-dynastic times. The various decorations and paintings on their wares eloquently speak for the Chinese advancement in aesthetic exploration.

1.2 Chinese Ceramic Paintings

The uniqueness of Chinese ceramic or pottery painting decoration worths exploring to expose and encourage adoption of such decoration. Although Nok terra-cotta pottery wares, were produced and highly fired in Nigeria about 500 BC according to Peters (2016), the pots

and decorations on them in terms of cultural motifs to the shapes forms, colours and surface qualities of hand-made wares, are outstandingly incomparable to Chinese pottery decorations such as the painted jar of the Majiayao culture, late Neolithic period (3300 – 2200 BC)

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/c>

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/p>

It is noted by Haward, BU (2013) and the New York Times that “pottery dating from 20,000 years ago was found at the Xianredong cave site, in Jiangxi province, making among the earliest pottery yet found”. National Academy of Sciences (2009) observed that “another reported find is from 17,000 – 18,000 years ago in the Yuchanyan cave in southern china”. The aesthetic appearance of Chinese wares from the early period till date undergoes series of eloquent development and technological approaches even though the central focus remains the heating or firing of the wares to achieve the final effect. It is the researchers view that the Chinese ceramics and arts which had about 20,000 years ago been practiced at Xianrendong in China (that give rise to the super technological drive of modern china which seems to go globally (Haward, BU (2013). The paintings on china wares speaks volumes in the area of creativity, cultural heritage, technological innovations and inventions, and these could probably be a significant means of economic sustenance to combat the huge population growth of china. According to (Hung (2011)“ The distinctive Majiayao painted pottery (Late Neolithic period 3300 – 2200 BC), with orange bodies and black paint, is characterized by fine paste textures, thin walls and polished surfaces, the almost complete lack of defects in excavated pots suggests high level of quality control during production.”

1.3 Impact of Early Chinese Ceramics

Numerous beautiful painted ceramic wares were produced at different period or dynasties. Few among them include, painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragons phoenixes, western Han dynasty (202 BC – 9AD), Bushell (1977). He, Li (1996) notes that the first porcelain was made in Zhejiang province during the Eastern Han dynasty. Shards recovered from archaeological Eastern Han Kiln sites estimated firing temperature range from 1,260 to 1,300° C (2,000 to 2,370°F). “The porcelaneous wares” or “proto-porcelain wares” were made as far back as 1000BC using at least some Kaolin fired at high temperatures”. Temple (2001) viewed that “Archaeological finds have pushed the dates to as early as the Han dynasty (206B – 220 AD). ‘Dien (2001) further observed that “the late Han years saw the early development of the peculiar art of humping, or “soul jar”, “funerary jar whose top was decorated by a sculptural composition. This type of vessels became widespread during the following Jim dynasty (265 – 420) and the six dynasties”. Another was the Sui Tang dynasties, 581 – 907 AD. A sancai of glazed offering tray, late 7th or early 8th century, Tang dynasty (618 – 907). They were also dynasty tomb figures which were only made to be placed in elite tombs close to the capital. According to Zgiyun (2010) “What is clear is that in the Song Dynasty which tended to uphold the esthetics of

conventional Confucianism, underglaze blue was not at all popular, Confucian esthetics emphasized simplicity and the underglaze blue designs were judged to be too ornamental”

The early blue and white porcelain, C. 1335, the shape from Islamic metal work were produced during Uan dynasty, 1271 – 1368.

Medley (1980) observed that “the Mongol that Yuan dynasty enforced the movement of artists of all sorts around the Mongol Empire which in ceramics brought a major stylistic and technical influence from the Islamic world in the form of blue and white porcelain, with underglaze painting in Cobalt. This has been described as the “last great innovations in ceramic technology”. The charming and fainting appearances of Chinese wares endear both the soul and spirit of the consumer to enjoy to wares. Exploring the aesthetics of Chinese ceramics is like a life-time endeavour due to the vastness of the numerous ceramic painted wares of about 20,000 years ago which cut across different dynasties and times. Various technologies and materials have been utilized with touches of cultural heritage for uniqueness.

It is the view of Valaver (2009) that “decoration by under-glaze painted patterns had long been a feature Chinese pottery, especially in the popular Cizhou ware (mostly using black over slip), but was perhaps regarded as rather Vulgar by the court and the literati class, and the finest ceramics were mono-chrome, using an understated aesthetic with perfect shapes and subtle glaze effects, often over shallow decoration caved or moulded into the surface”. Although the various motifs on the wares depict the traditional background of the people of China, other influences such as religion and people’s demand played vital role in the decoration or painting of the Chinese ceramic wares. The wares were also produced to meet international demand to boost the exploit market. Medlay (1980) claimed that “this was great contrast to the bright colours and complicated designs developed under the Yuan, whose organization was mostly based on Islamic art, especially metal work, although the animal was vegetable motifs, remained based on Chinese tradition”. Acculturation which brings influences of other cultures on the products affected people and cultures on the products affected people and cultures is likely the situation Chinese pottery decoration experienced. Kyung-Sook (2008) observed that “just as Nok culture influences Africa and the rest of the world, ceramics has inspired the world, traditional ceramics from china and later spread to Korea, Japan, Europe and down Africa” Peters (2017) noted that “the skill of pottery making by the Ibibios especially the women must have been brought from the earlier places of settlement such as Ikom zone which probably was influenced by the Nok pottery craft of about 600BC”.

Many factors indeed influence artifacts, culture, technology and design of a people as they grow and intermingle with others outside their cultural heritage. Chinese ceramic painting and decoration can never be an exemption due to its dynamic growth and influence.

1.4 The Concept of Aesthetic

Ceramic wares fulfill both utilization and aesthetic

functions. This study gives focus on the aesthetic exploration of decorative and painting embellishment of Chinese Ceramic wares. According to Rodowick (1994), "The Greeks term aisthesis – referring generally to problems of sense perception, and having its own complex history-into our modern sense of the term 'aesthetic'. The knowledge of what makes an object to acquire aesthetic ability is very crucial especially in the context of aesthetic in ceramics which already possess utilitarian capacity. It is necessary to also note the statement from Rodowick (1994) that "As recent challenges to NEA funding for 'controversial artists demonstrate, in question here is what can be counted as 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' activity".

It implies that the word 'aesthetic' could be interchanged with the word 'artistic' to arrive at the same. The Chinese ceramics wares indeed are art objects and referring to them as artistic or aesthetic to accommodate evaluation in the aspect of aesthetic sensibilities gives credence to such judgement or assessment. Rodowick further indicates that "Derrida establishes a historical topography, beginning with the critique of judgment, which insists that the questions of art be asked ontologically. As Derrida explains, this paradigm demands that;

We must know what we speak, what concerns the value of beauty intrinsically and what remains external to our immanent sense of it. This permanent demand- to distinguish between the internal or proper meaning and the circumstances of the object in question-organizes every philosophic discourse on art, the meaning of art and meaning itself, from Plato to Heidegger, Husserl, and Heidegger. It presupposes a discourse on the frame."

According to Baumgarten (ND), "Aesthetica (Aesthetics) was coined to denote a special cognitive domain of sensual thinking, which he argued was distinct from rational or logical thought; truth as known through the sense. Baumgarten argued that sensible knowledge was a faculty of mind that he termed an analogon rationis-an analogue of reason and a unique mode of reasoning in its own right"

The issue of aesthetic or what is beautiful is a global phenomenon. It occurs in every culture, group of people or individuals. Cultures have unique means of judging what is beautiful or aesthetically acknowledged. Peters (2014) observes that, the Ibibio culture in Nigeria is not left out among other cultures of the world on the issue of aesthetic and states that;

Notwithstanding, the Ibibios also practice traditional body decoration and house decoration basically for enhancement and aesthetic purposes. The traditional artists or decorators are mainly women who learnt the art from their parents or grand parents and other elderly ones. It is always a thing of joy when the traditional decorations finish their decoration and put a finishing do called 'ntoiuyai' which means the dot of beauty to show the completion of the work of art. Aesthetics which refers to 'Uyai' in Ibibio culture is always given a boost. Traditional elements and principles of aesthetics or beauty are never joked with when it comes to judging what/who is beautiful. They refer to those elements

or marks of beauty or aesthetics as 'mbonuyai'. If something or someone is adjudged to be beautiful, the next question will be – show me the mark of that beauty or 'mbonuyai'

1.5 Chinese Ceramic wares with Decoration and Painting Embellishment

Chinese culture is not left out in the acknowledging of the concept of aesthetics as exemplified in the works of arts. The focus of this research is on the exploration of aesthetics in the decoration and painting embellishment on Chinese ceramics wares. The versatility of aged-long standing Chinese ceramics ranges from bricks and tiles to hand-built pottery vessels. Hung (2011) observes that;

By the middle and Late Neolithic (What 5000 to 1500 BCE) most of the longer archaeological cultures in China were settled farmers, who produced a variety of attractive and often large vessels, often boldly painted, or decorated by cutting or impressing. Decorations is abstract or stylized animals – fish are speciality at the river settlement by Banpo. The distinctive Majiayao painted pottery, with orange bodies and black paint, is characterized by fine paste textures, thin walls, and polished surfaces; the almost complete lack of defects in excavated pots suggests a high level of quality control during production.

This is a clear picture that the cultural environment such as Banpo river settlement posed great influence on the pottery wares of the people, and equally other parts of China. The decorations and paintings on the pottery wares reflect the motifs, feature, activities and other influences in the cultural environment. The cultural influence of a people are characterized by the tangible intangible things and endeavours found in their culture. These affect the thoughts and view of life of the people in social life style as well as their products such as the Chinese pottery wares. The delicacies of the elements of aesthetics in a cultural environment are shown on their works of art and technology. Chinese ceramics is an embodiment of such unique delicacy of elements of beauty or aesthetics in their pottery wares. In this study, ten (10) Chinese wares are selected the numerous Chinese wares with such aesthetic accord and they include,

- (a) a covered red jar with dragon and sea design from the Jinging period (1521 – 1567) in the Ming dynasty,
- (b) painted jar of the Majiayao culture- Late Neolithic period (3300 – 2200 BC),
- (c) painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragon and phoenixes, western Han dynasty (2015C – 9 AD)
- (d) cloud – shaped pillow with iron – brown tiger design on white ship coating,
- (e) Gold fish vase from the Jinjing period (1521 – 67) of the Ming dyanasty,
- (f) Tang dynasty tomb figure of a counsel with lead – fluxed glazes,
- (g) Chinese Jingdezhen Porcelain Moonflask with underglaze blue and red- Qianlong period (1936 – 1796),
- (h) Nymphenbury porcelain group modeled by Frank Anton Bustelli, 1756,

(i) Bowl with dragons, phoenixes, gourds and characters for happiness (from the Peabody Essex Musieum), and

(j) Chantilly porcelain, soft paste (1750 – 1760).

The features on the selected ten (10) decorative and painted Chinese wares indeed embellish the wares. They serve as documentary evidences of the past social life, invention, event creativity art, technology and even the level of aesthetic appreciation of the people of China. The high level of technology and art involved in Chinese aged-long ceramics production engendered them with the word “China” for their porcelain as noted by Wikipedia on Chinese ceramics- “porcelain is so identified with china that it is still called “China” in every English usage”. It is probably Chinese ceramics that has gingered the search for other technological development in china as well as making china known globally. The aesthetic aspect of Chinese ceramics wares has caused great attraction to the people, other cultures and nations of the world. The importance of aesthetic exploration of decorative and painting embellishment on Chinese ceramic wares is enormous and well situated.

2.0 Method

A descriptive research designed is adopted to direct the activities of the study. The thrust for this research is to investigate and explore the aesthetic implications of decoration and paintings on Chinese ceramic wares. The primary and secondary sources of the data collected include; internet, books and newsletters, observation and discussion.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Aesthetic exploration of decorative and painting embellishment on Chinese ceramic wares which is an investigation by the researcher is linlect to the conceptual framework of ‘the classical concept of Art’ by Osborne (1968) which states;

The making of aesthetic objects has been almost universal through human history. From the emergence of modern man during the upper Paleolithic age, and the fine efflorescence of cave art in the Aurignacian and Magdalenian periods, there have been comparatively few peoples at any time who did produce some artifacts which we can now enjoy aesthetically as things of beauty even though we no longer know or subscribe to the values which they were served.

This concept shows that Chinese ceramic wares which are decorated and painted to embellish them were produced many thousands of years age and they still have the aesthetic qualities worth being enjoyed today. This consideration is a source of great encouragement to the past, present and future generations, and thereby boosting diligence, hardwork, innovation, invention, high creative and painstaking in doing whatever one has the opportunity to do for lasting consequences.

The concept shows that creative skills as based on the cultures of the people deserves adhering to sound cultural ethics and relevant approaches, to engender valuable and tangible legacies as well as sustain pleasurable visuality of

the people cultural artefacts and others. This is the essence of exploring the Chinese ceramics considering the ten selected Chinese ceramic wares with consideration to the cultural influence as well as the elements and principles of art and design which play great role in the issue of aesthetic appreciations.

2.2 Significance of the Study

The study is of great importance in the aspect of realizing that the making of aesthetic objects is universal and requires diligence, hardwardk, creativity and constant experiment as seen in decorative and painting on Chinese ceramic wares which have been sustained for many thousands of years for many generations to enjoy.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Chinese ceramic wares with embellishments are samples selected and evaluated as seen in the ten (10) selected Chinese ceramic wares. The suitability of the visual images to the content of aesthetic exploration of decorative and painted Chinese ceramic wares is reflected in the work. The ability of the sourced data to be in line with the purpose of the study were interpreted and evaluated. Paragraphs of Chinese wares from some different eras and Chinese cultural environment were selected. The study was limited only to ceramic wares from Chinese environment.

The evaluation of selected ten (10) Chinese ceramics wares in view aesthetic exploration of embellishment and general forms and appearance of the wares they following steps were considered;

- (i) Description and approaches perception of the wares
- (ii) Interpretation of the wares considering time and cultural environmental they were produced.
- (iii) Giving the relevant, assessment or judgementlossed on the elements on 1 principles of arts and design which are reflected in the content of the wares such as the subject, theme, medium product, furniture’s, design and style.

The uniqueness of the shapes, forms, colours, texture, lines and droughtmanship and others are factors for determining the level of creativity and aesthetic value attainment which Chinese ceramic wares have been very high in this study. The well defined considered shapes, form, since colours unique and purpose design on the covered red jar with dragon and sea design from the Jiajing period (1521 – 1567) in the Ming dynasty, and the Chinese Jingdeghen porcelain moonflask with underglase blue and red, Qianlong period, 1736 to 1796 attest to the high level of aesthetic found in Chinese decorated and painted wares.

DECORATED AND PAINTED CHINESE CERAMIC WARES



PLATE 1

Covered red jar with dragon and sea design from the Jiajing period (1521–1567) in the Ming dynasty.

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 4

Cloud-shaped pillow with iron-brown tiger design on white slip coating.

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 2

Painted jar of the Majiayao culture, Late Neolithic period (3300–2200 BC)

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 5

Goldfish Vase from the Jiajing period (1521–67) of the Ming dynasty; Porcelain; Paris, Musée Guimet 261101

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 3

Painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragons and phoenixes, Western Han dynasty (202 BC – 9 AD)



PLATE 6

Tang dynasty tomb figure of a camel, made with lead-fluxed glazes, here including cobalt blue but no green.

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 7

Chinese Jingdezhen porcelain moonflask with underglaze blue and red. Qianlong period, 1736 to 1796

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 10

Chantilly porcelain, soft-paste, 1750-1760

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 8

Nymphenburg porcelain group modelled by Franz Anton Bustelli,

Courtesy: Wikipedia



PLATE 9

Bowl with dragons, phoenixes, gourds, and characters for happiness. From the Peabody Essex Museum.

Courtesy: Wikipedia

3.0 Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

The investigation on the decorative and painted Chinese ceramic wares for aesthetic exploration purposes is an embodiment of appreciation of the creativity and beauty of Chinese pottery or ceramics. The ten (10) important Chinese wares encountered in the study include, (a) covered red jar with dragon and sea design from the Jingde period (1521 – 1567) in the Ming dynasty, (b) painted jar of the Majiayao culture- Late Neolithic period (3300 – 2200 BC), (c) painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragon and phoenixes, western Han dynasty (205C – 9 AD) (d) cloud – shaped pillow with iron – brown tiger design on white slip coating, (e) Gold fish vase from the Jiajing period (1521 – 67) of the Ming dynasty, (f) Tang dynasty tomb figure of a counsel with lead – fluxed glazes, (g) Chinese Jingdezhen Porcelain Moonflask with underglaze blue and red- Qianlong period (1736 – 1796), (h) Nymphenburg porcelain group modeled by Frank Anton Bustelli, 1756, (i) Bowl with dragons, phoenixes, gourds and characters for happiness (from the Peabody Essex Museum), and (j) Chantilly porcelain, soft paste (1750 – 1760). Covered red jar with dragon and sea design for Jiajing period (1521 – 1567) in the Ming dynasty, painted jar of the Majiayao cultural Late Neolithic period (3300 – 2200 BC), painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragons and phoenixes, Western Han dynasty 9202 BC – 9 AD), cloud – shaped pillow with iron- brown tiger design on white slip coating, Gold fish vase from the Jiajing period (1521 – 67) of the Ming dynasty; porcelain, tang dynasty tomb figure of a camel, made with lead-fluxed glazes, Chinese Jingdezhen porcelain moonflask with under glaze blue and red - Qianlong period 1736 – 1796), Bowl with dragons, phoenixes, gourds, and characters for happiness, and Chantilly porcelain, soft-paste (1750 – 1760).

The Chinese ceramic wares have very strong utilitarian and aesthetic functions for sustenance of many generations, and this is something other cultures should emulate. The dragon and sea design, phoenixes, brown tiger, goldfish and camel are features found in the cultural environment of different parts of China such as the river

settlement of Banpo and others. The socio-cultural life style of the people, natural endowment, religion, beliefs and events etcetra generated motifs for decorative and painted Chinese ceramic wares production.

According to Onobrakpeya (2016), "Ideas, forms and motifs exists in raw, and sometimes in interesting state. It takes an artist to discover reshapes, refine and simplify them to create art pieces. As a paint maker, I go further, I took advantage of the dynamics of primaking and experimentation to manipulate the same motif or idea to produce different design effects".

The Chinese potters must have been experimenting using various motifs found in their environment to produce high class rated ceramics some thousands of years ago which are still enjoyed today. The constant experimentations with glaze materials as early as such early period the covered red jar with dragon and sea design from the Jiajing (1521 – 1567) in the Ming dynasty, and painted pottery pot with raised reliefs of dragons and phoenixes- Western Itam dynasty (202BC – AD) and others gave the Chinese potters great advantages in ceramics arts and technology .

The constant experimentations and development of creativity reflect on the visuality, economic and technological boom of China. The aesthetic attributes on decorative and painted Chinese ceramic wares is not limited, but elaborate and also serve many generations of Chinese and other people/cultures to enjoy. The aesthetic attribute of Chinese decorative and painted ceramics wares is a significant attraction to various people and other cultures of the world.

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