

# Position Changes of Ancient Chinese Ceramic Decorative Patterns Observed from the Way of Living

Niping Ye\*

Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, China

\*Corresponding author: y\_annxian@163.com

**Abstract:** Analyzing the changes of the way of living in ancient China, this thesis discusses the following positional changes of the ceramic decorative patterns of the same period and studies the changes of living style based on the ancient painting literature as the main reference frame. The two explorations mutually verify that the positional changes of ceramic decorative patterns were in the pace with the changes of the way of living, altering from sitting on the ground to sitting down (sitting on seating with lower limbs hanging down). As furniture heights increased gradually, visual Angle was varied, thus making ceramic adornment position move down thereby, and enriching adornment content.

**Keywords:** Ceramic decoration, The way of living

## 1. Introduction

Ancient China embraced with various daily ceramic decorative techniques as well as multitudinous decorative patterns while modern times celebrate daily ceramic decoration design integrated comprehensively with technology, aesthetic appreciation and expression techniques. And acquiring the change of the focus of the ancient decorative patterns is of great benefit to the designers on how to accurately grasp the visual language of the decoration design so as to improve the decoration effect when conducting the daily ceramic decoration.

## 2. The changes in the way of living

### 2.1. Period of sitting on the ground

In the prehistoric period, the ancients changed from the primitive cave nest residence to the preliminary construction of houses, and the "sheds" and "Ganlan dwelling"(Houses built above the ground on the wooden or bamboo column base frame) appeared. The "Book of Rites" records, "In the past, the king had no palace, and lived camp caves in winter and wooden nest in summer." In the Stone Age, people sat on the ground. As the time had been ages ago, we could only see some traces from the unearthed fragments of the woven mat and the cloth prints on the pottery. Pottery came after agriculture and made settlement more stable. At that time, most of the daily utensils were placed directly on the ground.

Before the Eastern Han Dynasty, sitting on the ground was always the main way for people to live. "Sijiting of Rites of Zhou" describes the names and uses of the five different mats at that time. The T-shaped silk painting of the Western Han Dynasty unearthed in Mawangdui symbolizes the lower part of the world and depicts the scene of sacrifice to the tomb owner. It can be seen that the white board symbolizing the earth raised by the arms of the god of water, Yu Jiang, on which there are ding (an ancient cooking vessel with two loop handles and three or four legs), zhong (rder, hollow, made of copper or iron), hu (a container made of ceramics or metal, with a mouth, handles or beams, is used to hold liquid and pour out from the mouth) and other sacrificial supplies. This is also one of the proof that people were used to placing objects on the ground. What can be a more direct evidence is the Wanjian (name of an ancient acrobatics, using bells and swords when performing.) sword dance image bricks unearthed in the Sichuan Yangzi Mountain. The image to the left of the size of two ding, and the cup and plate were all removed, showing that it may be the end of the banquet, the time to hold a song and dance.

The ancestors before the Eastern Han Dynasty usually took objects from the ground or at the low

place daily, and needed to look down on the objects for a long time, and relatively ignored the lower part and bottom of the objects.

## 2.2. Period of sitting on the ground and sitting down

From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Wei and Jin dynasties, a tall seating —— huchuang (a lightweight rope chair that can be folded down. The chair can be folded and there is a back) showed up. More than 4,000 years ago, high seating had appeared in Central Asia, Egypt and other places. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, the culture of the Western Regions and ancient Indian Buddhism were introduced into our country. The way of sitting on the ground began to show a trend to change to the way of sitting on bed. As the cultural exchanges brought by the war of more than 300 years in the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the furniture such as huchuang and huyi gradually appeared. During this period, because the high-type furniture mainly came with the introduction of Buddhism, it was widely used in the temple. It was popular among monks and then among the high ranking nobles. In general, people with high social status had the custom of sitting down, while the common people still sat on the ground.

It can still be figured out from a large number of data that people were still sitting on the ground, and sitting down had not yet become the mainstream, and people's visual observation perspective had not changed dramatically.

As shown in figure 1, the image brick "The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest and the Rong Qiqi" was excavated on the Xishan Bridge in Nanjing, in which the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest" sat on the ground and drank wine while singing, with a Jiuzun (vessels ancient people used to warm wine or hold wine) placed on the ground among them. Shan Tao and Liu Ling were both drinking with ear cups. In the picture, there was a Jiuzun near Ruan Ji, Wang Rong and Shan Tao respectively. This point can also be observed in the "Heroic Women and Ancient Sage Screen Paint" unearthed from the tomb of Sima Jinlong of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The third group of picture on the back depicts that Mao Rong used vegetarian food to treat guests. And the inscription is entitled "Vegetarian food for guests". Left side of the table were seats for guests, with a food case, case put ear cup, and plate in the front.



Figure 1: The Parts of image brick "The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest and the Rong Qiqi".

You can see from these remaining brick paintings and paint paintings that the mainstream form at that time was still sitting on the ground, so people's visual focus was still more inclined to the upper half of the objects.

In the Sui and Tang dynasties, kneel sitting, sitting cross-legged and sitting hanging down were prevailing at the same time. In the scene of "Tang Dynasty Palace Music Map", there were more than ten female concubines in the harem, sitting around a huge square table, drinking tea and listening to music, which shows a part of people's life in the late Tang Dynasty, where people usually sat on chairs or on couch. Gu Hongzhong's "Night Banquet" depicts the scene of singing and playing of Han Zaixi with his guests. In front of the table placed wine cups and food. On the table was a pair of exquisite ceramic wine thermometer. Zhuzi (ancient wine pot) was in the warm wine bowl, and beside was the cup with support.

The transition from kneel sitting on the ground to sitting down is long. Although it looks like that it was just about the increase of furniture, but it brought great changes to people's living customs and even the concept of etiquette, and the matching daily ceramic devices also changed accordingly.

### 2.3. Period of sitting down

In the Song Dynasty, sitting on the ground was replaced by sitting down. Zhuang Chuo's "Jilei Roll" describe: "The ancients sat at the table, so they used to stretch their feet in a dustpan shape. But now people sit on couch, taking hanging down the lower limbs as the etiquette, which is quite the opposite." People who fully entered the period of sitting down changed the viewing Angle different from sitting on the ground before. People sitting in a chair looked at the objects placed on the table, and their visual height difference changed greatly from before. As a result, the reduced height difference resulted in more attention to the overall shape and decoration of the object. When the bottom of the object was clearly visible, the lower half, which did not match the delicate upper half, is no longer tolerated.

As shown in figure 2, Su Hanchen's paint "makeup beautiful ladies picture" in the Southern Song Dynasty depicts a lady dressing up, facing the mirror with delicate lacquer dowry, rouge box, elegant vase inserted a few clusters of narcissus beside. "Listening to the Qin" created by Zhao Ji, Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, paints the scene of playing the piano and appreciating the song under the pine tree. A very beautiful white porcelain incense burner was placed on the table of the crane. Din Yunpeng painted "Boiled Tea " depicting Lu Tong cooking tea on his couch. Although the author describes Lu Tong making tea in the Tang Dynasty, the tea drinking style and tea set depicted in the whole portrait were all in the late Ming Dynasty. Many utensils were displayed on the stone case in front of the couch, and the mother-of-pearl lacquer box, white glazed tea bowl, bronze incense burner and double-ear cups are all very exquisite.



Figure 2: "Makeup beautiful ladies picture" from Su Hanchen in the Southern Song Dynasty.

After the Song Dynasty, sitting down became the absolute mainstream in people's daily life, and sitting on the ground and low-style furniture were left in the ancient and elegant memories of the literati and officials.

## 3. The position change of the object decoration

### 3.1. Period of sitting on the ground

The size and decorative style of the pottery are closely related to the habit of sitting. Because the pot is placed directly on the ground, judging from the law of the human eye sight range, people stand's observation perspective is focused on the top of the pot, while maintaining squatting or kneeling posture to see the object on the ground, the focus of the sight is also located in the upper half of the object and the shoulder, neck, waist and abdomen of the object. Therefore, the decorative pattern of the utensils in this period was mainly located in the shoulder, neck and waist of the utensils, and the lower half of the

utensils was mostly directly exposed to the fetal body. The parts of the colored pottery pattern were distributed in the easiest places of sight.

For instance, the colored pottery pot of Majiayao culture can be a typical representative. The frog pattern colored pottery pot now collected in Qinghai Museum is an example of the frog pattern of hands and feet stretching, while looking down one can see staggered cross patterns. One half of the lower hanging, there is no other decorations. In the same period, the artifacts, such as the colored pottery leaf pattern bean of Yangshao culture, the four series of cans of Majiayao culture painted pottery vortex pattern, and the colored pottery petal pattern pot of Dawenkou culture, all have such characteristics. The Western Han Dynasty painted pottery pot has painted hunting patterns on the belly part and the lower third is the unadorned naked fetal body.

### ***3.2. Period of sitting on the ground and sitting down***

On the white glaze green colored four-series tank of the North Qi, the upper half of the body is decorated with yellow glaze green color markings, the abdomen is engraved with honeysuckle lotus petals, and the lower half of the blank has no decorations. The green glaze print spittle pot of the Southern Dynasty and the green glaze carving six-series pot of the Northern Dynasty also have such characteristics. The decorative pattern mainly stays on the upper part of the object, and at least the lower third is mostly undecorated. Even if there is the green glaze object covered with glaze, the highlights are mostly decorated in the instrument mouth and shoulder abdomen, such as the green glazed brown colored lotus eight-series kettle of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, which is enough to prove that people's visual center in this period is still mainly concentrated in the upper half of the utensils. But there also occasionally appeared large utensils carved with delicate and complex, magnificent decorations such as blue glaze back covered lotus statue.

By the Sui and Tang dynasties, the decoration position of this period has been clearly different from the previous generations. There are mainly similar decoration of the above parts, but also many general decorative objects, which shows that people's visual center has changed. There are still like the Sui Dynasty brown glaze lotus grain bottle carved with lotus grain on the shoulder, the upper half of the body with brown glaze, the lower half of the exposed tire without decoration, which is also a typical feature of the Sui Dynasty Yuezhou kiln. But at the same time, a large number of artifacts have been decorated with color painting, such as yue kiln secret color porcelain pot, the whole body is decorated with the natural stretch of the cloud pattern. In the same period, the three-color water notes unearthed in Changsha kiln were all painted on the objects with small dots of the pattern.

### ***3.3. Period of sitting down***

Since the Song Dynasty, the decorative patterns of ceramic utensils are mainly decorated full with flowers, and half-section decoration and even bare fetal body have been very rare. Many kiln ceramics in the Song Dynasty were famous for their glaze color, warm and shiny, such as Ding kiln, Ru kiln, Guan kiln, Ge kiln and so on. And famous for the decoration of the kiln such as Yaozhou kiln carving, Cizhou kiln painting flowers, Jizhou kiln decal, each has its own characteristics at the same time, but also with full flower decoration for the majority.

In the later Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, with the development of blue and white decoration, the development of various color glaze, colorful, bucket color, pastel, is rarely reproduced as only the focus of the shoulder and neck position before. Under the specific historical conditions of the Yuan Dynasty, the artifacts of the Yuan Dynasty were very different from the cultural exchanges between the East and the West, the living customs between the Mongolian and Han dynasties and the cultural aesthetics. On the ceramics, the shapes and patterns of the objects are exotic, and almost all the remaining objects are full of decoration. Blue and white decorative pattern multi-layer distribution, very complicated. Blue and white peony Tang grass dragon ear large pot decorative pattern from the mouth to the bottom of the pot, the theme lines and auxiliary prints interspersed with each other.

## **4. Conclusions**

Referring to the reasons for the change of the decoration position, with the development of history, different research directions will appear different influencing factors, such as the development of porcelain making technology, the research of glaze formula, the progress of kiln kiln tools and so on. The cultural background of various times, people's aesthetic changes will also have a certain impact on it.

Among them, the development of living mode is an important factor affecting the change of ceramic decoration position. Both the location of furniture and ceramic decoration patterns take the Sui and Tang dynasties as the transitional period, from sitting on the ground to sitting down on the feet, from the upper part of the main decoration to the full flower decoration. Looks to raise of furniture only, but had great influence to every respect. The position of ceramic decorative pattern increases gradually as furniture position, the change of sitting posture, cause visual Angle to change, caused the decorative position of ceramic decorative pattern to move downward, adornment content is more rich and substantial.

The research of tracing the source of the ancient times is conducive to the current designers to skillfully grasp the location distribution of the ceramic decoration and handle the perception of the design objects on the design objects, so as to more accurately grasp the visual language composition of the design and obtain a stronger decoration effect.

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