

# Study On Decorative Art of Greenbelt Pastel Lotus Embossed Wuzi Dengke Bottle In Qing Dynasty

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## ABSTRACT

China is a country with a long history of producing ceramics, leaving many exquisite and precious ceramic artworks. The ceramic involved in this paper is one of them. From the perspective of iconology, this study studies the Qing Dynasty porcelain “Greenbelt Pastel Lotus Embossed Wuzi Dengke Bottle” (GPLEWDB) through specific image analysis, including the form characteristics and symbolic meaning, historical background, and other contents of ceramic decoration. Then, according to the historical data, analyze the formation of the ceramic decorative art of social and cultural factors. This study attempts to change the traditional research methods of Chinese art history, in the form of case analysis, ceramic decorative elements of multi-level image analysis, to achieve a more in-depth study of ceramic cases. The study on the form and symbol of decorative patterns of GPLEWDB is helpful to link ceramic art research with ancient Chinese traditional culture, analyze the relationship between them, expand the perspective of traditional research, and promote the application of interdisciplinary research in ceramic research.

**Keywords:** *Ceramic decoration, Iconology analysis, Formal analysis, Theme Implication, Historical symbol*

## INTRODUCTION

As a representative art form in China, ceramics has long enjoyed a good reputation both at home and abroad. Ceramics are usually both practical and artistic. The artistic expression of ceramics can not be without various types of decoration, which come from all aspects of life and represent a variety of symbolic meanings. This study will carry out a series of discussions on the decorative art of “Greenbelt Pastel Lotus Embossed Wuzi Dengke Bottle” (GPLEWDB) in the Qing Dynasty.

GPLEWDB is an essential ceramic artwork belonging to the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty. The height of the bottle is 42 centimeters, with a small mouth, long neck, and sliding shoulders. The

abdomen is oval, and a red ribbon decoration is wrapped around the neck. The body is upright and elegant, and the decoration subject is happy and festive (see Figure1).



**Figure 1. Qianlong Period of Qing Dynasty, GPLEWDB**  
(Source: Author's personal collection, 2020)

The bottle has a green background and a bright red ribbon at the neck. The bottle mouth is decorated with auspicious cloud patterns, and the green glaze on the bottle body is decorated with traditional Chinese lotus flower patterns and bat patterns. The bottom of the bottle is decorated with geometric patterns and gold thread. The whole bottle body is filled with various traditional Chinese decorative designs.

In addition to painting and decorative patterns, there are five cute sculptures of little boys on the bottle. Some of them are standing on the shoulders of the bottle, some are climbing up with a red ribbon, and a child is standing at the bottom of the bottle. The boy on the left shoulder of the bottle is holding a fruit in his hand, the boy on the right is holding a big red Ruyi (traditional Chinese handicraft), and another child is squatting on the shoulder of the bottle watching his friend climbing up. The boy at the bottom of the bottle has a traditional Chinese musical instrument, Sheng. Because of its vivid image and beautiful meaning, it was called *Wuzi Dengke* (five children celebrate-getting good grades in the imperial examination), representing the hope for a better future and the wish to get good grades on the test.

When we appreciate this beautiful ceramic artwork, we will be interested in understanding the meaning, history, and development of the decoration on this ceramic work, which is also what the author of this paper is interested in and wants to know.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese ceramic decoration art, as China's significant historical and cultural accumulation, is the artistic expression of Chinese traditional culture. The formation of all sorts of adornment must have extensive social and cultural reasons. The researchers need to explore, for this paper, the reasons for the construction of ceramic decoration can be summarized as the following three aspects of content.

### An Emphasis on the Continuation of Life

Life is precious but fragile. In the original period, humans, in the face of a harsh natural environment, in the face of the beast attack, in the face of high infant mortality, their living conditions

were complicated. Since then, humans have had to live full of fear. People ask for the prosperity of future generations by various means. They created the female figurines, used to express the worship of female reproduction.

With the growth of the practice and the accumulation of knowledge, life's pursuit has not diminished. In the Qin and Han Dynasties in China, for example, the emperor oftentimes sent personnel around looking for longevity drugs to achieve the immortal effect. Many Kings and emperors of the Han dynasty also once for a variety of ageless drug addiction can live longer. It is enough to reflect the life of desire and fear.

With such a view of life, in the face of the inevitable loss of life, they have an obsession with passing on the family line. A family is eager to have children born continuously (here refers to boys). Having enough children means that the family can continue and will not disappear from this world (Feng Xianming, 2013). In ancient Chinese traditional culture, only boys could pass on the family's life and ensure the purity of the family bloodline because of them. Girls would grow up and become members of other families and bear children for other families. This belief led directly to the family preference for boys in ancient Chinese culture. Having enough boys in a family means an endless stream of good fortune and auspiciousness. For this reason, there are far more images of boys than girls in children's ceramic decorations.

The children's theme decoration in this paper belongs to a branch of character decoration. People give all good wishes to their children, and children have been regarded as a symbol of hope and the future. Children represent the hope of a family, a nation, or even a country, the pursuit of a family to carry on the family line, and the yearning for the growth and prosperity of the family.

### **The Influence of Education and Examination System in Ancient China**

In China's feudal society, the emperor ruled the whole country, and the males of the royal family could only succeed in the position of the ruler of the country. Before the Sui and Tang Dynasties in China, there was no examination system to select talents. The candidates for critical posts in the country were usually from prominent families (with money and status). Ordinary people had no chance to participate in the political work of the country (Cao Zhi, 2020). In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the ruler set up the imperial examination system to break the narrow talent selection system. As long as the male who met the criteria could participate in the examination, they could be selected as political governance participants if the examination results were good. For ordinary families, this is undoubtedly a way to change their fate and the fate of their families. Before this, it is impossible to achieve (Deng Qianbin, 2013).

Therefore, a family regarded it as a supreme honor for its male to succeed in the imperial examinations and get good grades, which also meant that the family was about to prosper (Zhou Jiyin, 2017). Therefore, against this political background, ancient China gave great hope to boys, hoping that they could get good scores in examinations and participate in the country's rule. Therefore, to express the hope for the success of the exam, in the ceramic decoration, *Wuzi Dengke* has become a popular theme, expressing the hope and blessing of the success of the exam, wish they can get good results because of its beautiful implication and symbol, has been loved by people.

### **The Pursuit of Good Meaning**

It is human nature to seek advantages and avoid disadvantages. People are always pursuing an aspect that benefits them, and this idea can also be expressed in works of art (Cao Zhi, 2020). Ceramic decoration patterns usually have good symbolic meanings, such as lotus for purity, peony for wealth, bamboo for toughness, orchid for good quality, pomegranate and grape for many children and happiness,

deer for enjoyment, magpie for good things to happen, crane and pine for longevity and so on (Huang Xiaoqi, 2021).

China is a country that attaches great importance to the meanings and symbols of things, and people assign various symbolic meanings to things according to their characteristics. The decorative pattern will not allow the implied meaning, not beautiful things as a decorative pattern, to reflect the pursuit of a better life and a better future: decoration must have indicated purpose and implied meaning must be auspicious (Niu Dianyi, 2021).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the historical data of the Qing Dynasty ceramic treasure GPLEWDB. According to the theory of iconography, founded by German art theorist, Panofsky (1987), the analysis of artistic works should be comprehensive and include three aspects: pre—iconography, iconography, and iconology analysis. Only studying the form of the artwork itself, the theme allegory, and the historical symbol can be regarded as a complete study of iconology. This study will review the theme of the article based on this. Finally, the report analyzes this form of decoration social background and cultural roots.

Define the research object of the formal analysis method: for example, the line, color, composition, space and other formal elements of the artwork. Make a formal analysis of the GPLEWDB art of the Qing Dynasty, such as the characteristics of color application, the composition of painting decoration and structural attributes of ceramic decoration.

On the basis of formal analysis, the decorative images and patterns of ceramic artworks are analyzed. For example, the use of children's decorative patterns, animal themes and plant themes in ceramics, as well as the symbolic meaning of decorative themes and patterns.

## FINDINGS

Images are distributed in all corners of artworks, and ceramic decoration can also be regarded as an image naturally. Therefore, it is necessary and feasible to analyze the decoration of ceramic iconography. According to Panofsky (1987), the whole process of iconographic analysis can be divided into three levels: Pre- iconography stage, Iconography stage, and Iconology analysis stage, and it would be incomplete without one of them. For a ceramic artwork, the pre-iconography stage is mainly about studying the form of the artwork itself, such as lines, colors, structures, forms of expression, etc., which refers to the intuitive visual aspect. This stage is similar to the formal analysis of Wofflin (1987). In this part, this study will analyze the ceramic from the three aspects of the complex background and color expression, the attention to the details of the painting, and the differences in children's gender expression.

Iconography is a more in-depth analysis stage than pre-iconography. Regarding iconography, Panofsky said: "iconography analysis is the study of stories and fables. Iconography analysis presupposes a mastery of particular subjects and ideas handed down from various literary sources, whether through purposeful reading or oral literary traditions. Based on analyzing the visual form of artistic works, we need to deeply understand the symbol and meaning represented by specific images in history, culture, and society. For example, in traditional Chinese culture, the lotus represents purity, bamboo represents tenacity, and the pomegranate means having many children. Iconology analysis is the last and highest setting. In this stage, Panofsky believes that artists or works of art should be placed in their historical stage and analyzed with the characteristics of The Times. The purpose of associating an artwork with the political, economic, cultural, and other historical backgrounds and cultural trends is to comprehensively view a work because Panofsky believes that the development of artistic style is

consistent with the social, philosophical, and cultural development of that time. Next, this study will introduce the ceramic decoration from the above three aspects, respectively.

### **Analysis of the Form of Ceramic Decoration**

The analysis of ceramic decorative form is the key to solving the problem of the characteristics of decorative arrangement and the source of decorative form. Through the study and summary of the decorative form of ceramics as a whole, it is helpful to sort out the basis of the ceramic decorative form. Its core starts from the artwork itself, from the visual form. The purpose is to grasp the artwork's composition, such as lines, color, structure, space, rhythm, and other content. Because every work of art is composed of specific form elements such as point, line, and surface, the combination of various forms of artwork. The formal characteristics of artworks are often the first to enter the eyes of the audience.

### **Dense Decorative Forms**

The adornment of pottery and porcelain can be divided into two parts, the first is the setting of the painting, and the 2nd is colorific application. The image set is also the form of a decorative painting surface. Different decorations can form different artistic styles, some paintings are fully dense, and some pictures are sparse, giving the audience different aesthetic feelings.

Through the sorting and analysis of the ceramic decoration before the Ming and Qing Dynasties, one of the most prominent characteristics is that the decoration often appears in the form of individual patterns on the ceramics, known for the sparse decoration structure, without too dense decoration performance.

GPLEWDB decoration has prominent, dense, and complex characteristics in the painting. On the bottle body with a green background, there are lotus patterns, curly grass patterns, bat patterns, auspicious cloud patterns, Ruyi patterns, and geometric patterns densely distributed. The basic principle of picture composition is to leave no blank space.

In some respects, the sparsity or total density of the picture has a specific relationship with the order of The Times. The Qing Dynasty is the last feudal period in China, the rulers pursued a luxurious life and gorgeous decoration, and complete density decoration was the essential feature of Qing Dynasty ceramics.

### **The Decoration is Rich in Color**

Color is one of the most critical elements that constitute a work of art. The use of different colors can form artworks of different styles. For example, some works prefer simple colors, while others prefer the use of rich colors. By analyzing and studying the color use of ceramic artwork, the characteristics and style of the artist and the artwork can be defined, and the aesthetic taste of an era can also be seen.

The development of ceramics in China has experienced a long time, and ceramic color application has also experienced a pretty long development process. Pottery from the original period of element (no color pottery, only the essence of soil), painted pottery (only with simple colors such as red, brown, and black), to the Qin and Han Dynasties of green, white ceramic, three-color pottery of the Tang Dynasty period, the cyan porcelain during the Song and Yuan period, blue and white porcelain, and developed in the Ming Dynasty color porcelain. The use of color in ceramics is constantly growing, and the types of color are also continually increasing. Each era has different color usage habits.

The ceramic art of the Qing Dynasty showed very different artistic characteristics from that of the previous dynasties in terms of the use of color. In addition to the high-quality pigments produced in

China, many pigments were imported from abroad, and western painting pigments and painting techniques were used in the decoration of ceramics. Coupled with the painter's exquisite painting techniques, the ceramic decoration of the Qing Dynasty was generally gorgeous.

GPLEWDB, in the form of decoration, has prominent rich, luxuriant characteristics. The fusion of all kinds of rare colors, delicate colors, and superb color composition means forming a complex color combination form. Creators use precious pigments, gold dust, etc., for painting decoration. Through the study of ceramic color application, we can convey the aesthetic habits and color pursuit of the creator and user of the artwork in the period of the artwork to the audience.

### **Paying Attention to the Details of Decoration**

Details can make the ceramic decoration look more delicate. Of course, it is also an important test of the ceramic painter's painting technology standards. Because of their love for ceramics, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty invested a lot of energy and money in the production of ceramics. They set up a unique official ceramic production organization in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, set strict regulations, and sent officials to supervise the production. Officials have rigorous requirements for ceramic production and decoration, such as using precious raw materials; ceramic decoration requires exquisite depiction, to distinguish high-quality ceramic artworks from ordinary ceramic products produced by the people. At the same time, whether the ceramic decoration is fine is also a reflection of the social status of ceramic users.

The decoration of GPLEWDB well reflects the painter's emphasis on detail portrayal. The delineation of lines and the shading of colors are meticulously completed. The depiction of children's sculptures also pays great attention to details, and the characterization of the characters' facial features is also meticulous and natural. There are also many small decorative patterns on children's clothes, such as clouds and geometric patterns, which would not be noticed without careful observation. The main patterns of lotus and bat on the bottle also pay attention to details. The petals and stamens of the lotus are visible. Based on maintain its appearance, the bat added some geometric decorative patterns depicted with golden pigments on its body and used white pigments to draw eyes for the bat, which are detailed and vivid.

### **Differences in Children's Gender Performance**

The gender difference of children here refers to the sculpture image of children decorated on the bottle body. There are altogether five children decorated on the bottle body. It is worth noting that all the five children are boys who climb and play happily. In the similar ceramic decoration of children theme in the Qing Dynasty, the gender of children is boys, and there is almost no image of girls. This decorative feature is inseparable from Chinese traditional culture, reflecting the preference for boys in ancient Chinese cultural tradition.

### **Symbolic and Allegorical Analysis of Ceramic Decorative Elements**

There are many interesting decorative elements in the decoration of GPLEWDB, such as children's image decoration, lotus decoration, bat decoration, cloud pattern, Ruyi decoration, musical instrument Sheng, ribbon decoration, etc. In Chinese culture, these decorative elements are not only a kind of decorative pattern but also contain rich symbols and implied meanings, rich traditional Chinese culture.

### **Children**

In the traditional Chinese decorative arts, children are the symbol of many children and the family's prosperity, and most of them show the scenes of children playing in daily life. In Chinese art history, we

can find that the earliest paintings about children in China were in the Tang Dynasty. Before the Tang Dynasty, children's photos were exceptionally developed due to the rise and popularity of custom painting. Some famous painters specialized in children's artwork, such as Li Song and Su Hanchen. New Year pictures for children have been formed in Chinese folk art, and various baby drama paintings have also become popular. For example, Su Hanchen's "Autumn courtyard baby Play" and "100 Children Playing in spring" show children's scenes in daily life. Some are teasing dogs under trees and playing games, and some worship Buddha Statues. The pictures are warm and exciting, showing children's love and innocence.

At the same time, ceramic decoration also appeared a lot in children's decoration. In the pottery of Changsha kiln in the Hunan province of the Tang Dynasty, we can see some painting decorations depicting children's daily life. Changsha kiln is a typical folk kiln in the Tang Dynasty and a pioneer in producing painted porcelain in China. Folk ceramic decorators create ceramics to their hearts' content without too much subject matter limitation in creation. Lively and lovely children's theme decoration is played incisively and vividly by them. Cizhou kiln was another kind of porcelain in the Song Dynasty. This folk kiln continued the characteristics of the Changsha kiln in the Tang Dynasty and used color painting on white porcelain, opening a new world of Chinese painting porcelain. The ceramic images of Cizhou Kiln are dominated by a white background with black flowers and white ground with brown flowers. The themes are very folk, and children are one of the critical decorative themes.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, children's ceramic decoration became more and more abundant with the continuous creation of ceramic varieties. It is used in everyday appliances. Some depict children playing in the courtyard, some playing chess, some in nature, picking lotus seeds and flowers in the mountains, some chasing each other, and some flying kites.

The children in ceramic decoration are usually boys, and girls are rarely seen. This is the expression of the concept of favoring boys over girls in art in Chinese feudal society. Boys are considered the guarantee of family prosperity and inheritance, so expressing the children's theme also shows the expectation of a family's long-term wealth. In ancient times, due to various reasons such as disease, war, and hunger, the survival rate of children was meager. Both dignitaries and ordinary people looked forward to their family's prosperity. Therefore, the children's paintings, which symbolize "many children and happiness" and "full of children and grandchildren," have become a kind of spiritual comfort for people and show people's good wishes for the continuation of life. In ceramic decoration, children are usually used together with objects with beautiful meanings, such as lotus, clouds, peony, fish, etc., to realize the superposition and multiplication of beautiful symbolic meanings.

## **Ruyi**

In traditional Chinese decorative art, *Ruyi* symbolizes auspiciousness and beauty. *Ruyi*, an ancient handicraft, symbolizes good luck. According to the written materials of the Qing Dynasty: "Ruyi, an ancient cute nude held in one's hand," was originally a tool used for itching in daily life and later differentiated into an object with symbolic meaning (symbolizing as I wish). *Ruyi* usually uses precious wood, gold, silver, jade, and crystal stones as raw materials. In shape, *Ruyi* is usually s-shaped and has a long handle that can be easily held in hand. *Ruyi* is generally decorated with Ganoderma, cloud patterns, bat patterns, etc. Some *Ruyi* tails are decorated with wreathing, one of the treasures highly valued in ancient times and a symbol of status and wealth.

## **Musical Instruments - Sheng**

An ancient Chinese musical instrument with a clear and harmonious tone, Sheng was indispensable in old musical performances. In traditional Chinese decorative art, Sheng symbolizes celebration and

congratulations. A poem from the Chinese pre-Qin Dynasty, Xiao Ya ·Lu Ming, contains the following lines: "A flock of deer is chirping happily, eating plants in the field. I will play Se (also a traditional Chinese musical instrument) and Sheng to welcome and entertain my friends". It is often regarded as a symbol of celebrating auspicious things.

## **The Red Ribbon**

In traditional Chinese decorative arts, red ribbons symbolize peace and auspiciousness. The ribbon is a kind of exquisite handmade ribbon, usually made of cloth and silk. Different decorative patterns on the fabric represent peace and good luck. Red symbolizes joy and enthusiasm in China. The red ribbon on the ceramic works introduced in this paper describes the celebration of good things. There are also clouds on the ribbon, which also represents auspiciousness.

## **Lotus**

Lotus is a prevalent aquatic plant with beautiful flowers of various colors. In traditional Chinese decorative art, the lotus is a symbol of purity. Zhou Dunyi, a litterateur of the Song Dynasty, said in his essay on The Love of Lotus: "All kinds of flowers grow on water and land, and there are many to love. Tao Yuanming of the Jin Dynasty loved chrysanthemums only. Since the Tang Dynasty, most people have been like a peony. But I love the lotus flower, which grows out of the mud but is not polluted, washed with water, and not enchanting. The inside of the lotus stalk is through, the outside is straight, and the branches and stems are not born next to it. The fragrance is far clear, and it stands cleanly in the water. You can only look at it from a distance, but you can't go close to it".



**Figure 2. Lotus decorative pattern**  
(Source: Author's personal collection, 2020)

Chinese people are full of love for lotus. Painters love to draw various lotus pictures. Artisans make various lotus decorations, such as lotus lamps. Ceramic makers also use lotus as an essential decorative pattern to beautify ceramic products. There are also many decorative pictures of children embracing lotus flowers in folk New Year paintings. Figure 2 is the decorative pattern of the lotus flower in the ceramics in this paper. Based on retaining the essential characteristics of the lotus flower, a certain degree of deformation is carried out to make it more suitable for ceramic decoration.

## **Bat**

The bat, a night-flying animal, has an ugly face. As Chinese culture attaches great importance to homonyms, the pronunciation of bats in Chinese is the same as that of the Chinese character representing



"fortune," so bats have been used as a kind of auspicious decoration for a long time. People have changed the shape of bats in a variety of ways. They have entirely lost their terrible appearance in reality and become very lovely in form, representing blessing, auspiciousness, and good things in decorative art. Based on retaining the basic shape of bats, it has been changed to a large extent to make it more suitable for existence as a ceramic decorative pattern.

### **The Epochal Characteristics of Decoration -- Complexity and Delicacy**

The last part of the paper has been on the ceramic decoration form, decoration elements represented by the symbol, and the implied meaning of a detailed analysis. The following content will enter into the iconology analysis of ceramic decoration. Panofsky believes that the interpretation of iconology analysis requires a deep understanding of the history, culture, and society in which the artwork is located because the artwork is a symbol to reveal the social significance and social culture and a cultural symbol of a historical period. The decoration of the main character of this paper, GPLEWDB, is to place its decoration in the historical context at that time to study and analyze the relationship between historical culture, social relations, and ceramic decoration.

GPLEWDB is a ceramic work from the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, which prominently reflects the decoration culture of the Qing Dynasty -- complexity and delicacy. The Qing Dynasty was the last feudal society in Chinese history, at the end of the feudal society. The founders of the Qing Dynasty, belonging to China's ethnic minorities, paid particular attention to the use of decoration in life. On the one hand, they are good at learning about the culture of other nations while protecting their own culture to a certain extent. In the superposition of various cultures and decorations, complex and complicated decoration characteristics are bound to appear. On the other hand, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty, especially the Qianlong emperor, to the west art special love, at this time, and there was much delicate western art, the painting was introduced into China, and the impact on Chinese art was tremendous, such as Rococo decoration was delicate and complicated, the use of western decorative techniques, the use of western decoration pattern, become the trend. In short, the ceramic decoration of the Qing Dynasty was generally characterized by "complexity and delicacy," which was consistent with the social and cultural characteristics of the Qing Dynasty.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study mainly uses the research method of iconology to make a detailed analysis of the decorative art of GPLEWDB in the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, including the expression form of decoration, and the reasons behind the formation of decoration, and the symbolic and implied meaning of traditional Chinese culture. The research can deepen the understanding of Chinese ceramic decoration and understand the relationship between ceramic decoration art and The Times. Still, it also has positive significance for the inheritance and protection of Chinese traditional ceramic decoration.

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