

# RHETORICAL SPACE

## *Culture of Curiosity in Yangcai under Emperor Qianlong's Reign*

Chih-En Chen

Department of the History of Art and Archaeology

PhD Candidate

### ABSTRACT

This research is arranged into three sections in order to elaborate on the hybrid innovation in *yangcai*. Firstly, the usage of pictorial techniques on porcelain will be discussed, followed by the argument that the modelling technique in the Qianlong period could be the revival of Buddhist tradition combined with European pictoriality. The second section continues the discussion of non-traditional attributes in terms of the ontology of porcelain patterns. Although it has been widely accepted that Western-style decorations were applied to the production of the Qing porcelain, the other possibility will be purported here by stating that the decorative pattern is a Chinese version of the multicultural product. The last section explores style and identity. By reviewing the history of Chinese painting technique, art historians can realise the difference between knowing and performing. Artworks produced in the Emperor Qianlong's reign were more about Emperor Qianlong's preference than the capability of the artists. This political reason differentiated the theory and practice in Chinese history of art. This essay argues that the design of *yangcai* is substantially part of the Emperor Qianlong's portrait, which represents his multicultural background, authority over various civilisations, and transcendental identity as an emperor bridging the East and the West.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chih-En Chen is a PhD Candidate at the Department of the History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS, University of London. Before he arrived his current position, he worked for Christie's Toronto Office (2013–2014) and Waddington's Auctioneers in Canada (2014–2018). He received an MA in History of Art from the University of Toronto. He was a Visiting Scholar at the Beckman Institute (2008) and Academia Sinica (2018), awarded The Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarships from Canada (2017–2020), GSSA Fellowship from Taiwan (2018–2019), The BADA Friends Prize in Memory of Brian Morgan (2020), The Oriental Ceramic Society George de Menasce Memorial Trust Award (2020–2021), and the Chiang Ching-kuo Fellowships for PhD Dissertations (2020–2021). Specialised in Asian ceramics and history of art in the global context, he has been consulted by museums and private funds, including the Fitzwilliam Museum, the V&A, and the Gardiner Museum, etc.

**KEYWORDS:** transculturalism, *yangcai*, *aotufa*, Emperor Qianlong, Postcolonialism

## INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, porcelain has been one of the most important exporting merchandises in China due to its stunning delicacy and highly decorative characteristics. Chinese porcelain was massively traded to Europe through the Middle East or Maritime Silk Route by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The trend reached its zenith under the *Pax Manjurica*,<sup>119</sup> or the so-called High Qing era (1683–1839).<sup>120</sup> Owing to the political and economic prosperity as well as the emperors' profound involvement in the design and manufacture of artworks, the quality and the quantity of porcelain peaked during the *Pax Manjurica*. The popularity associated with porcelain was especially palpable during the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (1735–1796). During this time, a significant amount of extremely high-quality porcelain was fired under imperial-directed commission. This achievement was derived from three main reasons: First, Jesuit missionaries serving as painters in the imperial Qing court imported and introduced Western pigments and pictorial techniques into China. The Jesuits' perspective nourished the field of Chinese art, producing varieties and novelties. Second, Qing Dynasty was an empire composed of multiple cultures (Manchu, Mongolian, Han, and Tibetan) even before the Europeans arrived; therefore, multiculturalism and transculturalism incubated the Emperor Qianlong's relative tolerance of European pictoriality. Third, due to the grand connoisseurship in the art of the Emperor Kangxi 康熙 and the Emperor Yongzheng 雍正,<sup>121</sup> as their successor, the Emperor Qianlong's desire to surpass their achievements was readily obvious in every aspect. This desire drove the art supervisors at the time, such as the superintendent of the Jingdezhen imperial kiln Tang Ying 唐英 (1682–1756), and those who served at the Qing Imperial Household Department (Neiwufu 內務府) and the Qing Imperial Workshops (Zaobanchu 造辦處) to conduct research into finding innovative ways of designing porcelain to please and fulfil the demand within the imperial precinct. Therefore, numerous original and revolutionary glazes and unprecedented motifs were created in a short period of time.

---

<sup>119</sup> The *Pax Manjurica* is a term coined in Latin, standing for “Manchu Peace,” which is to better represent the status quo race-wise in the High Qing era compared to *Pax Sinica* (Chinese Peace).

<sup>120</sup> Wakeman, “High Ch’ing: 1683–1839.”

<sup>121</sup> The first and the second Emperor during the time of *Pax Manjurica*, reigned from 1661 to 1722 and 1722 to 1735, respectively.

Emperor Qianlong was different from two of his predecessors in terms of his relationship with European Jesuits. The Jesuits arrived in China and served the Qing imperial court before Emperor Qianlong was born. As a result, some of the Jesuits even became Qianlong's mentors in his youth. Therefore, in order to understand the aesthetic perspective of the Emperor Qianlong and the ingenious design of the porcelain fired under his reign, the Sino-European relations and Jesuits' influences within the imperial precinct are fairly paramount. The importance of Sino-European relations in terms of Chinese art history was reinforced in *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese painting*, where Cahill argues that China was fascinated by European visuality at the time.<sup>122</sup> Most of the present scholarship focusing on the account of Sino-European pictorial perspective concentrates on the contribution of the Jesuit painters who served in the Qing imperial court in terms of the rendition of paintings. For example, one of the earliest studies of its kind was conducted by Cécile Beurdeley in *Giuseppe Castiglione: a Jesuit painter at the court of the Chinese emperors*.<sup>123</sup> Even though the more recent study by John W. O'Malley et al. makes a relatively broad overview of Jesuits' impact on Chinese culture, his work still focuses closely on paintings in those chapters concerning Chinese art.<sup>124</sup> The other studies dedicated to the linear perspective brought to the Qing imperial court by the Jesuits were likewise limited to the scope of the two-dimensional pictorial surface.<sup>125</sup> However, the Sino-European artworks unapologetically and inextricably became part of Chinese art history in every aspect and various representational media, including the manufacture of porcelain and works of art. The European pictorial techniques that were adopted in Chinese paintings were found in the design of porcelain in an alternative representation. For example, the standard European pictorial techniques, such as foreshortening, linear perspective, and *chiaroscuro* can be seen on *yangcai* 洋彩 produced in the Jingdezhen imperial kilns during the Qianlong period.<sup>126</sup> The term *yangcai* was first adopted by Tang Ying in the thirteenth year of the Yongzheng reign (1735), where he defined the term as "imitating the West" and applied it to the ware which he innovated and introduced into the

---

<sup>122</sup> Cahill, *The Compelling Image*, 70, 223.

<sup>123</sup> Beurdeley and Beurdeley, *Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit Painter At the Court of the Chinese Emperors*.

<sup>124</sup> John W. O'Malley et al., *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*.

<sup>125</sup> Finlay, "The Qianlong Emperor's Western Vistas"; Kleutghen, "The Qianlong Emperor's Perspective"; Musillo, "Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Visions"; Musillo, *The Shining Inheritance: Italian Painters at the Qing Court, 1699–1812*.

<sup>126</sup> Liao Baoxiu, *Huali caici*, 19–21.

canon of Qing imperial aesthetics.<sup>127</sup> In Liao's study, she argues that *yangcai* was deeply influenced by European pictoriality and possesses three main differences compared to traditional Chinese *fangcai* 珐琅彩, which was polychrome enamelled porcelain produced under the imperial-directed commission in the kiln directly run by the Qing Imperial Household Department inside the Forbidden City. The differences are as follows: Western edge décor, exotic patterns, and the usage of light and shadow. Although these three aspects are readily relevant to the European perspective, the ontological background underlines that the design on porcelain could be far more complicated than a single explanation can express. Given that a multicultural eambiente dominated the High Qing era, a purely single cultural appropriation was hardly taken place. Craig Clunas describes the openness of China as a "culture of curiosity" in *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, which means that the Chinese attempted to fill the gaps in their own narrative by taking advantage of the multicultural environment.<sup>128</sup> Chinese appreciated the interstitial human geographical society and learned from other cultures to complete their categories. Therefore, European/Christian imagery and iconography was only part of this openness to exotic cultures. Instead of attributing *yangcai* exclusively to European pictoriality, we should consider the manufacture of porcelain under Emperor Qianlong's reign as an outcome of a "culture of curiosity."

## PICTORIAL TECHNIQUES ON PORCELAIN

The conception of modelling and pictorial perspective in terms of painting varies from cultures to cultures, and the recognition of this conception is a process of integration and evolution. Some studies argue that European pictoriality brought tremendous influence on Chinese painting and nurtured Chinese history of art in depth.<sup>129</sup> Even though the European contribution to Chinese paintings (particularly the Qing imperial court painting) from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries is an undeniable fact, the East-West exchange and the following Sino-European mutual interpretation commenced long before Jesuit painters served in the Qing imperial court. For example, the application of light and shading

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 10, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, 173.

<sup>129</sup> Beurdeley and Beurdeley, *Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit Painter At the Court of the Chinese Emperors*, 150–52.



in painting came to Chinese attention prior to the introduction of the European perspective in the sixteenth century. Chinese artists adopted the shading and highlighting from Indian Buddhist painting in the Liang Dynasty (502–557) and subsequently used this modelling technique often in religious painting.<sup>130</sup> Even though we rarely find the same technique in the latter *shanshui hua* 山水畫 (mountain and water landscape painting). Therefore, to deconstruct the ontology of European pictoriality requires a hermeneutic explanation between both the East and the West and should be traced back to the period before the Qing Dynasty.

The trading of porcelain between the East and the West is one of the most important primary sources for studying transculturalism between these two worlds in the historiography of Chinese history of art.<sup>131</sup> Liao contends that the Western elements presented over paintings on porcelain by using two examples from the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, which were exhibited in *Stunning Decorative Porcelains from the Qianlong Reign* in 2008. The first example is a pair of gall-bladder vases in *yangcai* enamels with figure décor attributed to Tang Ying, dated to the tenth year of the Qianlong reign (1745) (accession number: 故-瓷-017952, figs. 1-1, 1-2, and 故-瓷-017953). This pair of vases was painted with two windows, or the so-called *kaiguang* 開光 in Chinese,<sup>132</sup> with a blue-enamelled *chilong* 螭龍 (Chinese hornless dragon) pattern geometrical edge design. The pattern besides the *kaiguang*s was relatively flat compared to the scenes inside the *kaiguang*s, which are more three-dimensional, with shading and hatching, further creating an illusionistic pictoriality by the two yellow-enamelled *ruyi*-cloud circular frames overlapping the blue *chilong* windows (fig. 2). In this piece, Tang Ying successfully created at least two spaces of these vases: one is on the glazed surface, and the other is beyond the surface. The subject matter in the *kaiguang*s is the Eighteen Lohans 羅漢 from Buddhism, and the background is full of decoratively auspicious clouds to create a spiritual and religious ambiance. Liao argues that the figures and the clouds painted in the background, with strong contrasts between light and dark, suggest the appropriation from the

---

<sup>130</sup> Wang Min, “Tianzhu yifa yu aotuhua xi.”

<sup>131</sup> Gordon, *Chinese Export Porcelain*.

<sup>132</sup> *Kaiguang*, which has its long tradition of application, refers to a frame decorated with a recurring design (usually flora and fauna), enclosing the subject matter on Chinese decorative art.

*chiaroscuro* brought by the Jesuit painters;<sup>133</sup> however, according to the subject matter as well as the painting technique used, the minute designs on this pair of vases more closely resemble the traditional Buddhist paintings imported from India before the tenth century AD. The Buddhist paintings focus on creating an illusionistic space within the pictures for the purpose of religious worship and pilgrimage. Therefore, lighting and shading naturally became a pivotal part in Buddhist paintings in order to bring the representation of Buddha close to spiritual and visual reality. The mural paintings in Gra Thang Dgon (扎塘寺 གྲ་ཐང་དགོན་པ་) in Tibet have numerous examples of illusionistic space creation.<sup>134</sup> These murals were painted in a technique similar to that on the pair of *yangcai* vases in terms of the representation of the clouds in the background. The second example is a pair of *meiping* 梅瓶 vases in *yangcai* enamels with a figure in the landscape and imperial poem decoration, dated to the eighth year of the Qianlong reign (1743) and attributed to Tang Ying (故-瓷-017203, fig. 3-1, 3-2, 故-瓷-017204). The figure in the painting, an old chrysanthemum seller, was painted using the technique of Western *chiaroscuro*, according to Liao's study.<sup>135</sup> The potters used a white glaze to demonstrate the convex areas of the face (nose, chin, and cheeks) and dark glaze to stand for the concave areas on the face (eyes, ears, and neck). A similar methodology was also applied to the figure's limbs, which, surprisingly, resembles the style found in the mural painting located in the Cave 181 at the Kizil Caves in Xinjiang, China (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region),<sup>136</sup> and some examples can also be found in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in New York (accession number: 51.94.5, fig. 4) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (accession number: III 8839, fig. 5), which date from the sixth to the seventh centuries AD. This light-and-highlight methodology was a standard feature of *aotufa* 凹凸法 (concave-convex method) that originates in India instead of Renaissance *chiaroscuro* from Europe. Aotufa was brought to Tibet in the sixth century AD and became a popular pictorial understanding in mainland China from the sixth to the tenth centuries AD. The painting technique was generally used on the mural paintings in the Dunhuang Caves, and it is fairly obvious in

---

<sup>133</sup> Liao Baoxiu, *Huali caici*, 20, 152.

<sup>134</sup> Wang Min, "Tianzhu yifa yu aotuhua xi."

<sup>135</sup> Liao Baoxiu, *Huali caici*, 20.

<sup>136</sup> Gu Ying, "Lun xiyu yangshi aotufa yu tianzhu yifa," fig. 3.

Dunhuang Mogao Cave 285 and Cave 321.<sup>137</sup> Dunhuang mural painting applied *aotufa* on their pantheons, especially on the faces of Buddha, and the face presented by *aotufa* is addressed as a “five-white face” due to their usage of white paint on the forehead, nose, cheeks, and chin. Therefore, the application of *aotufa* in the Qing imperial *yangcai* wares could be another perspective from which to interpret the existence of light and shade found on the painted figure of the *yangcai* enamels vase.

The basic concept of European *chiaroscuro* and Buddhist *aotufa* is substantially different. They also serve distinct purposes under dissimilar cultural environments. There are two main differences between *chiaroscuro* and *aotufa*, and these differences can help us understand the ontological integration of the firing of *yangcai* attributed to Tang Ying. Firstly, *chiaroscuro* assumes a fixed source of light, whereas *aotufa* does not. Take *The Matchmaker* by Gerrit van Honthorst in 1625, for example. Van Honthorst uses a single candle to illuminate the scene, and this single fixed source of light converges the whole picture together. The basis of *chiaroscuro* is mathematics, and it follows Alberti’s orthogonals of light and his idea of a “veil” between a painting’s subject and human eyes.<sup>138</sup> In contrast, *aotufa* is a conceptual representation of light. The source of light in the picture is often unclear, and the light and highlight are used instead of the light and shadow in *chiaroscuro*. Secondly, the purpose of light and shadow is different within these two methodologies. *Chiaroscuro* applies mathematical theory based on painting skill to imitate an exaggerated reality and create a single subject matter focus on the canvas. In *The Matchmaker*, by using intense coverage of shadow, the light from the match is exaggerated in order to illuminate the young woman with her half-exposed areola, which conveys a sexual message. The usage of light can disorient viewers from the detail of the painting, preventing the spectators from finding the painting unrealistic. On the other hand, the purpose of *aotufa* is more spiritual than *chiaroscuro*. The initial usage of *aotufa* served a religious purpose in order to create both a visual and incorporeal sacrosanct place for inviolable pilgrimage activities. Avoiding the usage of shadow is a way to draw the worshipers into the religious picture’s illusionistic world. In *chiaroscuro*, even though it

---

<sup>137</sup> Wu Di, “Lun Dunhuang bihua gongbi zhongcaihua yu xiyu aotu yunranfa de guanxi.”

<sup>138</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 81–84.

looks very close to reality, the great amount of shadow limits the possibility of illusion in the paintings. For example, if *The Matchmaker* is placed in a well-illuminated room in a museum, viewers will find that it is a painting immediately. However, if it is placed in a dark environment like the painting itself, the imitated reality will be well-presented and deceive the spectators. However, *aotufa* uses light and highlight to avoid the limitation of the ambience surrounding the painting. Without the shadow, the *aotufa* painting can be viewed in any angle and any environment without visual confusion. Furthermore, highlighting brings the painting into another level of consecrated pilgrimage and blurs the perception of beholders.

Tang Ying's *yangcai* porcelain should be regarded as a derivative of cultural encounters, including the Southeast Asian *aotufa* and the European *chiaroscuro*. *Yangcai* is a complex built upon multiculturalism or the Chinese "culture of curiosity." Liao's statement regarding the Western perspective being the single force leading to the invention of *yangcai* is based on Tang Ying's report to the Emperor Qianlong, in which he wrote: "Imitating the Western style, so it is called *yangcai*." Therefore, Liao's argument is well-based on the primary textual source from Tang Ying; however, a historical written text can have multiple interpretations. What was written and recorded sometimes does not represent the entire truth. In the case of the representational technique in *yangcai*, as I have mentioned above, the Buddhist *aotufa* seemed to weigh more than European pictoriality. In addition, the Emperor Qianlong himself piously practised Buddhism himself despite his multicultural background; hence *aotufa* was used regularly in the Buddhist pantheons painted in the imperial Qing court. Tang Ying also lived in the same cultural background, and he must have come into contact with Buddhist paintings. Therefore, I suppose that *yangcai* mainly adapted to the Buddhist *aotufa*, even though *yangcai* was developed at the time when Jesuit painters played an important role in the imperial Qing court, and the Emperor Qianlong appreciated their contribution sincerely. European *chiaroscuro* happened to be a trigger for this innovative application because Tang Ying needed a novel statement for his creativity.

## ONTOLOGY OF PORCELAIN PATTERNS

The pattern design of *yangcai* is readily distinct from *falangcai*, or the traditional Chinese enamelled porcelain. In some cases, even though the pattern designs are extremely similar and employ the same subject matter, they can possess entirely different visualities. Take two designs dated to the Qianlong reign as examples, both found in the collection of the National Palace Museum Taipei, a yellow ground *yangcai* gu vase (accession number: 故-瓷-017034, fig. 6-1, 6-2)<sup>139</sup> and a pair of *yangcai* flowers and birds dishes (accession number: 故-瓷-017875, fig. 7, and 故-瓷-017876, fig. 8).<sup>140</sup> The vase and the dish share a similar pattern of tangled vines, lotus and exotic flowers, but the pictorial impressions are quite polarized on these pieces owing to the application and the representation of light. The *yangcai* enamelled gu was painted with light and highlighted with opaque glass (leadless and non-arsenic famille-rose pigment), while the light and shadow on the *falangcai* enamelled dishes were painted using a traditional technique used in Chinese landscape painting (i.e., leaving the surface of porcelain blank to stand for light). In addition, the *yangcai* enamelled gu vase possesses a more three-dimensional design by showing foreshortening on the flowers and the leaves, complicated overlapping between vines, and the combination of modelling skill and superimposed patterns. Liao claims that the pattern designs in *yangcai* were also a cultural appropriation and inspired by Renaissance *chiaroscuro* and the European concept of foreshortening, while I contend that the design of *yangcai* is more complicated in terms of its exotic components. As I have mentioned in the last section, Buddhist *aotufa* can also offer an alternative explanation for the light and highlight in the pattern design as it does in the painting on porcelain. However, whether the influence was *chiaroscuro* or *aotufa*, both were originally developed in painting rather than pattern design on three-dimensional artefacts. In order to trace the originality of *yangcai* pattern and its exotic attributes, two aspects will be discussed in the following paragraphs: firstly, I will go back to the beginning of the similar tangled vines and flower pattern in blue and white porcelain in Yuan and Ming Dynasty in terms of the modelling technique; secondly, I

---

<sup>139</sup> Liao Baoxiu, *Huali caici*, Plate. 36.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, Plate. 30.

will explain the similarity between *yangcai* and *tongjing hua* 通景畫 (penetrable-scene paintings) in the Qianlong period.

Different aspects of the invention of blue and white porcelain can be traced back to different periods. Cobalt oxide (blue pigment) imported from the Middle East was first used on porcelain in the Tang Dynasty (618–907). However, the pattern design of blue and white porcelain at the time was comparatively simpler than the design in the Qing Dynasty. In the Song Dynasty (960–1279), owing to the influence of pattern design from Jizhou kiln, the tangled vines and lotus became an important part of the traditional pattern in blue and white porcelain, but it was less popular at the time and not produced in great quantities. The closest prototype of Qing Dynasty blue and white porcelain dates back to the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), in which the complicated designs were applied to the patterns.<sup>141</sup> Single overlapping and double overlapping designs were rarely found at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, but they dominated the pictorial surface of blue and white porcelain when entering Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), especially after the Yongle period (1403–1425). In the Ming Dynasty, the overlapping design was not combined with a modelling technique, as seen in the *yangcai* of the Qing Dynasty. Therefore, the patterns were still quite flat compared to those identified in *yangcai*. The manufacture of blue and white porcelain reached its zenith during the Kangxi period (1622–1722), and the design of pattern faced a revolutionary innovation. Kangxi was the first emperor to rule the so-called *Pax Manjurica* period, in which the economy and culture prosperously developed and the politics was stable; therefore, a great amount of social resource was put into the artisan industry. Techniques for the application of cobalt blue pigment on porcelain made great progress and almost mimicked traditional Han Chinese ink painting on silk and paper in terms of the density of colour;<sup>142</sup> therefore the term *mo fen wucai* 墨分五彩 (ink could have five colours), which means there are five distinguishable cobalt blues based on the density of pigments, was also adopted to describe blue and white porcelain. This innovative technical development made modelling become tenable on blue and white porcelain, and it was the first prototype of the combination of modelling and overlapping design on porcelain. The design, both the

---

<sup>141</sup> Zhu Yuping, *Yuandai qinghuaci*, 10–12.

<sup>142</sup> Feng Xiaoqi, *Ming Qing qinghua ciqi*, 39.

pattern and the gradient glaze, on *yangcai* is quite similar to the blue and white porcelain applied with the technique of *mo fen wucui*, fired during the Kangxi period. The only difference is that *yangcai* is polychrome, yet blue and white porcelain is monochrome (only cobalt blue is applied). The first European Jesuit arrived in China in the late Ming Dynasty and started to bring the Western pictoriality to the East. Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining 郎世寧, 1688–1766), who arrived in China in 1715 under the Emperor Kangxi's reign, officially introduced Renaissance *chiaroscuro* and one-point perspective to China. As a result, we can find a foreshortening pattern in blue and white porcelain in Kangxi period. Therefore, Liao's claim regarding the influence of the Western pictoriality on *yangcai* could be, in fact, an indirect appropriation from the Kangxi period blue and white porcelain.

Although the omnipresent usage of light and highlight in *yangcai* is quite similar to the one in *aotufa* in terms of modelling figures, Buddhist *aotufa* painting does not contain any pattern design resembling *yangcai*. Therefore, the highlighting pattern in *yangcai* could be an innovation by the Jingdezhen imperial kilns superintendent Tang Ying, or it could be traced to another source. The *tongjing hua* by Giuseppe Castiglione and his apprentices can offer an alternative explanation for the design in *yangcai*. *Tongjing hua*, which is also called panoramic/penetrable-scene painting, is a special genre of art representation in the imperial Qing court. The extant *tongjing hua* is extremely rare, and all of them are attributed to Giuseppe Castiglione and his Jesuit and Chinese followers (e.g. Louis Antoine de Poirot 賀清泰 and Jin Tingbiao 金廷標). *Tongjing hua* is an illusionistic painting attempting to create another space within space. The painting itself is like a gate that connects architecture to an imagery heterotopia. In order to attain perspectival illusion, Castiglione applied light and highlight in *tongjing hua* instead of the traditional methodology used in *chiaroscuro* and *quadratura*. According to Kristina Kleutghen's recent study, Castiglione made this choice because of the Emperor Qianlong's personal dislike of shadow;<sup>143</sup> therefore, he developed this new way based on his own Italian *chiaroscuro* training and Buddhist painting in China. The similarity between *yangcai* patterns and *tongjing hua* is readily obvious; for example, the *tongjing hua* on the ceiling of

---

<sup>143</sup> Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions*, 106.



Juan Qin Zhai 倦勤齋 (Studio for Retirement from Diligent Service) in the Forbidden City, in which the bamboo and the wisterias were painted with a number of highlights to reach deceptive illusion, is very similar to the technique used in *yangcai*. Moreover, *yangcai* was invented just after the achievement of *tongjing hua*; therefore, the mutual influence on interdisciplinary communication stands a great chance.

Given the complex cultural situation during the Qing Dynasty, art historians should attempt to conduct exhaustive research in terms of the referential source on style. Another example which was attributed to the Western influence in Liao's study is the edge décor on *kaiguang* (windows). *Kaiguang* was first painted on ceramics during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in China, and it was earlier than the Renaissance period in Europe. Song Dynasty ceramics were exported in great quantities to Europe via the Middle East in the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries AD; therefore, even though the edge décor of *kaiguang* in *yangcai* resembles the one in French faience, it is not a satisfactory argument to maintain that *yangcai* appropriated faience design.

## STYLE AND IDENTITY UNDER THE QIANLONG'S REIGN

Although the Qing Dynasty was not the first Dynasty in Chinese history with multi-racial composition, it was the first Dynasty with European intervention in the imperial studios. Therefore, this unprecedented condition brought the artistic hybridity of Qing Dynasty to a distinct level. The artworks derived from multicultural encounters have been relatively well discussed in Western art historical discourse since the beginning of Orientalism in the 1970s,<sup>144</sup> which contributed to the contact between the East and the West. Orientalism argued against the Eurocentric historical discourse, collapsing the purity of European culture, and released the voice from the Other. Followed by the development of colonialism and post-colonialism, the whole concept of Orientalism evolved into the dispute of representation of historical narrative: the history of the colonizer and the colonized. This dispute continued through the 1980s under the schema of primitivism, in which the definition of modern art was reconstructed. In 1984, William Rubin's exhibition Primitivism

---

<sup>144</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

in 20th-century art: affinity of the tribal and the modern brought numerous discussions regarding decolonization.<sup>145</sup> The usage of transcendental “affinity” made the exhibition controversial and drew a number of negative critical reviews. James Clifford responded to Rubin’s curatorial conception by saying that colonialism is a two-way process and should be considered a hermeneutic problem instead of using affinity to circumscribe its legitimacy.<sup>146</sup>

The polemical and continuous disputation from Orientalism to post-colonialism generated the necessity of redefining the works of art under this interstitial human geographic environment. This equivocality rejects the historical narrative from both the colonizer and the colonized. The hybridity comes from an in-between heterotopia where the power of various cultures reaches balance. In order to identify this hermeneutic mutuality, Homi K. Bhabha contends that the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is interdependent;<sup>147</sup> therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the ontology of this in-between space. He applied the term “the third space of enunciation” to elaborate on the existence of this in-between space, arguing that all cultural contradictories are constructed in this third space.<sup>148</sup> Under this agenda, the ambivalent “hybridity” of artworks could be explained, and the historical narrative of this third space could be independently framed. There are numerous scholars who continue to adopt the third space theory, such as Edward Soja, who developed Bhabha’s third space by focusing on the spatiality of human life, demonstrating the hybridity by human geography.<sup>149</sup> In *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region*, Richard White used the term “middle ground” instead of third space to elucidate the same idea of reproduction of hybrid space.<sup>150</sup>

The concept of post-colonial hybridity is a possible schema for interpreting multicultural society in Qing Dynasty and its artworks; however, as James Elkins claims that art historians must develop an alternative research schema and theoretical analysis for

---

<sup>145</sup> Rubin, “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art.

<sup>146</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 295–296.

<sup>148</sup> Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences.”

<sup>149</sup> Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 123–136.

<sup>150</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*.

Eastern art history because the substantial different cultural background cannot be regarded as an analogy.<sup>151</sup> In the Qianlong period, owing to the Emperor Qianlong's personal passion for works of art, his own preference and his multicultural and multi-religious background became an essential part of the hybridity in the Qing Dynasty. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, Giuseppe Castiglione investigated a novel way of illusionistic painting due to the emperor's dislike of shadow, and Tang Ying was able to show his innovative *yangcai* because of the Emperor Qianlong's tolerance and his obsession with European culture. All of these were part of the Emperor Qianlong's personal revolution which then became an indispensable portion of Han- and Manchu-Chinese history of art. Tang Ying might have the concept of *aotufa* and *chiaroscuro* before the invention of *yangcai*, yet he was only able to perform it under the Qianlong's reign due to his artistic passion and curiosity-led tolerance.

## CONCLUSION

The rhetorical space, glazed on the surface of porcelain, for the "culture of curiosity" in *yangcai* is a historical witness of the encounter of the East and the West. *Yangcai* is a combination of multicultural artisans, transcultural remediation, the technical prowess of both East and the West, the emperor's will and preference, and the recreation of Sino-European pictoriality. This essay provides an alternative perspective to examine the ontology of *yangcai* wares fired under the Emperor Qianlong's reign, elaborating the danger of attributing the inspiration of *yangcai* pattern exclusively to the perspective from European court painters, proposing a reexamination of transculturalistic and post-colonial artisan environment of the High Qing era ruled by Manchu. The assumption of Western vista as the underpinning of *yangcai*, which might have sabotaged and endangered our understanding of the artistic profile in China's long eighteenth-century, has been revisited and averted. Moving across time and space, drawn to the evolution of porcelain firing from the Kangxi period blue and white porcelain, penetrable-scene painting within the Qing imperial precinct, and ancient India *aotufa* representational technique for Buddhist space, the present research has substantially explored the culture

---

<sup>151</sup> Elkins, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, 81–83.

of curiosity to unveil the secret carried by the rhetorical space created within the surface of *yangcai* ware.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*. Yale University Press, 1956.
- Beurdeley, Cécile, and Michel Beurdeley. *Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit Painter At the Court of the Chinese Emperors*. Translated by Michael Bullock. First Edition. Rutland Vt. C. E. Tuttle Co., 1971.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences." In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 206–9. London: Routledge, 1995.
- . *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Cahill, James. *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Clunas, Craig. *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*. Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Elkins, James. *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*. Hong Kong University Press, 2010.
- Feng, Xiaoqi 馮小琦. *Ming Qing qinghua ciqi: Gugong bowuyuan cang ci shangxi 明清青花瓷器: 故宮博物院藏瓷賞析*. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000.
- Finlay, John R. "The Qianlong Emperor's Western Vistas: Linear Perspective and Trompe l'Oeil Illusion in the European Palaces of the Yuanming Yuan." *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 94, no. 1 (2007): 159–93.
- Gordon, Elinor. *Chinese Export Porcelain: An Historical Survey*. Stated First Edition edition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- Gu, Ying 顧穎. "Lun xiyu yangshi aotufa yu tianzhu yifa 論西域樣式凹凸法與天竺遺法 (On the Three-Dimensional Method and the Inherited Tianzhu Method of the Western Regions)." *Dunhuang yanjiu*, no. 02 (2017): 78–83.
- John W. O'Malley, Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Steven J. Harris, and T. Frank Kennedy, eds. *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Kleutghen, Kristina. *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*. University of Washington Press, 2015.
- Kleutghen, Kristina Renee. "The Qianlong Emperor's Perspective: Illusionistic Painting in Eighteenth-Century China." PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2010.
- Liao, Pao-show 廖寶秀. *Huali caici: Qianlong yangcai 華麗彩瓷: 乾隆洋彩 (Stunning Decorative Porcelains from the Qianlong Reign)*. 1st ed. Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan (National Palace Museum), 2008.

Musillo, Marco. "Mid-Qing Arts and Jesuit Visions: Encounters and Exchanges in Eighteenth-Century Beijing." In *Ai Weiwei: Circle of Animals*, edited by Susan Delson, 146–61. Munich–London–New York: Prestel Publishing, 2011.

———. *The Shining Inheritance: Italian Painters at the Qing Court, 1699–1812*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016.

Rubin, William Stanley. "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. *Museum of Modern Art*, 1984.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Verso Books, 2010.

Wakeman, Frederic Jr. "High Ch'ing: 1683–1839." In *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation*, edited by James B. Crowley, 1–61. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.

Wang, Min 王敏. "Tianzhu Yifa yu aotuhua xi 天竺遺法與凹凸花析 (Analysis of Tianzhu Yifa and Concave and Convex Pattern)." *Zhuangshi*, no. 11 (2008): 94–95.

White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Wu, Di 吳迪. "Lun Dunhuang bishua gongbi zhongcaihua yu xiyu aotu yunranfa de guanxi 論敦煌壁畫工筆重彩畫與西域凹凸暈染法的關係." *Dangdai jiaoyu lilun yu shijian* 3, no. 06 (2011): 151–54.

Zhu, Yuping 朱裕平. *Yuandai Qinghuaci 元代青花瓷 (Blue and White Porcelain from Yuan Dynasty)*. Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2000.

APPENDIX A: IMAGES



國立故宮博物院  
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

Figure 1-1A yangcai gall-bladder vase © National Palace Museum, Taipei





國立故宮博物院  
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

*Figure 1-2A yangcai gall-bladder vase (other view) © National Palace Museum, Taipei*



國立故宮博物院  
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

*Figure 2A yangcai gall-bladder vase (other view) © National Palace Museum, Taipei*



國立故宮博物院  
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

*Figure 3-1 Ayangcai meiping © National Palace Museum, Taipei*



國立故宮博物院  
NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

Figure 3-2 A yangcai meiping (other view) © National Palace Museum, Taipei





*Figure 4 Kizil Caves mural painting © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*



Figure 5 Kizil Caves mural painting © Museum für Asiatische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin





*Figure 6-1*Ayangcai gu vase © National Palace Museum, Taipei





*Figure 6-2A yangcai gu vase (other view) © National Palace Museum, Taipei*



*Figure 7 A yangcai flower and bird dish © National Palace Museum, Taipei*



*Figure 8 A yangcai flower and bird dish © National Palace Museum, Taipei*