



Angular Momentum of Switzerland

Imperial Blue and White, Famille Rose and Vert

*A Collection of Artisan Timepieces with Verre Églomisé Miniatures,
featuring rare Chinese porcelain designs*

For more than a thousand years porcelain was one of the most admired products in the world. It played a central role in many cross-cultural exchanges, serving as an artistic symbol across great distances. Historians now believe that the cultural impact of Chinese porcelain has been greatly underestimated. Although there's a wealth of literature written about Chinese porcelain, the experts in the field, such as historians and archaeologists, rarely consult the publications.

Europeans first discovered true porcelain in Chinese blue and white wares of early to mid 1500s. It was love at first sight. Western merchants imported millions of porcelain items, prompting the English critic and writer Samuel Johnson to call it „the contagion of China fancy“. Others called it a „porcelain disease“, an obsessive desire to possess something that seemed exotic. For over a thousand years Chinese porcelain was greatly admired throughout the world, not just in Europe.

It influenced every ceramic tradition in the world, including Asia, Africa, Middle-East, and South America. Egyptian and Turkish potters combined Chinese porcelain decoration with

Ottoman designs; Venetian potters adapted flower patterns from Turkish pottery, while Chinese craftsmen followed the design of Venetian glass makers in porcelain. With their stress on simplicity and economy, Chinese porcelain craftsmen are closely related to their poets, writers, and visual artists. They seek to express harmony with the natural surroundings. Chinese artists often have looked for inspiration by withdrawing to remote areas, and these landscapes have become conventional themes of Chinese art.

The art of Chinese porcelain has played a crucial role in bringing the artistry of porcelain to different parts of the world, as well as to different and often seemingly unrelated disciplines (architecture, sculpture, silverwork, etc.) It set forth a novel and creative multi-cultural synthesis that has helped the way the world looks at a work of art and has remarkably influenced the aesthetic of the Baroque and Rococo Eras.

„Blue and white wares“ (Chinese: qīng-huā; literally „Blue flowers“) designate white pottery and porcelain decorated under the glaze with a blue pigment, generally cobalt oxide. The

decoration is commonly applied by hand, by stencilling or by transfer-printing, though other methods of application have also been used.

To date a piece of Ming blue and white ware, it is instructive to study the following 3 aspects:

1. Painting Techniques used such as Lines (Brush strokes and Wash methods). 2. Form/shape, glaze and cobalt. 3. Type and evolution of motifs. All the 3 aspects mentioned must be considered as a whole to derive an accurate dating. The first two aspects would enable you to place the dating of a piece of Ming blue and white to one of the 3 phases, early (Hongwu to Tianshun), Mid (Chenghua to Zhengde) or late Ming (Jiajing to Chongzhen). To further narrow down on the dating, we would need to look into the 3rd aspect.

Painting Techniques

Lines (Brush Strokes)

The potters of the Early Ming period used calligraphic strokes to draw the motifs. To execute the strokes, the brush is held upright to write with its brush tip. By coming writing and stippling movements, brushstrokes are created which can be described as round, wet, soft, elastic and rhythmic. The lines show variation in thickness. This style of brush strokes was used generally till the Zhengde period.

There are still some from Jiajing or later which used calligraphic strokes but could be singled out by applying additional dating guidelines. From Jiajing period onward, the lines for the motif are generally executed in even thickness and appear stiffer when compared to the earlier period. The Chinese described it as iron-thread lines.

Wash Methods

Before Tianshun period, motifs were depicted using calligraphic strokes. From around Tianshun period onward, the potters started to apply a wash of blue over part of the motif such as the flower or clothing of human figure. There are two wash methods:

Pigmented-Wash method

The pigmented-wash method was adopted by potters from Tianshun to Early Jiajing period. To create the wash, the potter presses the tip of the colored brush and either stippled or swept gently at area to be coloured. The wash applied using this method has uneven tone of blue.

Waterdrop-wash method

The waterdrop wash method was most commonly used on blue and white from Late Wanli onward. The motif is outlined with even thickness iron-thread lines. The wash effect is created by dragging a pigmented water drop (suspended on the tip of the brush) across the area desired. This technique required great skill and creates an even coat of blue.

Generally, if the composition of the motifs used solely calligraphic strokes, the piece of blue and white is usually dated to before Tianshun period. From Tianshun to Zhengde, the composition of the motif usually involved calligraphic and pigmented wash. There are also those from Chenghua to early Jiajing that used full pigmented wash method. Those from Late Jiajing onwards usually used the iron-thread outline and waterdrop wash method.

Evolution of style of execution of motif

I must stress that this is a general guideline. It is not unusual to find a dying style still used on small quantity of the production while a new style was developed and finally replaced the former. However, despite the persistence of the older style of execution of the motif, other aspects will reveal its actual age. For example, the calligraphic style was used to decorate the motif on a bowl. On first look, one would think it is dated to before Tianshun. However, the potting of the bowl is thin. This is a feature not found before Tianshun. Hence, we should look further and fully assess all other aspects to derive an accurate dating.

Form/shape, glaze and cobalt

Generally, the potting of Ming vessels is thick in the early Ming period and became increasingly thinner. It became very obvious from Jiajing period onward. For bowls, the wall of the footring is thick during the early Ming period and became typically thin from Jiajing period onward. One exception was some bowls with the Yu-bi type of broad footring wall found in Tianshun/Chongzhen. (see below photo). A large number of the bowls also have unglazed outer base during early Ming period.

The glaze of vessels before Jiajing is generally thick and thin after Jiajing. A large number of vessels in early Ming tends to be underfired and do not have a clear ring when tapped. During Jiajing period, a type of cobalt called Hui Qing was mixed with local cobalt to produce a purplish blue. It was used on some of the vessels from Jiajing to Tianqi period. During Wanli/Tianqi, there is also a group of blue and white which has a silvery gray tone to the cobalt blue.

Decorative band near rim of bowl

Decorative band near the rim of a bowl is another source of information for dating. For example, those with Sanskrit/Tibetan characters band was common from Xuande to Zhengde, the chevron band was popular from Chenghua/Hongzhi pieces, key-fret common from Yongle to Chenghua, cross-hatched diaper from Xuande to early Wanli. Other decorative motifs were used but less frequently from Hongzhi onward. Over the whole of Ming period, there are bowls with no decorative band or just two parallel lines near the rim. Interestingly, from Late Jiajing onward, majority only has two parallel lines near the rim and without decoration on the inner wall of bowl.

Decoration on ceramics besides its ornamental value, also reflects the cultural aspects of the Chinese civilisation. Moral values, religious belief and common wishes of the literati class and common folks are clearly and ingeniously conveyed through the motifs. Understanding the symbolism of the motifs will also help one to understand the Chinese. The Chinese have uniquely found a way to express such ideas in motifs on folk art. The key elements are:

* using emblematic object. For eg. peach is symbolic of longevity

* using object which is homophonic, ie its pronunciation is similar to a word which when used alone or in combination is able to convey an auspicious meaning. For eg. bat which sounds like „fu“ and can also mean happiness/luck.

* using a combination of above two elements

Qilin

The Qilin is an auspicious mythical unicorn-like animal. It existed during the time of Yao and Shun, two wise and benevolent mythical emperors of ancient China. In the ensuing time of degeneration, it disappeared from the world. Since then, qilin came to be associated with auspicious omen, virtue and illustrious offspring. Hence, qilin as a decoration is very popular and common on folk kiln porcelain wares.



18 Kt. white gold, 40.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with Qilin



18 Kt. white gold, 40.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with Quilin

Dragon

The style of dragons in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) art was even grander than that of the preceding Yuan, often appearing quite ferocious and awe-inspiring. The body became stronger, complete with horns, a bushy mane, eyebrows, leg hair, and so on. Not only are all the details shown, but the dragon is also handled a complete and even way. The full mane, for example, is often shown flying back in a very decorative manner. The mouth is either open or closed, while the nose is often shown like a scepter, emphasizing its auspiciousness. Regardless of whether the view of the head, the scepter-like nose is always prominently displayed. The claws are often shown in a circular pattern. In addition, a kind of dragon in the Ming dynasty was shown frontally with the head placed in the center of the motif as the neck curved down to create a curving form with horns, hair, whiskers, and claws distributed over the space. The tail curves back up, adding the final touch to a grand and majestic symbol of imperial power.



18 Kt. white gold, 41.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with dragons.



18 Kt. white gold, 39.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with dragons.



18 Kt. white gold, 40.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with a dragon.



18 Kt. white gold, 39.70 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with a dragon.



18 Kt. white gold, 41.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a blue and white dish with a dragon.

Poenix & Peony - Famille Verte

In Chinese art, both formal and informal, the phoenix symbolises the Empress and by extension, female. It also symbolises virtue, duty, alignment, compassion, and loyalty. The peony, known as "The Queen of Flowers", symbolises summer, love and affection. It also indicates a hope for greater advancement and is also a synonym for nobility and gracefulness.



18 Kt. white gold, 41.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon onyx. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a Famille Vert dish with Poenix and Peony.



Basket of Flowers - Famille Rose

In Chinese decorative arts pictured flowers, are representations for various aspects of life. Basket of fruit or flowers - one of the Eight Immortals

Apricot - beauty, beautiful woman, spring and good fortune, Carnation - marriage, Cherry blossoms - power, feminine beauty and sexuality, Chrysanthemum - intellectual accomplishments, cleansing qualities, cure illnesses, longevity, considered to be the „gentleman of flowers“ (also symbol of autumn), Jujube (date), red coloured - wealth, prosperity, fertility, Lily - innocence, Lotus - purity, lotus flower - enlightenment, lotus seeds - prosperity, offsprings, lotus stem - connection to origin, Lotus is one of the Eight Buddhist Symbols of good fortune, an attribute of He Xian Gu of the Eight Immortals. Magnolia - beautiful woman, Narcissus - prosperity, Orchid - elegance (also symbol of spring), Peony - beauty, rank, higher social status, luxury, opulence, Sunflower - to have a good year

18 Kt. white gold, 41.00 mm case, hand-winding movement, crown with cabochon sapphire. Digital time display by revolving hour-disk à „Souscription“. Verre Églomisé miniature of a Famille Vert dish with a basket of flowers.