The Arrival of a New Color Palette of the Qing Painted Enamelware: Inter-Regional Collaboration in Material Experiments

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This paper investigates the emergence of a new colour palette of enamel pigments in China from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century. Although Chinese enameled wares (here mainly referred to artworks of employing enamels on porcelain and copper) -- one of the most accomplished genres of Chinese decorative arts -- has received much scholarly attention, studies on enamelware have largely limited their discussion to specific regions or techniques. Thus tong tai hua falang 銅胎畫琺瑯 (painted enamels on copper, enameled in Beijing) and citai hua falang 磁胎畫琺瑯 (painted enamels on porcelain, enameled in Beijing) made in Qing court (in Beijing, ) yang cai 洋彩 and famille rose export porcelain of Jingdezhen (painted enamels on porcelain, enameled in Jingdezhen), and Guang cai 廣彩 (pained enamels on porcelain, enameled in Guangdong) for export and Guang falang 廣琺瑯 (painted enamels on copper, enameled in Guangdong) by imperial commission were often studied separately in different contexts.

There is not yet a wider view to explore these phenomena in a larger scale. In other words, a holistic overview of a new colour pigment’s arrival, which happened simultaneously in distant areas in the late 17th to 18th century China, is lacking here. In addition, barriers framed by the traditional differentiation of materials and trainee(disciplinary) is clearly shown in the previous studies. In many/general cases, scholars who work on ceramic studies did not bother to include enamels on copper into their account. However, it is extremely interesting and very useful if we are to cross material barriers and to juxtapose the objects in different materials with each other, intruiging and meaningful questions would actually arise. For instance, isn’t it great to know that yangcai wares made in Jingdezhen were, in fact, imitating imperial painted enamels on copper made in Beijing in terms of the bright colours employed, the highlight of gilt rim. and the blue interior of the vessels as noted in my previous studies? Another example pointed out by scholars that merits explanation is while raw pigment materials were shared in the making of both enameled glass and copper in Guangdong, why did Guangdong enameled copper sometimes copy the patterns of Jingdezhen export(ed?) porcelain?
This paper thus takes a different approach by exploring new pigment materials introduced to several manufacture centers in China through global trade and by European missionaries. The introduction of new materials, its required knowledge and technology led to the emergence of new colour palettes and related knowledge and required technology in the workshops in Beijing, Jingdezhen, and Guangdong. Through their interwoven relationships with local enamel crafts, these colour palettes gave the Qing imperial enamelware a new visual identity and the domestic markets and export markets a new local product. It was for this reason that they display different visual features but were still connected in the use of colour, the composition or motifs employed. Benefited from the fruitful studies on Qing court enameled wares in past several decades, we are now in a better position to explore this innovation in a broader picture.

By paying particular attention to the transmission of newly acquired pigments, knowledge about the materiality of pigments, and visual effects techniques, I argue that the new colour palettes were the outcome of multi-tiered interactions in technology, resources, and visual effects among technical experts situated in the above-mentioned regions. Furthermore, I show that artisans in Beijing, Jingdezhen, and Guangdong workshops were interactive with their overseas counterparts through various channels. The visual and material culture of the Qing painted enamelware thus emerged from the global circulation of crucial pigment ingredients as well as from multi-directional movement of materials, knowledge, and designs within and across the borders of the Qing empire.

To sum up, this paper not only shows the establishment of new visual identities in early modern China, but also demonstrates different strategies that new colour palette adopted to achieve expressive narration and extraordinary visual impact, and the transformation in color palette (Jingdezhen) and adoption of new art makings in the regional contexts of Beijing and Guangdong. We also need to bear in mind that this new colour palette involved not only new visual styles and glaze ingredients that scholars have already identified, but also a systematic change in overglazed painting technology that followed by the introduction of new ingredients, painting and firing techniques, and facilities. In addition, this transformation in colour palette would not take place without the inter-regional collaboration in material experiments.

The solid studies from previous scholars – who scrutinized local developments of color palettes in different regions or individually and studied the linkage between one region and another – serves as a base for my study. On such foundation, with more detailed and strong case studies on Jingdezhen, Beijing, and Guangdong, I have reexamined the similarities shared by the enamel products of these regions and the linkage of these cases from a broader scope and provide an overarching framework of
transformation of color palettes on glazed ceramics in the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century in a global context. What seems to be several unrelated new developments in colour palettes is actually one fundamental and groundbreaking change in terms of materials, required knowledge, and firing technology in early modern period. However, it was not a coincidence that the arrival of a new colour palette occurred in three places.

The above discussion has shown a complex picture of inter-regional exchanges of people, materials, and ideas interwoven between Beijing, Jingdezhen, Guangdong, and Europe. Qing court (the central government) made good use of foreign and local resources by gathering not only pigment materials but also skillful craftsman and technology from long established manufacture center such as Jingdezhen and newly rising manufacture workshops in Guangdong to support its ambition on establishing a new art making and visual identity under the imperial control and regarded as one of great cultural achievements of Manchus ruling. Subsequently, supervisors, pigments materials, designs were sent to the local manufacture centers to produce wares for the imperial use. It is at the same time, the court was expanding its influence – passing advanced technology and materials from imperial workshops to local workshops, requested quality and form, fashion style and visual effects which have been set up, interpreted and generated in the court, such as yangcai and Guang falang. Undoubtedly, they further absorbed or mixed with local commercial production sectors in one way or another, which is shown in the forms and compositions among local products for domestic and export markets.

Meanwhile, the change of colour palette in Jingdezhen, the establishment of Qing court painted enamels, and the appearance of Guangdong enamelware manufacture in late Kangxi period indicated a strong link in materials, related knowledge, and technology between Europe and China through different channels within their own contexts.
Flint purse inlaid with painted enamel miniature portrait. Ca.1700. Limoge, France. Remains of “L” inscription can be found in the very lower part of the lady portrait. It might refer to “Jacques Laudin I” (1627-1695) or “Jacques Laudin II” (ca.1663-1729). National Palace Museum Collection.

*Citai hua falang* 瓷胎畫琺瑯 (Painted enamel on porcelain, enameled in Beijing) *gu*


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