

Chinoiserie in 19th Century Britain

-- Taking the V&A's Collections as an Example

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Abstract

The China pavilion of the Victoria and Albert Museum contains a large number of exquisite Qing Dynasty porcelain, which are admired by the world for their traditional Chinese decorative patterns. In the 19th century, Britain was undergoing design reform and the bud of modern design, at this time, the trend of " Chinoiserie " was set off again. This proves that the budding and development of British design was influenced by the inflow of Chinese decorative patterns. Through the research on the construction process of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the in-depth exploration of the museum's Chinese collections, this paper confirms and analyzes the influencing factors of the plant patterns on the Qing Dynasty palace porcelain on the British design.

Keywords

Victoria and Albert Museum; Chinese cultural relics; 19th century; British design.

1. Victoria and Albert Museum

1.1. The Establishment of A Museum

Victoria and Albert museum is the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design, is also home to scientific and industrial collection, one of the China pavilion collection of more than 18000 pieces, its age one thousand years, porcelain collection is launched Britain for a long period of the " Chinoiserie " agitation, rich collection also embodies the appreciation of British technology to China.

Victoria and Albert Museum was opened in 1852, also known as the Museum of Manufactures, in Marlborough Building, with Henry Cole as the first director. The establishment of the museum had a necessary connection with the Great Exhibition of Industry held by The United Kingdom in 1851. Before the exhibition, Cole, a member of the Royal Society of Arts who had always advocated the combination of art and industry, participated in the eleventh International Exhibition in Paris, where various objects were exhibited. He realized that Britain was poor in international exhibitions. After returning home, he proposed to Prince Albert, who was interested in showing the achievements of British industrial development to the world, to hold a large international exposition covering art, products and machinery, and was recognized as one of the planners of the International industrial exposition. The purpose of the museum was built in order to make the fair after some precious exhibits can be preserved for long, gradually after collection of typical exotic treasures, times art, paintings, historic souvenir and collectors to donate some of the high value of collection, formed a integrated and comprehensive museum.

1.2. Chinese Collection

Henry Cole and his colleagues Richard Redgrave and Owen Jones were responsible for selecting the items from the fair. Redgrave, who was engaged in design education, was one of the key advocates of the reform of design education, and developed some standards for the implementation of the curriculum of decoration and industrial art, advocating the practicality

of design. Owen Jones ever read in British Royal Academy, accept professional design education at the same time ever to study all over the world inspection, to Oriental decorative pattern and colour expressed full appreciation and praise. The ideology of unity of heaven and man and the refinement of natural patterns in Chinese decoration fit the spirit of the emerging naturalism in Britain. In Britain, where design is at the bottleneck of industry, many artists choose to draw inspiration from eastern patterns. As a near-obsessive researcher of Oriental art, Jones himself amassed a large collection of Chinese ornaments, which will no doubt have influenced his selection and collection of artifacts in the museum after the World's Fair.

Britain attaches great importance to industrial production, and it can be seen in the museum that Britain is a remarkable industrialized society. Henry Cole believed that art education in Britain needed to be improved, and he advocated the expansion of the collection of paintings, arts and crafts, and pursued high standards. The museum was renamed the Museum of Decorative Arts in 1853, and it housed 23 pieces of Asian porcelain from the Royal collection to highlight the royal family's high aesthetic and status. It moved to South Kensington in 1857 and was renamed the South Kensington Museum. In *Examples of Chinese ornament selected from objects in the South Kensington Museum and other collections*, Owen Jones writes, in South Kensington Museum there are a variety of color harmony, made by using complex skills decorative close to perfect Chinese arts and crafts, the reason many of China's public buildings because of the war from looting and destruction, resulting in a large number of real luxuriant adornment art cultural relics into Europe, the European decorative arts development produces the effect of not allow to ignore.

In 1899, In order to commemorate her and Prince Albert's contribution to Britain, Queen Victoria officially changed the name of the museum to the Victoria and Albert Museum of The United Kingdom. At that time, the Chinese cultural relics in the museum already had a relatively large number, and the exquisite degree of cultural relics was amazing. British scholar Craig Clunas committed to the research field of Chinese culture and art history, he mentioned in his book of *Chinese art* in the late 19th century British again in contact with the Japanese scholar increased interest in the Chinese painting, and the late Qing political and economic weakness in western museums and private collections from China took many wonderful works of art, Sometimes under controversial circumstances.

2. The China Pavilion Contains Porcelain

2.1. Export Porcelain

Chinese porcelain was already popular in Britain in the 18th century, and Chinese ceramic art aesthetics also had a positive influence on the promotion of British Rococo style. In *Europe and China*, Hudson writes: "The widespread use of porcelain features gave Rococo style interior decoration a new character and had a strong influence on the whole sense of form and colour." However, some factors led to the low collection value of export porcelain popular in The UK at this time. On the one hand, handicrafts of the Qing Dynasty can be roughly divided into two categories: the first one is complicated and pursues extreme delicacy and beauty to meet the ornamental needs of the royal family and nobles. One is popular among the people, used for currency, with Jingdezhen as the center to manufacture export craft commodities.

But still can't meet the British maritime trade chain expansion of porcelain goods demand, their side to China, China's large orders and provide design and style, and cater to consumer, opposed to begin production in the European version of the blue and white porcelain, trying to use their own way to Chinese porcelain aesthetic imitation reconstruction, formation of a distinctive European version of the "Chinoiserie" porcelain. On the other hand, tens of thousands of export porcelain as a commodity was required by the number of British merchants, and could not

compete with the high quality porcelain collected by the royal palace and nobles in terms of quality, craftsmanship and exquisite degree.

(Figure 1) The center of the eight party plate is decorated with pictures of ladies and children often seen in porcelain patterns. Such objects with Chinese life scenes are quite appreciated by British people. The plate shape and single pink decoration around the plate can also indicate that it is made for export. Single pink enamel is common in export commodities. In addition to the simple production process, it can be seen that the color treatment of the color pattern on the glaze is not transparent and uniform. There may be many reasons affecting the production process of this kind of porcelain, which is also a common problem in export porcelain. (Figure 2) The decoration on the plate combines pink and black, which were popular for export porcelain at that time. This color combination is not common in China, as most people prefer noble and auspicious colors such as yellow, purple, red and green. These small platters, most of which also come with sets of teacups, were made mainly for export to Europe, so as to meet the European demand for elaborate decorations. Similarly, artisans seem to paint without elaborating every detail, but just pointing to the point. Perhaps it was the spread of this type of export porcelain that led the 19th century European realism artists to label Chinese artistic expression as "stuffy and without perspective".



Figure 1. Qing Yongzheng pastel ladies' godchildren figure eight plates

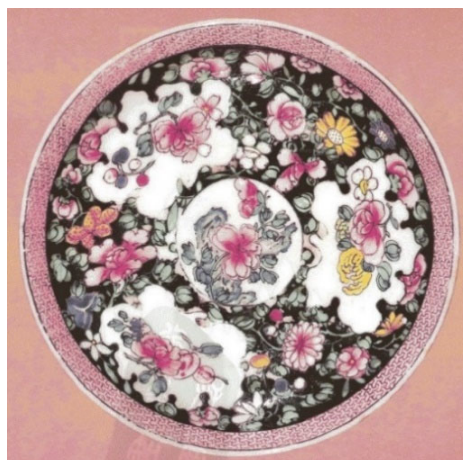


Figure 2. Pastel flower plate from Yongzheng to Qianlong of Qing Dynasty

2.2. Imperial Porcelain Relics Collection

Compared with the commerciality of export porcelain, the value and preciousness of Qing dynasty palace relics can be seen. In the 18th century, Chinese crafts flourished in Europe for nearly a hundred years. In the middle and late 19th century, contrary to the gradual decline of

the Qing Dynasty, British capitalism developed rapidly. The West acquired tens of thousands of porcelain treasures and archaeological relics from the Chinese royal family through wars and other means, and then exhibited them to the world in the form of exhibitions and auctions in Europe, which once again refreshed the world people's cognition of mysterious Oriental art and also made the British re-examine the Chinese art that they had almost despised.

Victorian era to the construction of the museum is enthusiastic, it is considered a record part of urban development and promote civic pride, many people in the society during this period and collector donated generously to museum collection, and even some collectors in the name of their funding to build a new museum or gallery is not rare.

Alfred Morrison was a famous Collector in Britain. He was regarded as one of the most important collectors of Chinese art in Europe in the 19th century. His Fonthill House displayed a large number of Chinese porcelain. Most of the patterns in Owen Jones's "*Chinese pattern*" are taken from the porcelain and enamel of the Qing imperial palace in Morrison's collection, which is the essence of his collection of Chinese art. Henry Brougham Loch, a British soldier, was the reason the Morrisons acquired so much Chinese porcelain. It was he who ordered the burning of the Old Summer Palace when he went to Beijing in 1860 as the private secretary and negotiating envoy of the British minister. Before the burning, British and French forces had carried out extensive looting of the Old Summer Palace, and at least 1.5 million valuable cultural relics were transported to Europe and later to other parts of the world. As an accompanying special envoy, Loch took the opportunity to collect a large number of Chinese cultural relics and resold them to Morrison after returning to China in 1861.

After five generations, the Qing dynasty porcelain collection in Fonthill House was gradually sold or auctioned by later generations. Every appearance caused a sensation all over the world, indicating the hot demand of Qing Dynasty court porcelain. There are also Qing Dynasty palace colored porcelain collections in the museum, such as (Figure 3) is a high-quality palace utensil. The central background of the bottle is full of pink satin, and the large white flowers are rich in details and gorgeous. The upper and bottom are matched with plant and jewelry patterns, and the bright yellow bottom confirms the noble status of its owner. (Figure 4) is a variety specially made for the palace, with rich colors. In addition to the distinctive gorgeous line decoration, its workmanship is more complex, realizing the perfect combination of external decoration and internal practicality.



Figure 3. Qing Qianlong purple powder enamel lantern vase



Figure 4. Qing Qianlong pastel hollow revolving bottle

George Salting is famous for his collection of European medieval paintings, European furniture and Chinese porcelain. He owns more than 1,000 pieces of Qing dynasty porcelain. He inherited his father's collection while preserving and displaying it in the South Kensington Museum and other public institutions. The famous American painter James Whistler was also an experienced collector of Chinese and Japanese porcelain when he settled in England, and even influenced the Rossetti brothers and some of their patrons to start their porcelain collections. It is in the collections of aristocracies, scholars, connoisseurs and royalty that the foundation of the museum's vast Chinese collection has been laid, enriching new ways of looking at Chinese art.

3. Influence of Plant Patterns of Qing Dynasty Palace Porcelain on British Design

3.1. Changing Attitudes to Chinese art in Britain

Owen Jones was fascinated by the use of colors and patterns in enameled porcelain. For a long time before that, he even disagreed with Chinese decorative art, either because the quality of many exported porcelain was really not sophisticated enough, or because of the influence of public opinion. In fact, from the mid-18th century, some articles criticizing China began to appear in some British magazines. Some people criticized the perspective and Yin and Yang of Chinese painting are not the rules, bright colors but not the depth, and called on the art community to unite against the popularity of Chinese wind; Some people directly criticized the French philosopher Voltaire and the Jesuits for their praise of China, saying that the Moral standards of The Chinese people were not as high as they claimed, and that China's history was not true, especially since it did not have an alphabet system, so it is hard to say how its culture developed.

In the 19th century, Chinese and Japanese art deco were often compared by British professionals, and for a time the British even praised Japanese art deco and devalued Chinese art deco. Lewis Foreman says in "*Nature in Ornament by day*" that "The Japanese Ornament is perfect in every way... The Japanese tradition is directly inherited from the Chinese, but the works of the younger generation are more vibrant. But he also points out that "If we consider Chinese decoration to be at best less natural than Japanese, it is more decorative."

When Jones published the *The Grammar of Ornament* in 1856, he still thought that the Chinese had no imagination at all and had made little progress in decorative art despite their long history. In the eyes of the West, Chinese civilization is monotonous and stagnant, and the conservative and exclusionary practices in trade narrow the scope of China's foreign trade, thus arousing the dissatisfaction of western countries. Adam Smith said in his famous Book "*An in*

quiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations " that "Although China is rich in human and material resources, its economy is almost stagnant and shows no signs of development. This is mainly because China does not pay attention to foreign trade." It was not until the 1860s, with the further development of Chinese craftsmanship and the influx of royal artefacts into Britain, that this discriminatory view was changed. Jones also because learning experience, and personally exposed to real Chinese craft boutique, attracted by deeply after efforts to delve into the Chinese decoration art, after also edit published "Chinese pattern" to promote to the world of profound national culture under the essence of Chinese art, selection of pattern for the most part, the 18th and 19th century Qing dynasty royal porcelain patterns, It laid the foundation for the beginnings of British design in the 19th century.

From the second half of the 19th century, Britain's interest in Middle Eastern and Asian art and culture also formed part of a wider movement in pursuit of historical styles in art and architecture, as those disaffected by industrialism and capitalism sought in romanticism and naturalism the true pre-modern ideals of the traditional East. Lawrence Binyon, a British Sinologist, also believes that "the central tradition of Asian art must be found in China. Among all the Eastern countries, the Chinese have shown the strongest aesthetic instinct and the richest imagination in history."

3.2. Plant Pattern with British Design

In the 19th century, the British industry and manufacturing industry developed rapidly with the momentum of destruction. The social background that the design and industrial development speed could not match made the British design in the Victorian era lost in a number of art deco styles, and formed the gorgeous, elaborate and accumulated Victorian decoration style with the characteristics of the British era. At the World's Industrial Exposition, Owen Jones questioned queen Victoria's eagerness to introduce a decorative style matching mechanical production, and the large number of redundant decorations randomly mixed with various styles. He thought that they lacked the design principles and stylistic thinking supported by them, but were meaningless and excessive decorations. Richard Redgrave also wrote in his review of the exhibition in *Journal of design and manufacturing* that "the lack Of fixed principles in decorative Design is most obvious" And that "the abundance Of decorative works on display... Is despicable ".

William Morris and Owen Jones led the "Arts and Crafts Movement", which promoted Oriental art and naturalism to change the design status quo and advocated plain art in the middle Ages, against the social background that British art and design were stuck in a stalemate. Although artists rejected the ugly appearance of mechanical products, However, in order to solve the problem of separation between art and technology, it is necessary to find a connection and balance between them, and at the same time, abandon the overly corrected Victorian style and gradually return to a design trend full of fantasy of tradition and nature. Designers and artists have expectations and ambitions for the patterns of animals and plants in nature, and the huge scale of patterns accumulated by China to the Qing Dynasty undoubtedly provides them with a large number of research objects.

China during the Ming and Qing dynasties of China technology and power than a lot of progress, in addition to the blue and white, youligong, bucket color such as color porcelain firing technology improvement, innovation and on this basis, to create the colored enamel, famille-rose and colorful, such as a new category, and these inflows in Chinese porcelain porcelain manufacturing technology qualification is shallow Britain and set off a new wave of " Chinoiserie " wave.

Plant patterns were widely used in the decoration of Chinese porcelain in the Qing Dynasty, and the expression techniques and styles of patterns became more and more abundant during this period. At this time, domestic animal patterns are often related to the distinction between

officials and the level of status, and the range of use is carefully planned, while the changeable and highly decorative plant patterns are more selected in use. Natural decoration is more likely to produce the effect of making people feel comfortable, so it is widely used in porcelain creation. At this time, the corresponding western theory of "origin of species" caused a sensation in Europe. Darwin refuted and proved the creationism believed by almost everyone in the West, giving people a revolutionary new meaning to the concept of nature and the world. A large number of plant experiment to reinvent life science theory laid a solid foundation, use picture record plant genetic laws can make people more clear understanding of the theory of evolution thought, at the same time also make people's aesthetic tendency gradually from religious myth theory to return to science and nature, perhaps to cater to the deflection of the target market, Most of the art deco designs of this period are full of strong natural style.

However, it is doubtful that natural style is prevalent in British design. Why the imitation and derivation of Chinese plant patterns can be clearly seen, but the shadow of Chinese animal patterns is rarely seen? This is related to the traditional national culture of China and Britain. Chinese and British people have very different beliefs and beliefs about animals, whether they are gods or animals. The dragon and phoenix patterns in the Qing Dynasty palace porcelain are mainly auspicious patterns that can only be used by the highest power of the royal family. However, in the west, the dragon, centaur, sphinx and beast are equal to the ranks of monsters, and even used to symbolize the end of the world. Such patterns are rarely used in the design. Bat "bat" and "fu" unisonant, in the traditional thoughts of Chinese has a "land fu" "extended" good moral, painted with patterns of the bat China in court have the status of the elder residence is common, while in the west the bat is a symbol of darkness, horror, obviously the one who is, won't willing to put the bats patterns and blessing and life together.

Owen Jones also chose a large number of highly decorative plant patterns such as tangles and flowers in his carding and interpretation of Chinese patterns, which undoubtedly inspired his design career. There are other plant and animal patterns as well, though he deliberately chose to include them in his collection. Animal patterns such as dragons and bats are not mentioned in his book.

3.3. The Evolution and Influence of Pictorial Plant Patterns in England

The patterns of animals and plants on China's Ming and Qing porcelain basically uphold the characteristics of the Song and Yuan dynasties, which can be roughly divided into two categories: one is the painting patterns that emphasize realism and freehand brushwork; the other is the deformation patterns that emphasize decoration patterns and are abstracted and beautified by plants.

The characteristics of the painting patterns of porcelain are dexterous and changeable. The symbolic expression of the patterns of Chinese classical traditional culture and emotion is mainly imitation of the calligraphy and flower and bird paintings of literati. The flower and bird decoration on porcelain pays attention to "the picture must be intentional, and the meaning must be auspicious", so it is widely used to imply the character of a gentleman and the meaning of praying for lucky and other intentional painting patterns. Song dynasty painting and painting subject matter and content value is brilliant in ancient Chinese painting, and painting and calligraphy lovers collection of song dynasty palace painting technique of far-reaching influence, is also common in the Qing dynasty porcelain plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum is such a gentleman said the talents have patterns, and peach, pomegranate, gourd such realistic decoration pattern with special auspicious implies, Most of them follow the ethos and techniques of the Song and Yuan dynasties.

For example (Figure 5) the style of decorating the plate with branches and birds started from the court paintings of the Song Dynasty. The decorative belt on the outer ring reads "Longevity is endless", which is specially made for the royal celebration of birthday. This design has also

been extended to all kinds of handicraft decorations. (Figure. 6) The painting style of Song and Yuan dynasties is still inherited. The matching of bats and peaches is a double blessing. The plate is decorated with eight peaches on the inside and three on the outside, and five bats on the inside and three on the outside. In traditional Chinese philosophy, peaches are often associated with longevity, while the five bats represent people's five wishes for a good and healthy life.



Figure 5. The Kangxi Dynasty colorful flower and bird pattern plate Qing Yongzheng



Figure 6. Powder enamel with peach grain

However, the selection and application of pictorial plant patterns in the East and the West are quite different. For example, Chinese people like to use peach, citrus, loquat and other auspicious fruits in Chinese myths and legends, while British people like to use grapes, strawberries, figs, apples and other fruits with special symbolic significance. Even the same fruit pattern has different meanings. For example, the pomegranate pattern. In China, the pomegranate with the characteristic of "one house with many children" implies prosperity of heirs and many children. In Europe, pomegranates were used to signal the arrival of new life.

The style of the emperor's Government and Rococo are common in European paintings, western flowers in the Renaissance, small flowers often used in European tapestry, carnations, tulips and other flowers. While Chinese people choose peony to symbolize women's glory status,

lotus to symbolize harmony, plum blossom to symbolize proud monarch bone... From the 19th century British paintings, the British depiction of pictorial flower patterns is objective, paying attention to sketch and reality. However, the use of Flowers in Chinese paintings is more than a part of the concept of expressing oneself through objects and expressing emotion through objects. Creators often send thoughts on works, focusing on the expression of connotation, and do not care too much about the contrast between light and shade and perspective.

Due to the great differences in life style, painting performance, plot belief and even artistic identity, there is not much mutual learning between China and Britain in painting patterns. Britain has a thirst for good art, but imitation is not the answer to a new generation of British design, judging from the unwarranted accumulation of Victorian decoration. These flowers and trees pattern for the British people do not like the Chinese understanding of the special cultural connotation, local some of the typical patterns are mostly related to geographic and faith, maybe in their opinion, no matter what design, show the natural sense, beautiful sex and match the industrial practicality is the most important thing.

4. Conclusion

Today, we rarely argue about the ownership of cultural relics. No matter where cultural relics are located, Chinese cultural relics still represent the traditional culture of the Chinese nation for thousands of years. Chinese decorative art has provided many elements and innovations for British design reform, enriched the connotation of British design in the 19th century, and also made people have infinite reverie about the past and future of Oriental charm.

The popularity of Chinoiserie in the world is not decreasing, which is the affirmation of the principle and status of Chinese art. We usually believe that the beginning of the history of modern design is from the British arts and crafts movement, and the germination and development of Chinese decorative patterns on British design cannot be ignored. William Morris, Owen Jones, Henry Cole and others left a strong mark on British modern design. They had to tolerate the existence of cold machinery, but the integration of Oriental decorative patterns and firm belief made British modern design rise under their struggle. Victoria and Albert museum collection of China indicate the history of the British royal collection of cultural relics in China, reveals the treasure has had a profound impact on the Chinese art of British design behind the facts, inflows not only helped the UK to China art attitude change, also make the world of decorative arts exchange between east and west got new understanding of the development of design form.

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