



**Research Article**

## **Zhang Songmao's Aesthetics of Ceramic Art Paintings:**

### **A Case Study of Famille Rose Painting Art Style<sup>1</sup>**

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**Received:** October 2, 2023 **Revised:** November 22, 2023 **Accepted:** December 17, 2023 **Published:** December 28, 2023

#### **Abstract**

Porcelain, originated in China, has been deeply branded with Chinese culture. With a long history of porcelain production, Jingdezhen witnessed the peak of the porcelain industry. Every innovation of porcelain in Jingdezhen has led to the trend of an era. The emergence of ceramic painting created a new milestone for ceramic art. Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting art is an important step in the development of Jingdezhen art. This study collects, organizes, and classifies relevant materials from the literature, providing detailed information and theoretical support for the research. It also analyzes Zhang Songmao's different famille rose painting art styles by analyzing some works and collecting and recording the materials. The results show that Zhang Songmao's ceramic paintings are rich in decorative language and brave in exploring new things. He created many new pigments and combined new colors to create his own personal style and has contributed significantly to the tradition and innovation of contemporary ceramic painting.

**Keywords:** Zhang Songmao, ceramic painting, artistic style, aesthetics, Famille rose

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a doctoral dissertation titled "Zhang Songmao's Famille Rose Ceramic Aesthetics – Creation for Spiritual Inheritance", completed by a Ph.D. student in Visual Art Design at Burapha University, Thailand.



## Introduction

In China, ceramics significantly express its traditional culture. As the mother country of porcelain, China has a long history of ceramics; while this is a great achievement, it also poses certain restrictions on the innovation and development of ceramic art. Traditional arts can be passed down through the collaboration of practitioners and researchers in the study and production of ceramics. The porcelain produced in Jingdezhen has been known all over the world since the Song Dynasty, and the Imperial kiln factory in Jingdezhen during the Ming and Qing dynasties made Jingdezhen the porcelain capital of China. Ceramic art design reflects historical changes in China. Recently, especially since 1949, people have regarded handmade porcelain technology as an inefficient mode of production which should be replaced by industrial mass production, and have enacted a series of reforms. (Jiaji, 2017)

Zhang Songmao's artistic style is largely influenced by the "Eight Friends of Zhushan." He specializes in ceramic painting of figures, landscapes, flowers, and birds, mainly in Chinese paintings, and especially famille rose paintings. Learning from nature and insisting on sketching, he has wide artistic interests and attainments and is adept at "combining the strengths of many schools" in forming his own unique style.

Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting art is an important milestone in the development of Jingdezhen ceramic art. To analyze Zhang Songmao's aesthetics of famille rose painting art, understand the historical value of Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting, and show its contribution to the development of China's ceramic painting, this article 1) discusses the formation and characteristics of Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting, and 2) uses his art to reflect on problems in the contemporary famille rose art of Jingdezhen, and observe its influence on contemporary ceramic paintings.

## Purposes of study

1. To analyze the aesthetics of Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting art.
2. To differentiate famille rose painting art styles.
3. To discuss the influence of Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting on contemporary ceramic painting.



## Scope of Research

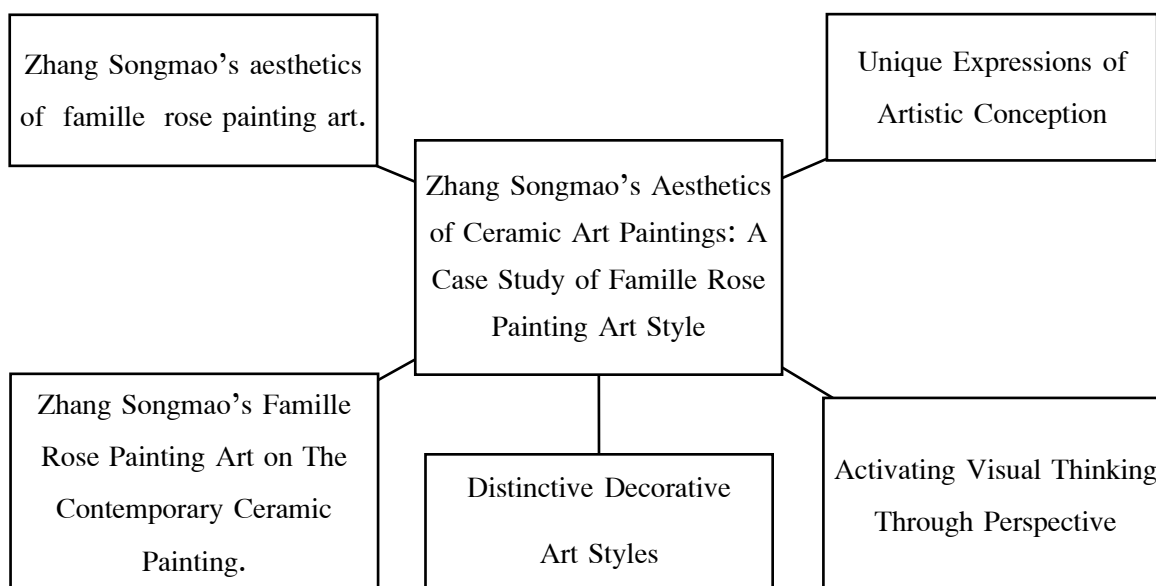
1. To explore the historical significance and impact of Zhang Songmao's famille rose painting art on the evolution of Chinese.
2. To gain a deeper understanding of contemporary ceramic painting.

## Research Methodology

Literature study involves collecting, sorting, organizing, and classifying materials related to Zhang Songmao's famille rose paintings.

Case study—analyzing different artistic styles of Zhang Songmao's famille rose paintings through collecting his artwork and related materials, providing a basis for an analysis of Zhang Songmao's style. Finally, Zhang Songmao's art features will be summarized with respect to background, artistic style, and aesthetics.

**Figure 1** *Conceptual Framework*



*Noted. By Qiu Jiaji, 2023.*

## Results

### 1. Zhang Songmao's Aesthetics of Famille Rose Painting Art

The influence of the individual artist's personality on ceramic painting style is a mark of the era. Different personalities produce their own aesthetics in artistic works. Looking at the history of ceramics, ceramics that are influential reveal the characteristics of the era. Painted pottery in the Neolithic Period, porcelain with brown glaze in the Tang Dynasty, celadon in the Song Dynasty, blue and white porcelain in the Yuan Dynasty, colored porcelain in the Qing Dynasty, and light crimson-colored porcelain in the Republic of China, show that the styles of ceramic art in different periods vary widely. In Jingdezhen, there are not only masters of ceramic art, but Chinese painters also go there to paint on porcelain. Ceramic artists take their ideas from different types of art, such as arts and crafts, Chinese painting, and Western painting. Artists want to create a ceramic work with its own style.

Zhang Songmao was born into a poor family in 1934 in Jiangxi. He lived in Jingdezhen, a center of Chinese porcelain production. Xu Zhongnan, who is in the “Eight Friends of Zhushan,” discovered Zhang Songmao's talent for ceramics, and took Zhang Songmao as an apprentice. Later, Zhang Songmao married Xu Zhongnan's granddaughter. In addition to its honorable name, this family has produced a tradition of craftsmanship. Zhang Songmao's style is largely influenced by “The Zhushan Eight Friends.” They have a realistic attitude towards the tradition of ceramic art, and they are masters of technique, theme, color, and forms of ceramic painting. (Lili, 2013)

**Figure 2** *Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.



In 1997, Zhang Songmao designed *Bauhinias Return to Embrace the Peonies*, which presented precious gifts established by the Jiangxi Provincial Government for the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In the same year, cooperating with Japanese ceramic artist Uradi, Zhang Songmao created the porcelain mural *Galloping Horses on Mount Lu*. The mural is five meters long and fifteen meters wide, and famous in China and around the world. He created two series of colored disks, ‘Beijing Summer Palace’ and ‘Flowers and Birds of Four Seasons,’ for Blava Ford in the United States, which. The snow scene porcelain plate painting *Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage* is collected by the Chinese Arts and Crafts Museum as a national treasure. Another snow scene porcelain plate painting, *Three Visits to the Thatched Cottage*, was sold for 1.5 million yuan. A collector purchased *Ode to Chinese Plum* by Lin Hejing for 1.3 million yuan, a record price for contemporary porcelain art.

**Figure 3** *Bauhinias Return to Embrace the Peonies*



Noted. By Zhang Songmao, 2010.

## 2. Different Famille Rose Paintings Artistic Styles of Zhang Songmao

### 2.1 Unique Expressions of Artistic Conception

When viewers appreciate a painting, they feel a strong resonance with the painter. A flower, a piece of grass or wood, or even a fallen leaf on the river inexplicably stirs up every cell in the viewer's body. At this moment, feeling and setting blend together. The artist has his own subjective feeling plus the objective reality of the situation. Context is the product of subjective emotion and objective scenery and the unity of scene and mood.



The famille rose porcelains painted by Zhang Songmao are exquisite and also have a distinguished artistic conception. When he paints landscapes on famille rose porcelains, he prefers to use ink as background and dot with green or reddish-brown, integrating mountains and clouds to show a powerful artistic conception and hazy aesthetic similar to the Chinese ink painting style. Meanwhile, the painting is consistent with the characteristics of porcelain: simple and vigorous, with the simplicity and purity of Laozi and Zhuangzi's philosophy.

For example, in Zhang Songmao's famous famille rose painting, *Pavilion of Prince Teng*, he used a compositional approach with a sense of grandness, depicting the landscape with decorative strokes from an overhead perspective, which gives viewers an intuitive experience of the landscape. In order to show the mist-covered waters, he often uses the scenery along the shore as a backdrop to conceal the shoreline. This enhances the openness of the whole picture, thus constructing a far-reaching artistic conception that makes the viewer savor the experience.

Figure 3, *Sails and Shadows on Changjiang*, draws a “passable, visible, visitable and livable” scene with an artistic conception beyond mere technical skill. At the same time, the value of the painting is reflected in the real record of the place. With the rapid development of the porcelain industry in Jingdezhen during the Ming Dynasty, water transportation became particularly important. Zheng Tinggui's poem “Bamboo Branch Song of Tao Yang” depicts the scene: “In the river bend next to the Ejing Beach, the ship's masts are bustling. Porcelains packed on ships wait for delivery; I hope you leave late but come back early.” In the transportation of porcelain, the Changjiang wharf is the only way to the city center. There are some kilns on the west bank of the river far from the east bank. During the reign of Wanli in the Ming Dynasty, the Jingdezhen kilns numbered nearly 1,000. A passage written by Wang Shimao recorded the scene he witnessed in Jingdezhen in the Wanli period: “Over 100 thousand houses full of light scatters over a thousand meters”. At that time, Jingdezhen was a brightly lit place that never slept. So, *Changjiang Bridge* and the merchant ships depicted in *Sails and Shadows on Changjiang River* bring the real life of Jingdezhen to us. We shuttle from the past to the present, and are carried back to the old days. (Yu & Yang, 2015)



**Figure 4** *Sails and Shadows on Changjiang River*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.

Tao Yuanming's *Love for Chrysanthemums* (Figure 4) was painted in 1946 when Zhang Songmao was twelve years old. At that time, his painting style was heavily influenced by Liu Yucen and Xu Tianmei (two artists in "The Eight Friends of Zhushan"). He painted with poetry, which expresses the quality of his work and his serene mood. Painting on ceramics is the same as painting on paper, and artists should pay attention to the power and speed of the stroke (Zhang, 1959). The paintings on ceramic show the unity of outlook and the inner harmony that resonate with the viewer's emotions.

**Figure 5** *Tao Yuanming's Love for Chrysanthemums*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.



Artistic conception is not only the combination of emotion and landscape but also the artist's ideas, aesthetic concepts and ideals, and objective scenery. The concepts in this “thought” are not abstract but intertwined with the artist's emotions. The meaning of “artistic concept” is not just emotion but rational emotion. Freehand brushwork is able to express the artist's feelings and sentiments, “writing the heart” of the author through the depiction of objects.

## 2.2 Activating Visual Thinking Through Perspective

In his book *Elevated Odes to Forests and Springs*, Guo Xi advised painters to “view from afar to grasp [the scene's] momentum, observe up close to capture its essence” (1117). Guo advised painters to observe life in a thorough and comprehensive way in order to create exquisite works. Through a series of observations and studies about changing scenes, including the changing of seasons and weather (sunny, cloudy, rainy and snowy), Guo has summarized regular experience (three-far method perspective), which has made a significant contribution to the development of traditional Chinese painting.

The anonymous Song Dynasty masterpiece *Crow in Cold Winter* (Figure 5), embodies the perspective technique in traditional Chinese painting. The artist's use of varying intensities of ink to depict the withered trees in the foreground and background creates a sense of reality in accordance with the principle of “near real, far blur” and “near large, far small.” The artist used light and delicate brushstrokes to intermittently outline the contours of the trunks and branches in the foreground. Moreover, different shades of ink were used to distinguish between light and shadow, to depict the volume and size of the tree trunks, and, through blending and shading, give a natural effect to the trees. By crossing the contours of trunks and branches with different shades of ink and positions, objects painted by the artist were shaped as vividly as nature.

While creating famille rose paintings on porcelain, Zhang Songmao places significant emphasis on perspective technique, contrasting solid lines with faint lines to activate and guide the viewers' visual thinking. He adopts an unbalanced painting method and psychological blurring of perception to break the viewers' perceptual limitations, evoking emotional resonance and an unconventional aesthetic experience. Through this method, viewers actively imagine the scenery beyond the paintings and appreciate its deeper meaning (Zhang, 1965). Zhang Songmao has established this style of art by understanding the aesthetic psychology of viewers.



**Figure 6** *Crow in Cold Winter*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.

For example, in his work *Ancient Pavilion in the Wind* (Figure 6), Zhang Songmao employs the perspective technique (frontal perspective) which is reflected in his depiction of pavilions, in which he treats objects of different distances with more detail in the foreground and increasingly diffuse brushstrokes as objects recede into the background. This method gives the painting a more three-dimensional quality and enhances its realism. Finishing this work with a mastery of perspective, Zhang Songmao achieves unity between the balance and imbalance of the scene, which helps to express the artistic conception of the painting.

**Figure 7** *Ancient Pavilion in the Wind*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.



### 2.3 Distinctive Decorative Art Styles

The decorative art style refers to the way an artist depicts objects through graphics, symbols, colors, and materials. In painting, decorative language also includes patterns and texture. Painting is symbolic, meaning that the objects will embody certain characteristics, social-cultural connotations, and aesthetic taste. Additionally, the use of decorative elements in art should align with the theme, making the selection of content and form.

As early as the Neolithic Age, people drew patterns on pottery for beautification and decoration, so there has always been a close relationship between ceramics and painting. That proper and natural combination delivers clear themes and strong decorative appeal. In delicate ceramic design there should be consistency between the shape and surface painting decoration, using patterns and painting based on the type of ceramics, so that the painted decoration and ceramic molding are coordinated. Harmony is a crucial element in ceramic art design, with a proper subordinate relationship, size, position, and unified style combining ceramic painting and shaping (Zhang, 1976).

Throughout Zhang Songmao's famille rose paintings, his distinctive decorative style is evident. In his artworks, such as *Ancient Pavilion in the Wind* (Figure 6) and *Cai Wenji* (Figure 7), Zhang's paintings use precise lines, concise colors, and adept perspective techniques to depict intricate and lifelike buildings, plants, and figures. By ingeniously blending ceramic art with decorative art, Zhang's paintings combine harmonious balance with vivid views and highly aesthetic value.



**Figure 8** *Cai Wenji*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.

In the flower-and-bird painting *Peonies and Colorful Butterflies* by Zhang Songmao shown in the image below, he uses vibrant colors to create vivid and natural images of flowers, leaves, and birds contrasting with the gray background of the porcelain vase, which not only showcases his unique decorative style but also outlines a lifelike scene with a sense of three dimensions.



Zhang Songmao is hailed as the “Prince of Peonies,” and any porcelain decorated with peonies in his works commands a high price. *Exceptional Fragrance* (Figure 8) is a famille rose chessboard vase featuring twelve peonies and two butterflies. With his vivid brushwork and harmonious color selection, Zhang creates a vital scene of elegant and beautiful peonies and flying butterflies, a stunning and exquisite masterpiece. This painting has immense artistic value beyond its price. In the realm of porcelain painting, Zhang Songmao is a versatile master. His works encompass a wide range of subjects, including figure, landscape and flower-and-bird paintings, and each showcases diverse features and unique styles. His figure paintings have been praised as classic and vibrant, with graceful and delicate depictions of human figures and attire; in landscape paintings, he captures grand scenery, showing a profound atmosphere, while often integrating the meaning of poetry with his artworks. His flower-and-bird paintings are delicate, fresh and elegant (Lili, 2013). In summary, Zhang Songmao’s paintings, whether they are landscapes, flower-and-bird, or figures, all possess a sense of vitality, reflecting his distinct artistic style.

**Figure 9** *Exceptional Fragrance*



*Noted.* By Zhang Songmao, 2010.





### 3. Zhang Songmao's Famille Rose Painting Art on The Contemporary Ceramic Painting

Born in Poyang County, Jiangxi Province, Zhang Songmao studied ceramic painting with the famous eight masters of Zhushan. He is flexible and down-to-earth in his way of thinking and knows that one needs to work harder than others to succeed. In his daily life, Zhang Songmao insisted on sketching, studying, and warming his poems to improve his mastery of culture and artistic sentiment. During the Cultural Revolution, due to the sensitivity of many artistic themes, Zhang Songmao focused on flower-and-bird painting and formed his own artistic style, which had a far-reaching influence on ceramic flower-and-bird painting. By breaking the tradition, his paintings are bright, powerful, colorful and decorative. The famille rose flower-and-bird paintings in his new style show his bold, brave, and passionate mood. He has learned various decorative languages of painting and is always exploring new possibilities. In the creation of ceramic paintings, he was not satisfied with the traditional colors of famille rose and began to learn the characteristics of famille rose colors. He created many new pigments and his own artistic style, combining these new colors.

In 1959, the first recognition of “ceramic artists” was awarded to Zhang Songmao by the People’s Government of Jingdezhen City. In April 1988, the Ministry of Light Industry awarded him the “Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts.” He was also a member of the Chinese Artists Association, the director of the Chinese Ceramics Art Association, the vice chairman of the Federation of Literature and Art Circles of Jingdezhen and the seventh member of the Jiangxi Provincial CPPCC. Essentially, he was appointed as a member of the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth committees of the CPPCC of Jingdezhen and enjoyed the “special government allowance” issued by the State Council. Zhang Songmao is a versatile painter in Chinese ceramics, as his work includes characters, landscapes, flowers, and birds, mainly in Chinese painting and especially in pink painting. He learns from nature, insists on sketching, and has a wide range of artistic accomplishments and his own unique style. The *Beijing Summer Garden* and *Four Seasons Flowers and Birds* he created are well-known, and he sells his work throughout the world.

Mr. Zhang Songmao insists on living in depth, drawing on the spirit of the mountains, and writing in the form of natural materials. He has made a significant contribution to the decoration of Jingdezhen porcelain. Regarding elegant ceramic art treasures, he worked hard to grow from ordinary porcelain to the first batch of ceramic artists after the founding of New China, the famous master of national arts and crafts. He won the “Chinese Arts and Crafts Lifetime Achievement Award”. (Lili, 2013)



## Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the investigation and analysis, this study:

1. explores the aesthetics of porcelain painting and the change of Zhang Songmao's artistic styles during different periods, demonstrating his artistic pursuits.
2. collects references and theoretical analysis in order to enrich and complement the academic materials related to Zhang Songmao's aesthetics of ceramic art painting, as well as contribute to the inheritance of his aesthetic values, and provide references and guidance for ceramic paintings.
3. analyzes the various artistic styles and characteristics of Zhang Songmao's famille rose paintings, and reflects on the profound influence of his artistic style on Jingdezhen ceramic art, providing valuable references for contemporary ceramic art research.
4. demonstrates the distinctive form and artistic conception of the pastel ceramics created by Teacher Zhang Songmao, showing that their ceramic brush is the same as used on paper, and emphasizing the importance and urgency of their strokes, with a straight and upright shape.

When creating ceramic pastels, Teacher Zhang Songmao also pays great attention to the handling of perspective relationships. He uses rendering techniques and virtual reality comparison techniques to mobilize and guide the visual thinking of the audience.

Teacher Zhang Songmao employs distinct graphics, symbols, colors, and materials to vividly express objects.

## Suggestions

Future research should 1) study in-depth the historic, artistic, and cultural value of Zhang Songmao, 2) seek in-depth knowledge about how ceramic craftsmanship and decoration can be applied to contemporary ceramic painting, and 3) explore the influence and impact of Zhang Songmao's ceramic painting on society and culture.



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