

“Artification”: Market-Oriented Design Strategy of China Daily-Use Ceramics After Reform and Opening-up

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Abstract

After the Reform and Opening-up, faced with intense market competition and low-value challenges, China's ceramic industry began to shift its focus to design, attempting to expand domestic and international markets and increase product added value through the “artification of daily-use ceramics.” In this process, designers sought to enhance the decorative and aesthetic qualities of daily-use ceramics by combining artistic expression with advancements in materials and technology, aiming to meet consumers' upgraded aesthetic demands. However, constrained by cost control, production technology, and design capabilities, many “artified” designs of daily-use ceramics have deviated from their original intent.

Keywords: China daily-use ceramics, artification, market, alienation

1. Introduction

In the late 1970s, China began to implement economic system reform and opening-up policies. Since then, China's daily-use ceramics have expanded in the international market with their low-cost advantage, but compared with similar products from Europe and Japan, their value is extremely low. To change the status quo and enhance market competitiveness, China's ceramic industry proposed the design concept of “artifying daily-use ceramics”.

2. The Origin of “Artistic” Design of China Daily Ceramics

2.1 China's Ceramic Industry Advocating the “Artistic” of Products

In 1980, during the National Arts and Crafts

Science and Technology Conference jointly organized by the State Science and Technology Commission and the Ministry of Light Industry, the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Leading Group proposed the dual objectives of “practicalizing handicrafts” and “artifying daily necessities.” This initiative redirected product development priorities, emphasizing the export of daily-use handicrafts. The “dualization” strategy embodied the vision of integrating traditional decorative craftsmanship with contemporary design within the arts and crafts framework, aiming to elevate the quality of export goods. The concept of “artification” essentially means “artistic enhancement”—whether applied to daily necessities or practical items—primarily focusing on the

aesthetic refinement of product appearances.

Based on the “dualization” policy, China’s ceramic industry proposed the slogan of “artistic ceramics for daily use and daily-use ceramics for artistic purposes,” advocating the application of artistic ceramic techniques to the shaping and decoration of daily-use ceramics to enhance product quality and added value. In 1992, the Information and Statistics Department of the Ministry of Light Industry identified “artistic daily-use ceramics and daily-use ceramics for artistic purposes” as a global trend in ceramic development and proposed this as the main direction for China’s ceramics¹. Initially, China’s “artistic daily-use ceramics” aimed to address the low value of exported ceramic products, making them more appealing to foreign consumers and boosting the export earnings of China’s daily-use ceramic products. Later, with the development of the domestic market, the “artistic” direction of daily-use ceramics also became a focus for domestic sales. From the perspective of contemporary China’s daily-use ceramics, the slogan “artistic ceramics for daily use and daily-use ceramics for artistic purposes” did not distinguish between artistic design and fine arts (pure art). Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, art and design have often been integrated in the ceramic industry, sharing a unified characteristic. The shift in terminology from “crafts and arts” to “artistic design” or “design art” reflects the growing emphasis on “art” in ceramic design.

From the creator’s perspective, ceramic artists are often ceramic designers, and vice versa—there’s no absolute distinction between these roles. Renowned figures like Zhang Shouzhi, Yang Yongshan, He Yan, Huang Chunmao, and Li Jianping are both ceramic designers and artists, while He Bingqin, Qiu Gengyu, Lü Jinquan, and Li Leiyin are artists who also work as designers. Globally recognized ceramic brands typically integrate artistic porcelain with daily-use ceramics, collaborating with celebrated designers and artists to develop new products. The British ceramic brand Wedgwood’s design success is inseparable from its partnerships with artists. Artists from diverse backgrounds have enriched Wedgwood’s ceramic designs with artistic flair,

enhancing product value and appeal while boosting sales. In China, many ceramic enterprises hire national, provincial, and municipal-level master artisans to participate in new product development, floral pattern design, and technical training. Daily-use ceramic manufacturers also produce decorative and artistic ceramics, with porcelain painters frequently contributing to the decorative design of everyday ceramic products.

2.2 Aesthetic Consumption and Art Promoting the Artisticization of China’s Daily Ceramics

As China gradually transitions to a consumer society, people’s preferences for items have shifted from practicability to aesthetically pleasing, and the selection of new items is increasingly based on aesthetics. In the socio-cultural context, items can reflect the user’s taste and carry symbolic significance. The “artistic” design of daily-use ceramics can be seen as a response to this lifestyle and changing demands.

From the perspective of the hierarchy of needs, “aesthetics” is a relatively higher-level demand for goods compared to “functionality.” After the reform and opening up, the living standards of the domestic population have significantly improved, the proportion of the middle class has gradually increased, and social production has achieved tremendous development with the establishment of the market economy system. The contradiction between “the people’s growing material and cultural needs” and “backward social production” has gradually been reconciled and improved, and China’s economy has shifted from a “commodity shortage type” to a “commodity surplus type.” The progress of productivity and the rapid development of manufacturing have led to an abundance of goods. The improvement in people’s living standards is primarily material, manifested in the increase of disposable money and the adequacy of living necessities. When people’s material needs are partially met, they will develop spiritual needs, which is reflected in the elevation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and also in the upgrading of material pursuits from “satisfaction,” “warmth,” “security” to “beauty,” “grace,” and “joy” as described by

¹ Department of Information and Statistics, Ministry of Light Industry. (1992). Development Trends of the World Light Industry and China’s Future Priorities. *China’s National Conditions and Strengths*, (2), 55.

Mozi.¹ Among the internal categories of daily-use ceramics, the artification of tea sets is the most evident. The reason for this is that tea drinking, compared to dining, is a more leisurely lifestyle activity, and the users are mostly from the leisure class. During the use of tea sets, users not only savor the tea but also appreciate the vessels, paying more attention to the aesthetic elements of the tea sets.

From an international perspective, foreign consumers favor single-piece products with artistic value. High-end items like cups, plates, and teapots serve multiple purposes—functional, decorative, and collectible. Exquisitely patterned dinnerware not only functions but also enhances home decor, making artistic quality a key consumer consideration. Domestically, art has become both a means to culturalize products and a strategy for value enhancement in competitive markets. Jingdezhen's small tea sets exemplify this trend, featuring rapidly updated designs, rich regional cultural elements, and significantly higher added value than similar products. Li Huifeng, director of Jingdezhen Yubai Ceramics, observes: "Times have changed. Tea cups used to be mere drinking vessels, but now people seek spiritual fulfillment and cultural sophistication. We sell culture and artistic living."² At a 2006 ceramic industry symposium in the National Art Museum of China, Sun Guanghui, then vice mayor of Chaozhou, remarked: "Five years ago, I focused solely on industrialization. Now that Chaozhou's industries have matured, I realize our competitiveness stems not just from industrialization, but from the perfect fusion of ceramics with art and modern lifestyles."³

Since the 1990s, the booming domestic ceramic art market and the rise of modern ceramic art have directly influenced the artistic transformation of daily-use ceramics. Production hubs like Jingdezhen, Liling, Longquan, Dehua, and Zibo have applied

traditional ceramic techniques—including painted designs, colored glazes, carved patterns, and sculptural forms—to everyday items such as cups, teapots, bowls, and plates. Chaozhou artisans employed openwork porcelain craftsmanship to create decorative plates and fruit stands, while Zibo innovated with colored glaze and carved porcelain for tea set adornments. Modern ceramic art's emphasis on material characteristics, unconventional shapes, and experimental firing methods has profoundly reshaped daily ceramic designs. Ceramic artists from Jingdezhen, Dehua, and Yichang have pioneered new approaches to artistic ceramics, fostering cross-cultural exchanges between diverse artistic styles. This has transformed traditional handmade ceramics into contemporary "living ceramics." Collaborations between Chinese and international designers, artists, and artisans have enriched product aesthetics, yielding notable works like the "Harmony 2007" coffee set co-created by Tsinghua University professor Zhang Shouzhi and Australian ceramicist Janet Debus, and the "Egret Soaring Through Clouds" first-class cabin tableware designed by Fujian master Chen Renhai and Greek designer Venia Giota for Xiamen Airlines.

British scholar Firthstone posits that human aesthetic activities have transcended the boundaries of pure art and literature, gradually permeating the "everyday life" of the masses, resulting in the "aestheticization of daily life." As a "cultural phenomenon," this aestheticization signifies the blurring of boundaries between art and life—where art becomes life-like and life becomes artistic. It also implies that all aspects of daily life, including mass-produced goods and their environments (designs), become objects of aesthetic appreciation. Daily-use ceramics, as common household items, have evolved from functional objects to aesthetic entities. The bowls, plates, teapots, and cups themselves possess formal qualities, and through over ten thousand years of development, they have acquired diverse shapes and decorations. When practicality is set aside, these "formally meaningful" daily-use ceramics easily become aesthetic objects free from utilitarian constraints. In everyday contexts, the aestheticization of daily objects promotes the artistic transformation of ceramics, while the artistic refinement of ceramics further enhances the aestheticization of daily life. Both

¹ Han Liu Xiang's "Shuoyuan" cites a lost text from "Mozi," which states: "One must always eat until full before seeking beauty; one must always wear warm clothes before seeking elegance; one must always live in peace before seeking joy."

² Chen Jin. (2015). Current Status and Development Trends of Daily-use Ceramics Enterprises in Jingdezhen. Jingdezhen Ceramic University, 36.

³ Fan Di'an. (2006). *Guarding and Expanding: Proceedings of the Ceramic Conference at the National Art Museum of China*. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 15.

“aestheticization of daily life” and “everyday aestheticization” integrate the visual forms and user experiences of daily-use ceramics into aesthetic experiences. The gradual decline of Jingdezhen’s artistic porcelain and the booming market for artistic small tea sets reflect not only the state’s anti-corruption efforts but also the changing demands of users under the influence of aestheticized lifestyles.

2.3 Technological Progress Enriching the Artistic Presentation of China Daily Ceramics

The artistic design of daily-use ceramics is inseparable from advancements in materials and production technologies. Before China’s reform and opening-up, domestic daily-use ceramic products were constrained by production conditions, resulting in frequent defects such as deformation, glaze shrinkage, and black spots. Due to the involvement of mold-making and trial firing in ceramic design, the R&D costs were high and market risks significant, leading to little innovation over the years. China’s daily-use ceramics were predominantly transparent white porcelain, mainly decorated with overglaze appliqué. However, the silk screen printing pattern could only achieve 80-100 lines, requiring 4-5 color runs, which resulted in dull pigments, limited color variations, and a lack of diversity in color schemes. These limitations hindered the decorative effects and left the artistic and design approaches of the products constrained.

Since the 1990s, the refinement of raw materials and modern production techniques have significantly reduced surface imperfections in daily-use ceramics, achieving a flawless smoothness that laid the foundation for artistic enhancement. The invention of new ceramic materials further enriched the aesthetic appeal of these products. New ceramic varieties like synthetic bone china, Huqing porcelain, and Hanguang porcelain elevated the artistic value of daily-use ceramics through their superior material quality.

The establishment of ceramic glaze factories in mainland China, including those from Taiwan and overseas, has significantly expanded the variety of domestic ceramic glazes. High-temperature colored glazes, reactive glazes, kiln-changing glazes, and decorative glazes are now widely used in daily-use ceramics. Improved printing technologies and premium glaze materials have diversified

decorative paper types, now categorized into underglaze, overglaze, and midglaze varieties. Small-format decorative paper (water-transfer type) is gradually replacing large-format designs and has become standard in domestic ceramic production. This format offers better flexibility and adaptability to vessel shapes, while enabling printing of precious metal inlays and relief patterns. It supports overglaze, midglaze, and underglaze designs with adjustable color layer thickness. The growing popularity of high-temperature fast-burning midglaze techniques reduces glaze erosion and avoids material-induced lead/cadmium leaching. These methods also overcome the limitations of insufficient underglaze colors and inferior decorative effects compared to overglaze designs, significantly enhancing creative freedom and artistic impact in daily-use ceramics. High-resolution printing equipment can even replicate hand-painted effects, breaking the monotony of mass-produced items. Advanced mold materials and forming techniques enable more precise and intricate ceramic designs. Automated engraving machines, 3D printers, and high-pressure injection systems expand ceramic production capabilities, allowing designers to realize innovative concepts. Cutting-edge kiln systems and firing processes have dramatically improved yield rates for complex and irregular ceramic shapes, reducing production costs and supporting artistic innovation in the industry.

It can be said that since the reform and opening up, the progress of materials and technology has broadened the path of “artistic” design for China’s daily ceramics. As British scholar Penny Spark said, “If consumer culture makes design inevitable, then technological progress makes design possible.”¹

3. The Expression of China Daily Ceramics Art Design after the Reform and Opening-up

In order to meet the market demand after the reform and opening up, the designer tries to add “artistic” to the decoration and modeling of daily ceramics, so that the products have higher aesthetic value.

3.1 Seeking Novel Visual Effects in Decoration

3.1.1 The Artistic Design of Decal Paper Patterns

¹ Penny Spark. (2012). *Introduction to Design and Culture*. Translated by Qian Fenggen and Yu Xiaohong. Nanjing: Yilin Press, 12.

Decal paper, which facilitates mass production, is a major decorative technique in China's daily-use ceramics. The pattern designs centered around decal paper are an important manifestation of the artistic development of China's daily-use ceramics. The content of decal paper designs has gradually become richer, encompassing not only traditional themes and floral patterns from both Eastern and Western cultures but also vegetables, fruits, birds and beasts, figures, and abstract designs. Compared to before the reform and opening-up, the patterns on decal paper are more aesthetically pleasing and diverse. To enhance the design innovation of decal paper and promote the artistic quality of products, Shenzhen Stechcol Ceramics draws inspiration from nature worldwide, documenting plants and birds through photography to create creative decal paper designs. The improvement of screen printing technology and the widespread use of computer plate-making have enhanced and diversified the printing quality of decal paper. By altering the base materials and pigments of decal paper, artistic effects such as enamel, pastel, doucai, watercolor, printmaking, and oil painting can be imitated.

Some ceramic enterprises replicate artists' artworks into ultra-high-resolution decal paper, making it hard to distinguish the genuine from the fake. Zhang Songmao, a renowned ceramic artist from Jingdezhen, has created plates from his porcelain painting "Peony Butterfly" and printed it into decorative decal paper for tableware and tea sets. Other companies transform famous Chinese and Western paintings into daily-use ceramic decal paper to enhance the "artistic" ambiance of their decorations. Chongqing Zhaofeng Ceramics once designed a series of tableware and tea sets inspired by Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh's oil paintings, which gained popularity among consumers worldwide. Designers from Beiliu Sanhuan Ceramics turned modern abstract artist Mondrian's famous paintings into decal paper, transferring them onto cups and plates with striking compositional appeal.

3.1.2 Application of Various Ceramic Decoration Techniques

Ceramic enterprises and artisans in Jingdezhen primarily enhance the artistic value of daily-use ceramics through hand-painted decorations, with limited variations in product designs. Small businesses and studios often source undecorated

plain ceramic pieces from external suppliers for hand-painted embellishments. Traditional ceramic painting techniques such as blue-and-white porcelain, underglaze red, famille rose, enamel, ancient enamel, and modern enamel are widely used in daily-use ceramic decorations, particularly for tea sets. These products are typically hand-painted by skilled artisans following designer-provided samples. Some manufacturers produce decorative patterns as transfer paper for ceramic applications, while others combine semi-manual production with hand-painted blue-and-white designs to achieve both mass production efficiency and the unique artistic charm of hand-painted blue-and-white. Yufeng Porcelain Factory encourages designers to experiment with hand-painted decorations on cups and tea sets, testing market responses before converting popular designs into mass-produced transfer paper. Ceramic enterprises like Hongye and Wanglong combine high-temperature colored glazes with overglaze floral and bird paintings, showcasing rich ethnic artistic traditions.

Liling's daily-use porcelain industry has developed under the artistic direction of "artistic daily ceramics". By expanding the color palette of underglaze enamel and applying the unique Fen water and firing techniques of underglaze five-color porcelain, the products achieve enhanced artistic appeal. The underglaze five-color technique involves firing at 1380°C, resulting in subtle coloration that creates refined artistic effects. To adapt to mass production, Liling employs the "imprint Fen water" method: patterns are first made into leather impressions, dipped in water-resistant ink or pigments, then printed onto pre-fired bodies. The prepared colored powders are dissolved in tea water, with concentrations adjusted according to each pigment's color intensity. Workers fill the patterns using Fen water brushes, controlling the thickness of the colored material to achieve gradient and layered effects. Liling's "Red Official Kiln" and Zhenmei Art Ceramics Company's underglaze enamel tea sets and tableware stand out with their distinctive artistic style. Beyond traditional underglaze five-color decorations, Hunan Hualian Ceramics' stoneware products incorporate various decorative techniques like matte finish, reactive glaze, snowflake glaze, crackle glaze, cosmetic clay, and relief carving. These techniques combine with the unique shapes and

heavy-bodied forms of the ceramics, creating rich, varied, and highly personalized artistic effects.

Historically, ceramic cookware primarily featuring clay pots were predominantly decorated with monochromatic glazes like ivory yellow, brown, or black, resulting in limited aesthetic options. Since the 1990s, ceramic cookware has evolved to incorporate increasingly sophisticated designs. The trend toward pristine white and delicate finishes gained prominence, often achieved through hand-painted designs or decorative paper appliqués. Recent years have seen a surge in colorful glazes or a combination of colored glazes with appliquéd, offering vibrant patterns and diverse hues that significantly elevate the artistic appeal of ceramic cookware. Notably, Guangdong Shunxiang Ceramics Co., Ltd. and Songfa Ceramics Co., Ltd. have moved beyond the traditional dull colors and rugged forms of ceramic pots, adopting light-colored glazes and shallow relief decorations. Their innovative dual-purpose cookware and serving vessels now combine functionality with sleek, contemporary aesthetics.

The traditional decorative techniques of porcelain, such as flower glaze, tea-leaf glaze, star-and raindrop glaze, twisted glaze and twisted body, and carved flower, are also used in the decoration design of high-grade daily-use ceramics.

3.2 Seeking Diversity Through Breaking Away from the Conventional Approach in Design

After the reform and opening up, China daily-use ceramics gradually broke the shape style of decades, began to seek the diversification of shape.

The design diversity of daily-use ceramics has significantly expanded, with increasingly unconventional shapes emerging. Ceramic manufacturers are seeking to boost product value by developing specialized designs that require advanced forming techniques, aiming to break free from the constraints of homogeneous, low-priced products. Drawing inspiration from international tableware styles, designers have moved beyond traditional circular forms to create innovative shapes including ellipses, squares, triangles, polygons, floral patterns, and nature-inspired designs, catering to the market's demand for differentiated products. The most notable evolution occurs in hotel ceramic

tableware. Designers now focus not only on functional elements like materials and compatibility, but also visually showcase how exquisite tableware complements gourmet dishes, reflecting the hotel's prestige and elevating dining experiences. To enhance dish presentation, most hotel ceramics feature unadorned white porcelain. This has driven designers to emphasize creative shaping, with unconventional forms becoming prominent. Plates and cups showcase the richest variety: plate types include hat-shaped, leaf-shaped, conch-shaped, shell-shaped, star-shaped, wavy, stone-shaped, upturned-corner, and angled plates; cup types feature pumpkin-shaped, lotus-shaped, ingot-shaped, boat-shaped, and tripod-shaped designs. Tableware is tailored to specific dishes—fish plates match fish, goose plates suit goose, and long strips complement grilled meats. Decorative accessories like chopstick holders, seasoning tools, spoons, and towel plates also showcase diverse designs. Jingdezhen Ceramic Co., Ltd. alone offers over 20 unique hotel chopstick holders, including dragon, swan, Great Wall, ruyi (auspicious) symbol, zither, bridge, and mountain motifs.

The thermal stability of ceramic cookware is related to its shape, so traditional cookware mainly features circular designs with little variation. As people's aesthetic demands for ceramic products increase, the shapes of cookware also show a tendency towards artistic design. Domestic daily-use ceramic enterprises have improved the rolling and pressing molding method, enabling the production of new shapes such as oval and square products. Dehua Guanfu Ceramics Company adopted a biomimetic design method inspired by purple clay teapots, shaping the heat-resistant pot into a pumpkin form and mimicking the colors of natural objects in the use of glaze. Jingdezhen Leicester Special Ceramics Co., Ltd., based on the research and development of new materials, hired China's master of arts and crafts and sculptor Zhang Yuxian to design the shapes of high-end heat-resistant ceramic pots, combining the images of zodiac animals with the objects themselves, and launched products such as "Prosperous Dragon" and "Success Comes Like a Horse." The aesthetically refined ceramic cookware has not only gained popularity among domestic consumers but also received praise in the international market, with products exported to countries such as Australia, South

Korea, and Japan.

3.3 Stylistic Expression Combining Modeling and Decoration

The designer also draws on artistic expressions to integrate decoration and modeling, making the daily-use ceramics more stylized.

Faplan Ceramics has become an internationally renowned ceramic brand through its unique artistic design and craftsmanship. The slogan of Faplan Ceramics is to create “functional art,” meaning that Faplan Ceramics is not only a functional daily item but also an artwork with aesthetic value. Faplan Ceramics’ tableware or coffee sets often appear in a series, including vases and decorative plates primarily for display, enriching the artistic beauty of the products. The “artistic” nature of Faplan Ceramics is based on materials and technology. High-quality raw materials, a wide variety of colors and glazes, advanced mold-making and demolding techniques, and superb firing processes create a perfect presentation of design creativity. The colors and glazes of Faplan Ceramics are specially formulated by a well-known Taiwanese glaze-making company, free from harmful substances such as lead and cadmium. In terms of molding techniques, Faplan Ceramics employs 3D printing molds and its exclusive patented “bevel demolding method,” breaking through conventional craftsmanship and the rigid, practical limitations of daily-use ceramics to produce complex and varied three-dimensional shapes. Faplan Ceramics blends traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western Art Nouveau styles, gradually forming its own unique design characteristics. Designers draw inspiration from nature and traditional Chinese culture, often using three-dimensional plants and animals as the main shapes or decorative elements, adorned with high-temperature underglaze colors, resulting in vibrant and layered hues. Faplan Ceramics products are like living vessels that transcend their form, where the vessel and its image coexist harmoniously, achieving a realm where the fluid, swirling “Art Nouveau” curves, flat paintings, three-dimensional reliefs, or sculptures blend seamlessly with the objects themselves, offering a unique artistic experience. Faplan Ceramics frequently collaborates with artists both domestically and internationally. The base marks of Faplan Ceramics are signed by designers, potters, or molders. Falan porcelain offers mass-produced items, yet many

are limited-edition pieces or one-of-a-kind masterpieces. The “Butterfly Dance” series, designed by renowned Taiwanese designer He Zhenwu, won the “Best Gift Award” at the New York International Gift Exhibition. Featuring delicate colors and harmonious decoration, the collection centers on three-dimensional butterflies complemented by floral motifs, with fluid lines and lifelike forms that blend motion and stillness into a captivating composition. By integrating vases with coffee sets in a cohesive series, designers blur the line between art and functionality while enhancing artistic value. Flan porcelain artists often incorporate renowned Chinese and Western paintings into ceramic designs through relief and sculptural techniques, creatively merging styles like the Van Gogh series, Wu Guanzhong series, and the “Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains” series. The Van Gogh series reimagines Dutch masterpieces featuring irises, sunflowers, and peach blossoms, skillfully blending three-dimensional and two-dimensional elements, relief and painting, objects and decoration—hallmarks of Flan porcelain’s artistic expression. While the designs exude contemporary appeal, resembling decorative artworks and collectibles, some products prove impractical due to complex structures prone to damage and difficult cleaning. While Flan’s success offers valuable lessons for daily-use ceramic brands, its design philosophy and production methods shouldn’t be blindly copied. Tangshan Asia Times Ceramics Co., Ltd. remains committed to hand-painted decorative products. The company maintains a design and hand-painting team of hundreds, employing exquisite gongbi (meticulous brushwork), abstract ink wash, and watercolor techniques to adorn bone china. Its designs blend the best of Chinese and Western artistry—some are meticulously crafted with unique elegance, others exude natural simplicity, while many radiate a strong contemporary vibe, establishing Tangshan bone china as a hallmark of artistic excellence.

Since the 1990s, influenced by modern ceramic art from Japan and the United States, craft ceramics have emerged as “lifestyle ceramics,” featuring both daily-use items like bowls, plates, cups, pots, and jars, and decorative pieces such as vases and incense burners. Lifestyle ceramics aim to overcome the limitations of modern ceramic art that overemphasizes form and spirituality while neglecting functionality. They

focus on showcasing the artist's individuality and artistic expression through handmade craftsmanship, often employing traditional techniques like potter's wheel shaping and coil-building. Unlike traditional craft ceramics that prioritize neatness and refinement, lifestyle ceramics embrace irregular forms and decorations, preserving production marks from shaping, decorating, and firing. They utilize various glazes and decorative clay to enhance visual appeal, highlighting material textures and warmth while demonstrating meticulous craftsmanship in details. Young ceramic artist Bian Xiaocen primarily creates functional lifestyle ceramics, mostly bowls, jars, and pots, often coated with decorative clay or matte glaze. His style draws inspiration from folk kiln roughware and Japanese ceramic art, blending practicality with rustic, timeless artistic charm. Lifestyle ceramic production is concentrated in traditional ceramic regions like Jingdezhen, Yixing, and Dehua. Some artists have developed distinctive styles and gained recognition, while others explore small-scale production or collaborations with ceramic enterprises.

4. The Alienation of "Artification" of China Daily Ceramics Since Reform and Opening-up

Due to the lack of design talent and the deviation of design cognition, China's daily ceramic design has also undergone alienation in the process of "artification", which is mainly manifested as the form hindering the function and concealing the defects of the product.

4.1 Form Hindering Function

Many domestic enterprises oversimplify the artistic design of daily-use ceramics as mere painting or sculpting. Whether to cater to consumers' aesthetic demands or to boost product value, "artification" has become a panacea. This approach transforms even low-quality ceramic objects into "artworks" through the "magic" of painting and sculpting, resulting in a flood of artistic "junk" and an "alienation" of artification. In the history of global design, the British "Crystal Palace" industrial products' overuse of artistic techniques drew criticism from John Ruskin and William Morris, sparking the British "Art and Crafts" movement that ultimately unified technology and art in Western modern design.

While artistic hand-painting and well-crafted sculptural designs can enhance the "artistry" of daily-use ceramics, crude repetitive

hand-painting and bizarrely forced shapes not only fail to add aesthetic value but also disrupt the simplicity of the objects themselves, making artistic refinement impossible. As a decorative technique, hand-painting should not be equated with "artification" when contrasted with appliquéd and printed designs. Under the banner of innovation and "artification," some production areas have seen bizarre animal-shaped teaware that lacks formal beauty and instead evokes negative associations, diminishing even the willingness to use them. Mr. Yang Yongshan argues that "inappropriate and unattractive designs like cat teapots and dog teapots, which degrade aesthetic taste, should not be promoted."¹ He further emphasizes that ceramic design should follow its own principles rather than applying general artistic creation methods. "Daily-use ceramic decoration design shouldn't simply involve painting patterns or traditional Chinese paintings on shapes; it should be an overall design based on the characteristics of the form, material texture, and color." The white porcelain panda teaware produced by a ceramic factory in Dehua failed to effectively combine artistic design with functional structure, resulting in products that are neither "beautiful" nor "practical." Its complex design makes production difficult, and it can hardly be considered "cost-effective." Some traditional production areas judge product value by "workmanship" (the amount of decorative patterns), with high prices for elaborate designs and low prices for simpler ones, which clearly narrows the value of "art" into a narrow quantitative measure.

After the market boom following the reform, Jingdezhen ceramics shifted focus to artistic porcelain, with its techniques also influencing daily-use ceramics like tea sets. The distinctive Jingdezhen-painted tea sets, though aesthetically pleasing, struggled to sell due to their thin, non-functional bodies that were too hot to handle and prone to breaking. "Most artists simply painted artistic designs on everyday ceramics, treating them as art—without achieving any fundamental

¹ Yang Yongshan. (2001). *On Tao Yuanming's Art Theory*. Harbin: Heilongjiang Fine Arts Publishing House, 125. Peng Yuwang. (2013). *Ceramic Sea: A Glimpse of the Past*. Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 255.

transformation in ceramic form.”¹

4.2 Concealing Product Defects

The “artification” of daily-use ceramics first requires solving process issues to achieve high-quality appearance. Taking white porcelain as an example, good transparency, gloss, whiteness, and surface defects-free are not only product quality standards but also important indicators of aesthetics. Some ceramic enterprises overemphasize “artification,” leading to safety hazards in daily-use ceramic products. Since heavy metals such as lead and cadmium are added during the decoration and firing of daily-use ceramics to reduce firing temperature and enhance glaze smoothness and color vibrancy, many small daily-use ceramic enterprises often use inferior materials to cut costs and highlight aesthetics. Coupled with outdated production techniques, this frequently results in excessive lead and cadmium leaching, posing health risks to users. In previous national quality inspections, issues such as excessive heavy metal leaching and poor resistance to sudden deformation in daily-use ceramics have consistently existed, hindering the high-quality development of China’s daily-use ceramics. Additionally, a large number of hand-painted tea sets with rough artwork flood the ceramic market, masking defects in the porcelain body and glaze. Peter Dohme believes that “the beauty of useful objects is determined by their functionality and honesty in materials and structure.”² However, narrow “artification” overlooks the basic usefulness and safety of daily-use ceramics, becoming a tool for product embellishment.

Shen Yu argues that the production of daily consumer goods (China’s light industrial products) has consistently followed two interconnected misguided paths: “artification of practical items” and excessive “crafts artification”.³ While emphasizing equipment upgrades and process improvements over product aesthetics, advocating the “artification” of functional items holds progressive value. However, neither “artification” nor aesthetic

enhancement should be the sole objective or ultimate goal of daily ceramic design, nor should they serve as evaluation criteria. Reducing ceramic design development to simplistic notions of “artification” or “artistry” still reflects narrow craft art thinking, oversimplifying complex design behaviors and consumer demands. “Blindly pursuing artistic qualities while neglecting functionality is clearly putting the cart before the horse. To successfully advance the artification of daily ceramics, we must innovate design concepts beyond mere functionality and practicality.”⁴ Since the new century, the “human-centered” approach has become a key trend in design development. The comprehensive optimization of user experience—encompassing practicality, aesthetics, and emotional engagement—has expanded the conceptual framework for ceramic artification.

5. Conclusion

In the market context, the “artistic” design strategy of China’s daily-use ceramics reflects a correction to the pre-Reform and Opening-up era’s neglect of product form in favor of quantity alone. It promotes the integration of functionality and artistry in China’s daily-use ceramics, enriches decorative and sculptural designs, and attempts to bring these products into the “aesthetic realm,” catering to consumers’ aesthetic demands to some extent and boosting trade growth and added value. This demonstrates China’s daily-use ceramics’ exploration in transitioning to modern design. The “artistic” approach in China’s daily-use ceramics reflects the continuation of traditional craft art philosophy, with its essence still being the enhancement of product value through “craftsmanship.” However, this “artistic” focus primarily emphasizes the beautification of “objects” rather than truly addressing the diverse needs of “people.” The “artistic” design of daily-use ceramics should not equate to “artification.” In a narrow sense, “artistic” design simplifies complex design issues into formal problems, revealing the limitations of China’s ceramic industry’s understanding of daily-use ceramic design in a market-driven environment. Looking ahead, the artistic design of China’s daily-use ceramics should transcend the notion of “beautiful objects” and instead

¹ Peng Yuwang. (2013). *Ceramic Sea: A Glimpse of the Past*. Nanchang: Jiangxi People’s Publishing House, 255.

² Peter Dohmer. (2010). *Design Since 1945*. Translated by Liang Mei. Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 65.

³ Shen Yu. (2017). *History of Modern Design Concepts in China*. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 209.

⁴ Porcelain Capital Evening News. (2013 March 6). “Qing Luan” (a Chinese term for premature maturity): The Inverted Priorities of Everyday Ceramics Artification.

focus on the interactive relationship between people and objects, as well as the experiences of beauty in the process, aiming for the artisticization of life.

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