

# The Chinese Landscape Galloping on Porcelain - A Study on the "Painting of Hunting on Horseback"

Liping Wang<sup>1</sup> Huafei Cai<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> School of Design Art, Changsha University of Science & Technology, Changsha, Hunan, China

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding author.

## ABSTRACT

Due to the psychological factors of aggression and war among European powers, horse riding and hunting decorations became one of the hottest styles in export porcelain in the 17th to 18th centuries. Porcelain painting images with horse riding and hunting as the theme have shown significant stylized features in composition and form expression. The appearance of these stylized features is undoubtedly a manifestation of the Ming and Qing dynasties' concept of creation and modular production.

**Keywords:** *Hunting culture, Qianlong, China and foreign exchange, Porcelain painting.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emperor Qianlong was a descendant of the Manchu people, and the tradition of hunting<sup>1</sup>[1] has also been preserved. On the one hand, hunting is a manifestation of personal physical fitness, and rulers may even want to showcase their physical abilities and strategies through this means; On the other hand, in ancient times, hunting showed the royal power and was a symbol of noble status. Perhaps horseback hunting was no longer a generalized game, but a process of pursuing fame and fortune. Paintings of hunting on horseback are one of the popular patterns on Chinese porcelain, and some of them reflect the traditional etiquette of masters and servants, indicating that this concept of hierarchy had deeply rooted in the hearts of Chinese people. It must be mentioned that porcelain is solid, and only its shape, color, and composition can be grasped by the craftsmen through porcelain. Porcelain paintings contain traditional Chinese

cultural ideas, and the scenes of hunting on horseback and shooting were also appreciated by Europeans who advocated colonial expansion and the mentality of foreign powers.

## 2. CULTURAL CONNOTATION AND REASONS FOR THE FORMATION

For three generations, hunting on horseback has been preserved as court entertainment. "Hunting is a very ancient activity. In ancient times, hunting was also known as 'field hunting', 'ground hunting', as well as 'shooting hunting', 'hunting', etc. Initially, hunting was just a production activity. But since the Xia Dynasty, rulers of all dynasties have widely regarded hunting as a great ritual. The 'Zuo Zhuan · Yin Gong' records detailed classifications and titles such as 'chun sou (spring hunting), xia miao (summer hunting), qiu xian (autumn hunting), and dong shou (winter hunting)'. After the Qin and Han dynasties, hunting activities gradually became an important form of leisure and entertainment for the royal family. For example, Emperor Wu of Han, Liu Che, enjoyed 'chasing wild animals' and enjoyed it... In the Tang Dynasty, not only the royal nobility enjoyed hunting, but they were also influenced by the hunting style of the royal family. Local officials, even literati, were mostly fond of hunting."<sup>2</sup>[1] In the Song Dynasty, the promotion of

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2. This hunting activity, which is hosted by the official and can also be participated in by ordinary people, has greatly

political governance resulted in poor martial arts skills, and the trend of hunting stagnated. The Qing Dynasty, which conquered the country on the horses, particularly focused on horsemanship and archery. Faced with the problem of Manchu descendants abandoning Manchu horsemanship and archery, Qianlong not only restored the Mulan Autumn Hunting Festival, but also continuously expanded the Mulan paddock, turning it into an important political center of the Qing Dynasty in northern China. "Qianlong believed that Manchu hunting was the key to not abandoning armament, which was not only reflected in many of his policies and behaviors, but also subtly influenced many Qing palace paintings."<sup>3</sup> [2] The Qing Dynasty palace painters created the image of Qianlong as "a good rider and archer", which can demonstrate Qianlong's persistence and determination in inheriting the Manchu rider and archer culture. As the commander of hunting, emperors often appear at the core of the screen, being the center of the hunting ground.

Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Qianlong also used block printing to draw their territorial maps and depict royal gardens and military conquests. Examples in this regard include a set of prints depicting the empire's mountain summer resort in Rehe, the European style palace in Yuanmingyuan, and various battles of conquering ethnic minorities at the border of the Qing Dynasty... Most Qing dynasty prints have multiple copies that can be seen by nobles, officials, even European elites and courts. Their visibility can be comparable to the French prints produced by the Louis XIV court, but it is unprecedented in the history of China's empire. In a sense, prints have played the role of a connector. Through this connector, the Qing Dynasty emperors perceived how the French court described

themselves as a glorious governing institution, and in turn brought them into their representative politics by deploying their image resources." [3] The establishment of diplomatic relations between Emperor Qianlong and Louis XIV of France in the 18th century not only strengthened the political and diplomatic ties between the two countries, but also provided a lubricant for cultural and artistic exchanges between China and France. "The missionaries made a lot of contributions, as they transported the famous 'Chinese Emperor' tapestry to Beijing and were responsible for completing the production of the 'Chinese Emperor's Campaign' set of pictures. The mature image presentation techniques used in these tapestries and prints demonstrate the strong interest of China and France in each other's cultures." [4]

The Ming and Qing porcelain painting of horse riding and hunting scenes, also known as "Dao Ma Dan", is a classic theme that reflects the strong military and prosperous posture of the Qing Dynasty, which often depicts the state of samurai riding horses, accompanied by other horse riding characters or walking attendants. The export porcelain "Painting of Hunting on Horseback" not only satisfies the Western curiosity about Chinese royal life and social culture; It can also echo the customs of horseback riding and hunting in Europe, and Europe's expansionist mentality of advocating colonialism in both military and political aspects is also metaphorical. In the grand hunting scene of European nobles as shown in "Figure 1", everyone is chasing and intercepting their prey, surrounded by besieged archers and horses waiting for battle, exuding a sense of desperation.

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promoted the popularity and promotion of hunting activities. In the Tang Dynasty, not only did the royal nobility enjoy hunting and were influenced by the royal hunting style, but local officials and even literati also mostly enjoyed hunting. In the Tang Dynasty, most of the border guards or local governors were generals who had a strong interest in hunting. Many literati, such as Wang Wei and Cen Sen, as well as Du Fu, Si Kongsu, Han Yu, Zhang Ku, Xue Feng, Wei Zhuang, Li Bai, Wang Zhihuan, as well as Zu Yong, Li Gu, Wang Jian, Xu Hun, and others, have roamed the border fortress all year round and even joined the army multiple times. They are very familiar with military life and customs, especially have a deep understanding of hunting activities including training and leisure time. So many poets personally participated in hunting activities, such as Wei Yingwu and Liu Changqing, as well as Liu Yuxi and Xue Feng, who often participated in various hunting activities or watched shooting competitions in their spare time

3. "The whistle deer is a hunting method that uses the whistle to imitate the sound of deer chirping and attract deer."



Figure 1 Noble hunting ground.

### 3. ARTISTIC FEATURES

Paintings of hunting on horseback contain rich styling elements and diverse forms of expression. On the one hand, this artistic representation originated from the concept of creation at that time, emphasizing the creation according to traditional "laws"; On the other hand, it is also related to modular production, and in order to reduce costs and improve efficiency, fixed templates are often used for creation.

#### 3.1 Shape Classification and Expression

The lineup of the "Painting of Hunting on Horseback" cannot be compared to the "Painting of Leaving the Capital and Returning to the Capital" as both are royal travel scenes. The protagonist is mainly male, including the emperor, prince, minister of civil and military affairs, and attendants. According to the theme, it can be mainly divided into five categories: archery on horseback, patrol on horseback, war on horseback, flag holding on horseback, and umbrella holding on horseback.

The "Painting of Archery on Horseback" is the most classic hunting scene, where the movements and expressions of the characters demonstrate the strong dynamics of hunting, showing the momentum of successful hunting. The "Painting of patrol on horseback" often depicts scenes of literati and officials riding horses and parading. Different Chinese elements are stacked in different materials, and this "mixed and matched" decorative style reflects the combined characteristics of Chinese style creation. For Schenk, who has never set foot in China, his thoughts on China are more based on the Chinese images he saw, combined with descriptions of Eastern anecdotes, and life experiences to create a comprehensive creation. The "Painting of War on Horseback" creates a tense atmosphere, with the main image of officials giving

orders, soldiers wearing and holding long swords. The "Painting of Flag Holding on Horseback" often depicts scenes of royal expeditions, and the disparity in identity and status can be seen in both clothing and form. The image of Europeans holding a canopy and umbrella fan appears in the "Painting of Flag Holding on Horseback", with the characters wearing fancy European style clothing. The high-ranking officials and nobles are dressed in magnificent attire, wearing towering hats, holding a long gun in their left hand, and the pot reins in their right hand. They look around with their eyes, but their clothing is indistinguishable from those around them, surrounded by attendants holding long guns, embracing the long axis, and holding a canopy. These images showcase a luxurious and colorful image.

Although the "Painting of Hunting on Horseback" of export porcelain painting is based on Chinese images, many traces of Europeanized Chinese style have been revealed in the process of image migration. In addition to the realistic features represented by the wide color porcelain style, there is also a Europeanized understanding and expression of the theme image itself. In Mason's Chinese style "hunting on horseback" porcelain paintings, images such as "spotted horses" and "spotted dogs" appear. These types of mounts, in addition to horses, also depict scenes of "riding deer" and images of cows as mounts... All of these reflect the "reconstructed" thinking in Chinese style porcelain painting creation, as well as some misunderstandings in the translation of Eastern and Western images. The natural scenery is an indispensable background for outdoor hunting themes, and some of the "horse riding hunting" porcelain paintings incorporate classic elements of willow style and flower bird pattern composition. The portrayal of birds flying in the sky and falcons in their hands reflects the European mentality of conquest and their desire to control things. The key

difference between Chinese style porcelain painting and Chinese porcelain painting lies in the expression of hierarchy, and this implicit relationship between characters is easily overlooked by Europeans. "Due to the low status of waiters, traditional etiquette requires that umbrellas for rulers should not be held in parallel. Therefore, a forward curved design is needed to achieve a convenient use effect, which is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the concept of superiority and inferiority in ancient China." [5] However, creating a relaxed and joyful atmosphere in the European Chinese style images did not pay attention to the regulations of character clothing and travel etiquette, which are considered unequalled by Chinese people.

### **3.2 Color-setting Style**

"Most Chinese palace painters are deeply influenced by traditional culture, and their traditional painting concepts are deeply rooted in their hearts, and they do not take Western painting for granted." [6] From classicism to the Rococo art period, Europe favored a strong and enthusiastic style. The product of cultural exchange between China and the West, as well as the fusion of porcelain painting techniques, Canton porcelain, better met the needs of European color design style and concrete expression. The style characteristics exhibited by painted porcelain represented by Meissen, Sever, and others are originally the result of mutual adaptation of culture and art. The Canton "Chinese style" porcelain is rich in color, overly connected and natural, with European realistic oil painting style features in both shape and color setting.

The first is the aesthetics. The color scheme of hunting on horseback can be divided into two types: Chinese style and European style, with the former being dignified and the latter being cumbersome. Taking Meissen porcelain as an example, the riding figures wear red court uniforms, and "red" is one of the five colors in China, which is a revered color. The attendants next to them are dressed in green clothes, seemingly in order of rank and order. On the other hand, looking at the European Chinese style wallpaper tapestry, the red color is randomly arranged on the clothing of the attendants, and there are scenes of horsemen wearing purple official uniforms and European style hats. It can be seen that China's deeply-rooted concept of hierarchy is not reflected in European porcelain paintings, and

European horseback porcelain paintings are more based on aesthetic design.

The second is the sense of wealth. In European paintings of horseback riding under umbrellas and during horseback riding battles, the costumes of the characters are all gorgeous and elaborate. The colors are mostly pink and blue-grey, similar to the color scheme of Baroque and Rococo in France, showcasing an exotic and psychedelic color, which is also related to the French fashion that swept the world from the 17th to the 18th century. Compared to the summary technique of the blue and white freehand brushwork style, Chinese style porcelain painting of hunting on horseback is more localized expression, such as the shaping of the body structure of the war horse and the rich and delicate color design, which may be related to the European art tradition of emphasizing realism. The creations of artists from different eras and regions reflect the current life and society, and artworks also reflect their dynamic development.

### **3.3 Composition Form**

The "hunting on horseback" of export porcelain mainly focuses on individual scenes and focuses on describing the dynamics of horse riding hunting, which is a prominent composition feature of this type of theme. The scenes of hunting on horseback on the porcelain at Meissen Porcelain Factory are divided into three scenes: bottleneck, bottle body, and bottle bottom. However, they are not organized according to the sequence of the story plot, but rather are presented in a narrative way of multiple events. Undoubtedly, the horseback hunters located in the focal point are the most prominent, indicating their ambition to conquer nature.

In order to better highlight the visual center, these types of images are mostly composed of triangles, and this stylized feature can highlight the core character of the horse. "In hunting culture, sharing prey reflects order and hierarchy. The images of Qianlong sharing prey seem to form a serious temple in the mountains and forests, forming a visual hierarchy between the top of the triangle, Qianjiang, and the ministers." [7] The main hunters of exported porcelain riding horses are Manchu adults from the Ming and Qing dynasties, with numbers ranging from three to five. The changes in the number of characters, the increase or decrease of composition elements, the adjustment of details, and the change of combination elements can enrich the visuals, increase the diversity of such themed visuals, improve the efficiency of batch

production of porcelain, and also adapt to the huge market demand. [8]

#### 4. CONCLUSION

With the continuous expansion of economic trade and overseas markets, Western society vigorously praises and pursues Chinese goods, and various arts and crafts categories in China have become extremely popular in the West. The formalization of mass production is the main source of Western understanding of China. By inheriting Chinese culture through porcelain painting images, from the hunting patterns in the Qing Dynasty to the hunting patterns on European Chinese style porcelain, it reflects Europe's worship of Chinese etiquette, the relationship between monarchs and subjects, and the benevolent and righteous rituals of emperors observing the hearts of the people. In the eyes of Westerners, this is a novel existence. Although the language is different, the images convey meaning and convey Chinese cultural etiquette through horseback riding and hunting.

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