

# Research on the Decorative Pattern Design and Characteristics of Gourd Bottles During the Qianlong Reign of the Qing Dynasty

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## ABSTRACT

In the Qing Dynasty, gourds were considered the embodiment of fortune, prosperity, and longevity, and people believed that gourds had an infinite lifespan in the universe in them. During the Qianlong reign, gourd bottles had unique shapes and rich decorative themes. On the basis of numerous scholars' research on gourd bottles during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, this study, on one hand, focuses on the patterns of flowers, animals, figures, landscapes, and characters, and adds ribbon patterns, and on the other hand, it also explores the characteristics of each pattern design in terms of composition. Finally, it can be concluded that in the design of flower patterns, a vine "C" shape or a circular shape can be used to surround the main object, and an inverted "Y" shape can be used to spread throughout the bottle body; in the design of animal patterns, circular, triangular, and rhombic compositions can be used, highlighting the orderliness in complexity. The gourd culture reflects people's longing for a better life. During the Qianlong reign, gourd bottles had a unique design, rich materials, exquisite techniques, and brilliant colors. The exquisite porcelain has great research value in terms of decorative techniques, decorative structures, and color combinations.

**Keywords:** *Qianlong, Gourd bottles, Decorative patterns, Design characteristics.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: GOURD BOTTLES AND GOURD CULTURE

As a common primitive plant, gourd has many seeds and strong reproductive ability. It can not only be eaten, but also be used as a production tool, musical instrument, and ornamental art. In Chinese culture, the "blessing" reflected by the gourd is deeply rooted in the bloodline of Chinese national culture. The gourd has the homophonic sound of "fu lu" (福祿, which means fortune and prosperity) and is seen as a symbol of auspiciousness. In ancient times, there were many myths and legends about gourds, legends about gourds' giving birth to human beings, and the connection between gourds and Taoist Eight Trigrams. In the Neolithic Age, people discovered the impermeability of gourds and used them as a tool for holding water. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, black glazed five linked jars emerged and standard porcelain was born. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, gourd bottles were rare, with small, simple, and round shapes. The early

Song Dynasty gourd bottle was similar to the Tang Dynasty, with a beautiful and upright shape in the later period. The porcelain of the Liao Dynasty embodied distinct ethnic characteristics. In the Jin Dynasty, it was popular to decorate the ware body with complex pasting techniques. In the Yuan Dynasty, there were enlarged gourd bottles and multi ribbed gourd bottles.

In the Qing Dynasty, gourd bottles had distinct artistic styles in different periods, symbolizing auspiciousness. For example, the squirrel grape pattern symbolized auspiciousness and stability, the longevity mountain and blissful sea pattern symbolized a long life, and the fortune and prosperity pattern symbolized good luck and official fortune. Both the emperor and the people had expectations for a better future. Emperor Qianlong was very fond of gourd bottles and the gourd vessels of the Qianlong Dynasty had the most types. The gourd is seen as a symbol of fortune, prosperity and longevity, and in the Qing Dynasty, it mainly focused on the prayers for

countless generations and for blessings and longevity.

## 2. CLASSIFICATION OF DECORATIVE THEMES

The classification of decorative themes is mainly divided into flower series, animal series, character series, figure story series, and ribbon series.

### 2.1 Flower Series

There are four main decorative techniques for flower themes. Firstly, a type of flower is used as the main object, with surrounding branches and vines winding out in a "C" shape from both sides of the flower; secondly, the branches and leaves around the main object flower rotate in a circular shape around it; thirdly, the branches and vines of the gourd are in an inverted "Y" shape, being intertwined and scattered throughout the bottle; fourthly, numerous kinds of flowers patterns are scattered throughout the bottle, with flowers of different sizes, clustering around each other, commonly known as "numerous kinds of flowers do not fall to the ground". The common themes of flower patterns include the continuous pattern of melons, flowers and red bats, numerous flowers offering blessings, baoxiang flower patterns, entangled branch flowers, hooked lotus patterns, numerous flowers patterns, and so on. Fret and wishful patterns are often adorned on the neck, mouth, and feet.

Among the blue and white, underglaze red gourd bottles, there are underglaze red fortune and wealth numerous-generation picture gourd bottle imitating the Yuan Dynasty in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, blue and white entangled branch flower pattern gourd bottle, and blue and white underglaze red fortune, wealth and longevity pattern flat gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, which have not only individual glaze colors, but also decorative patterns combining blue and white with underglaze red, blue and white with five colors. When blue and white are used as decorations alone, the commonly used themes include dragon patterns, endless life patterns, lotus patterns, flower patterns, gourd patterns, eight treasures patterns, and so on. When combining blue and white with underglaze red, there are three fruit patterns appearing. For example, the celadon glaze and blue and white underglaze red three fruit patterns on the small gourd in the Qianlong reign of

the Qing Dynasty are different from the previous full composition: the upper half has a small three fruit pattern on both sides, and the lower half has a front main pattern on both front and back, forming a triangular composition with the upper half. Although the famille rose "numerous kinds of flowers do not fall to the ground" ribbon gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty was decorated with intricate decorations, a flexible red ribbon was designed at the waist of the bottle as a decoration, like a flexible dividing line, making the gourd bottle appear agile and energetic. The rare green ground famille rose flower pattern gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty is different from other plump decorations, with only orderly and scattered decorations of small flower branches and butterflies, making it overall clear and elegant. In terms of composition, symmetry is often used, with the upper and lower parts having the same main object, such as the famille rose huangdi baoxiang flower gourd bottle and the rouge red gilded gold climbing flower longevity-character numerous flowers pattern gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty. One is to use the baoxiang flower as the main decorative pattern, and the other is to use the longevity character as the main pattern with numerous flowers patterns on the edge. For the processing of decorative characters, there are also unique decorative methods, such as the "寿" (longevity) bottle, which, for one kind, is only painted as the main pattern on the lower part of the larger abdomen, and for the other kind, is to decorate the upper and lower bottle bodies with two-dimension series of the same size, being neat and exquisite.

### 2.2 Animal Series

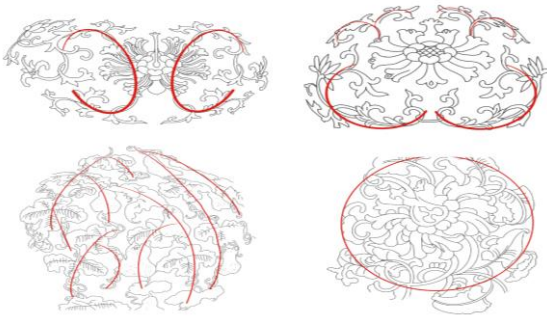
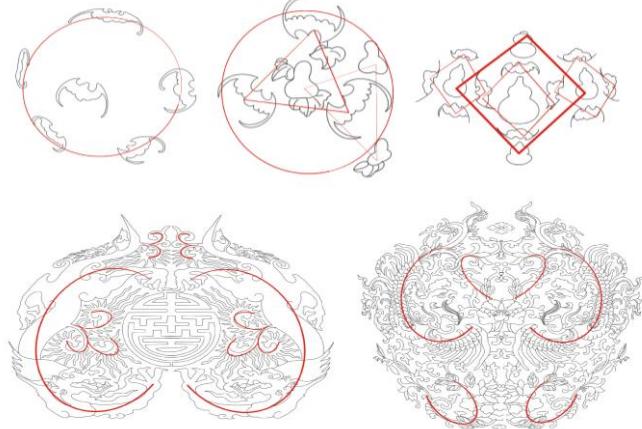
The animal series patterns mainly include gourd bat patterns, dragon patterns, phoenix patterns, baoxiang flowers, entangled branches, hooked lotus patterns, and numerous flowers patterns, which are usually used as auxiliary patterns to decorate the bottle body. Most of the gourd bottles are decorated with gourd bat patterns. One method is to use gourd vines as the main body, with bats arranged in triangular or rhombic shapes around them; another approach is to use bats as the main body of the picture, with a large red bat in the center and small bats surrounded in a circular pattern. Dragon patterns often appear together with the character "寿", commonly known as "double dragons holding longevity". Their decorative feature often includes two powerful dragons clustering around a "寿" character, with the dragon winding in a

symmetrical "C" shape, and the three clusters of dragon whiskers form a group, resembling a "C" shape with three connected roots. Phoenix patterns are often combined with entangled branch flower patterns and baoxiang flower patterns to be drawn on the bottle body. The two spreading phoenixes are in a "C" shape, surrounding both sides of the main object flower.

The blue and white underglaze red fortune, wealth and longevity pattern flat gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty has a unique design modelling. The lower half is a red bat that bites leaves and spreads its wings upwards. The wings are a combination of underglaze red and blue-and-white, and the upper half is decorated with underglaze red dots, forming a tight and loose composition from top to bottom, with a rugged and exotic style. The green ground famille rose melon and bat three-hole gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty is made by spreading gourd vines all over the bottle body, with red bats interspersed in the middle. The red bats in the upper

half of the bottle form a triangular composition, with their heads relatively surrounding the gourd, symbolizing fortune, wealth and auspiciousness. The bat ear small gourd bottle with famille rose continuous melon picture in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, with bats as earrings on the original decoration basis, looks like a doll tied with red braids, being auspicious and festive. The gold ground famille rose flower gourd bottle has a sweet and unique shape like candy. The entire bottle is painted with colorful three-dimensional small gourds such as sky blue, yellow, orange, and purple. The warm colored enamel, illuminated by light, looks like a small glowing candy box. Each small gourd is surrounded by red bats, and the combination of flat bats and three-dimensional gourds adds agility and roundness in symmetry and regularity. The same technique is used to depict the gold outlined line-carving dragon pattern bottle. A powerful and winding dragon rises from the blue ring foot like jumping out of the sea, dominating the world. ("Table 1")

Table 1. Decorative features of animal and plant patterns

Decorative pattern category	Graphic symbol	Features
Flowers and fruits		<p>1. Characteristic of change 1: The vines around the main flower are in a "C" shape, symmetrically opposite.</p> <p>2. Characteristic of change 2: The gourd and melon fruit patterns are in an inverted "Y" shape, spreading throughout the bottle body.</p> <p>3. Characteristic of change 3: The main object, flower branches and leaves surround it with a circular shape.</p>
Animals		<p>Characteristic of change 1: The gourd bat patterns appear in a combination of circular, triangular, and diamond shapes.</p> <p>Characteristic of change 2: In dragon and phoenix patterns, the winding dragon and spreading phoenix are often surrounded by flower patterns in a "C" shape.</p>

### 2.3 Character Series

The main characters used in the decoration of gourd bottles during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty include "寿 (longevity)", "万寿无疆 (boundless longevity)", "万事如意 (may all go well with you)", "大吉 (extremely lucky)", "大吉大利 (the most favorable auspices)", and so on. The character decoration of the two characters mainly involves writing the characters in the form of consecration on a single bottle body or carving them in the form of carved red lacquerware on the bottle body. The four-character phrase character decoration often appears on the combination bottle body, with two bottle bodies forming a pair, one bottle body displaying two characters in a consecration style, and the four characters forming a complete combination.

The "good fortune as one wishes" gourd bottle with the carved red lacquerware entangled-branch lotus holding eight treasures in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty was originally in pair. One bottle is engraved with "吉祥 (auspicious)" and the other with "如意 (as one wishes)". The bottle body is set against the background of the ryoka and brocade, with lotus and eight treasures patterns as auxiliary patterns. This combination of vessel types was very common during the Qianlong reign, and auspicious characters were often used. Carved red lacquerware is a type of carved lacquerware. During the Qianlong reign, most of the carved lacquerware was made in Suzhou, which is fresh and dynamic. The decorative patterns are generally spread throughout the bottle body, delicate and full. The enamel longevity pattern three-section gourd bottle in the Qianlong reign consists of three spheres, with symmetrical and regular patterns. The decorative patterns of the second and third layers are curved and winding downwards, resembling blooming flowers swaying in the wind, beautiful and agile, and the center of the blank space between the two flowers is engraved with a circular "longevity" character. The purple sands reinforced colored auspicious gourd shaped wall bottle from the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, is designed with the main pattern eight treasures patterns on the upper and lower bottle bodies, supplemented by *Passiflora edulis* patterns. The upper and lower bottle bodies are written with the words "大" and "吉" in red, and a three-dimensional yellow bowknot ribbon is painted on the waist.

### 2.4 Figure Story Series

The figure stories mainly include themes such as the celestial being in the wood raft, the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, the boys' dragon boat race, the figure painting, and the sexual painting. In terms of decorative techniques, consecration is often used. One is to select circular or oval frames from the vessel type itself and fill in the decorative image, and the blank space is filled with patterns such as numerous kinds of flowers, tangled branches, and *Passiflora edulis* outside the frames. One is to adopt a parallel layered approach, with each layer telling a different story. And another method is to combine the story scenes into a whole, covering the bottle body.

In the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, the famille rose celestial being in the wood raft square gourd bottle was depicted with scenes of immortals wandering through mountains and rivers. In terms of composition, both images adopt a combination of close-up and long-range drawing methods, with one type of two immortals and four immortals each forming a group, and the other of three immortals being grouped together in front, with one immortal at the back, and the blank space being decorated with symmetrical *Passiflora edulis* patterns. In addition to the special treatment of the immortals' position in the picture, the mountains, rocks, and trees are also combined using visual effects from small to large, from the shallower to the deeper. In addition to immortal paintings, there have also been Western figure paintings. In the yellow-ground enamel Western figure gourd bottle with silk ears from the Qianlong reign, the upper half is consecrated to depict Western scenery, while the lower half depicts the image of a curly haired lady holding a playful yellow haired baby in her arms. The porcelain body foreign color boys dragon boat race gourd bottle from the Qianlong region of the Qing Dynasty adopts the method of drawing the whole bottle body. This gourd bottle is a pair in total. The lower part is several boys on the bank, with different shapes. The upper part is the lake water arranged in abstraction oblique lines, and the distant part is the mountains. In the jade gourd bottle, the sculpture objects are generally concentrated on the upper part of the sphere, winding down in an "S" shape, and being decorated with dragon pattern ears, ruyi ears, and shrink-rings. In order to reflect the gentle and elegant characteristics of jade itself, most jade gourd bottles are often combined with sacred and auspicious decorative themes such as immortals, auspicious

clouds, and lotus. In general, landscape and character series often use three composition methods, one is the consecration style, one is the full bottle story drawing style, and the other is the half bottle story drawing style.



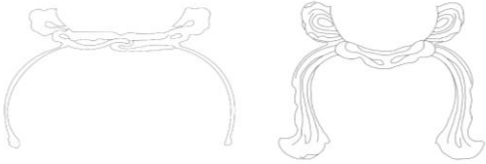
## 2.5 Ribbon Series

As a decorative pattern, ribbon patterns have two decorative techniques. One method is to use a flat decoration technique to draw on the waist or abdomen of the bottle, often in the tying form of dots, with two, three, or four-circle bowknots. Another type appears on the wall bottle decoration, in a three-dimensional form, with a bowknot decoration on the upper half of the bottle belly, and two hanging ribbons sticking tightly to the lower half of the sphere along the edge. The ribbon is originally a winding ribbon, being decorated with different knotting styles on the bottle body. If the decorative area of the ribbon wraps around the bottle body, there is another saying — the bundle pattern. For example, on the enamel gilt entangled branch flower pattern bundle twin gourd bottle form the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, the entangled branch pattern serves as the main pattern, surrounded by winding branches and leaves, and by a large area of blue ribbon on the belly of the bottle, like a small gourd carrying a package.

During the Qianlong reign, in addition to using famille rose, blue and white, and underglaze red as

decorative techniques, there were also exquisite craftsmanship techniques such as gilt, hollowing out, enamel, and carved red lacquerware. During the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, the technique of depicting golden *Passiflora edulis* patterns on the Baltico ground coat was adopted in the Baltico ground gilt *Passiflora edulis* pattern trigeminy gourd bottle. The main pattern is surrounded by a diamond shaped auxiliary pattern. Overall, the bottle body is round, the pattern is continuous in all directions, and the square and circle are combined. The hollowing out process often involves area selection on the main pattern. For example, during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, the famille rose gourd shaped hollowing-out rotary heart bottle and the copper body wire inlay enamel consecrated hollowing-out carved dragon pattern gourd bottle removed the surrounding area of the main pattern and created a hollowing out effect, highlighting the shape of the main pattern. The waist and base of the outer famille rose hollowing-out gourd bottle with blue and white rotary heart inside in the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty are decorated with flower hearts wrapped around a sphere, with upper and lower parts being relatively in a blooming pattern, and the shape is as elegant as a woman wearing a flower skirt rotating. In terms of color matching, it adopts a combination of cold and warm colors, integrating visual experience. ("Table 2")

Table 2. Decorative features of ribbon patterns

Ribbon pattern category	Graphic symbol	Features
Waist ribbon		There are dot shaped ribbons, as well as two or three-circle bowknot shaped ribbons, which are simple and flexible.
Bottle belly ribbon		There are three or four-circle ribbons, and the increase in ribbon area has led to the appearance of the bundle twin gourd bottles.
Three-dimensional ribbon		It mainly appears on the wall bottle, with a three-dimensional bowknot decoration on the side of the bottle.

### 3. DECORATIVE FEATURES

During the Qianlong reign, there were various types of gourd bottles in terms of decorative themes. The flower patterns often include baoxiang flower patterns, *Passiflora edulis* patterns, hooked lotus patterns, entangled branch flower patterns, numerous kinds of flowers patterns, curly grass patterns, wreath patterns, banana leaf patterns, etc. Sometimes they are enlarged as the main pattern, and the vines are symmetrically decorated with the remaining blank bottle body in a "C" shape. In addition to the floral decoration style of "numerous kinds of flowers do not fall to the ground", the continuous pattern of melons decorated on gourd bottles often uses an inverted "Y" shape, which is densely and regularly distributed throughout the bottle body. In animal patterns, dragon patterns and phoenix patterns are often accompanied by bat patterns and toad patterns of the main object. In terms of character decoration, there are "吉祥如意", "寿", "大吉", etc. In terms of decorative techniques, there are various forms such as bottle body spreading method, consecration method, layered decoration method, and story drawing method. In terms of the density of object decoration, there are three different levels: one is based on monochromatic glaze, only displaying rich glaze colors and shapes, without patterns throughout the body; one is the regular and scattered individual patterns on the bottle body, appearing fresh and elegant; one is a complex and gorgeous dense visual sensation, with numerous patterns intertwined, being luxurious. Various decorative techniques often combine with each other, such as flower patterns and plant patterns, character and flower patterns, flower patterns and figure stories, to decorate gourd bottles by combining main and auxiliary patterns.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The gourd has a beautiful meaning of auspiciousness and fortune. In the development of gourd bottles, Emperor Qianlong continuously innovated in the vessel types, resulting in the emergence of trigeminy bottles, hollowing out bottles, and rotary heart bottles. In terms of decorative patterns, first, various flower patterns are used to spread throughout the bottle body, appearing gorgeous and cumbersome, such as entangled branch patterns, *Passiflora edulis* patterns, baoxiang flower patterns, and numerous kinds of flowers patterns; second, using a consecration style, circular, diamond shaped, and irregular blank

spaces are took out from complex patterns to draw landscapes, figures, and stories; third, exquisite craftsmanship is employed, such as carved lacquerware, jade carving, and hollowing out, which are intricate. During the Qianlong reign, the decorative techniques of gourd bottles were diverse, with unique shapes and rich patterns, with multiple auspicious themes, reflecting the rulers' desire for wealth and prosperity for all generations.

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