

# Study on the Changes in the Type of Gourd Bottles During the Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty

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## ABSTRACT

In the Qing Dynasty, gourd bottles had developed into one of the traditional ceramic types, and their beautiful shape and auspicious meaning were loved by various emperors. Numerous scholars have analyzed gourd bottles from different dynasties and compared them from an archaeological perspective, providing a solid theoretical foundation for this study. This study will be based on the historical background of the Qianlong period in the Qing Dynasty. The innovation lies in: the first is to expand the scope of research materials, including not only the typical types that many scholars unanimously agree on, but also adding different texture types that have appeared in auction houses in recent years; the second is to study the changes and characteristics of the shape of gourd bottles from the perspectives of design and aesthetics. Finally, it can be concluded that the design of gourd bottles during the Qianlong period was constantly evolving, with more diverse and diverse vessel types. They had the characteristics of seeking change in common, seeking novelty in change, seeking diversity in novelty, and seeking complexity in diversity. The glaze color was sometimes fresh, refined, and sometimes colorful.

**Keywords:** *Qianlong, Gourd bottles, Shape, Changes.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: GOURD BOTTLES AND GOURD CULTURE

"Gourd (hulu)" is also known as hu, xuanhu, pulu, yaohulu, yuefuhu, changhu, and kuhulu. It is a widely planted melon and fruit plant among the early ancestors of our country. The earliest poetry collection in China, "The Book of Songs", contains a large amount of records about gourds, and the Chinese people's understanding of gourds has been accumulated for at least two thousand years. The gourd can not only be used as an ornamental handicraft or musical instrument, but also has enormous practical functions. On the one hand, the tender leaves and fruits of gourds can be consumed, used as medicine and feed. On the other hand, they can also be used as sowing tools, handicraft tools, fishing gear, household utensils, and even river crossing tools. When using gourds as handicrafts, they can be made into a variety of shapes according to different techniques: tied gourds, knife carved gourds, gourd carvings, needle drawn gourds, and so on.

The ancient people's understanding of everything in the universe was basically classified into two categories: yin and yang, and the gourd were thus associated with the "yin and yang concept" and "reproductive worship". In people's observation of life, gourd has many seeds and strong reproduction ability.

In the Primitive Society with many disasters and low productivity, it was regarded as the object of reproduction worship. In many ethnic groups such as the Yi ethnic group, gourds are regarded as ancestral spirits and worshipped. The "Laozi" says, "Tao generates one, one generates two, and three generates all things. All things bear yin and embrace yang." In the mythology of the gourd, it is often regarded as the ancestor god of the combination of yin and yang, representing everything that is composed of yin and yang. In a certain sense, it has the connotation of "Tao", and the gourd is also known as the "spiritual melon", which can be used for longevity. In Taoist scriptures, the round and hollow shaped gourd is seen as the "pot world", a wonderful world where immortals reside. In the traditional customs of the Han people, the gourd is regarded as a mascot

similar to the dragon, phoenix, and tiger. In the old days, Taoists would always wear the gourd when going out, believing that it could ward off evil spirits and suppress demons. The gourd and the Tai Chi circle are also closely related. Splitting a complete gourd in half into two parts symbolizes that the newlyweds become a unity of male and female opposition, and the two ladles snuggle together like a Tai Chi diagram of bearing yin embracing yang. The gourd jar is one of the eight auspicious items in Buddhism, and it is a Buddhist tool symbolizing auspiciousness.

With the change and development of gourd culture in different periods, ancient Chinese gourd utensils have shown different features: in the primitive society, it is a symbol of women and motherhood; In the slave society, it was used as a ritual vessel and sacrificial vessel; During the Eastern Han and Six Dynasties periods, it represented the hutian wonderland; During the Tang and Song dynasties, they also formed ties with Taoism and Buddhism, becoming one of the magic tools; During the Jin and Yuan dynasties, it

was the emotional and spiritual sustenance of literati; During the Ming Dynasty, it symbolized the "roundness of the sky and the place"; In the Qing Dynasty, it symbolizes "happiness, wealth, and longevity".

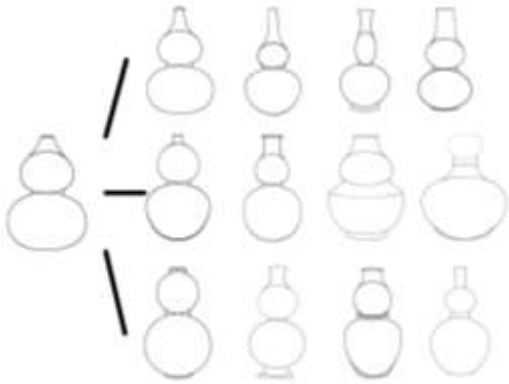
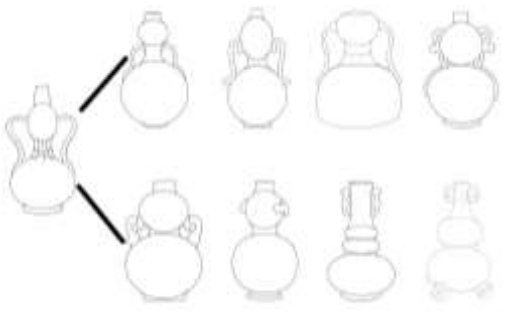
## 2. SHAPE CLASSIFICATION AND GLAZE COLOR

Blue and white, multicolored, pink, and various monochrome glazed porcelain appeared during this period, with monochrome glazes including blue, sky blue, bean green, pink green, apple green, peacock blue, and so on. This study will classify and sort out the types of conventional and irregular gourd utensils from two major aspects.

### 2.1 Conventional Gourd Bottles

Conventional gourd bottles are divided into earless gourd bottles and eared gourd bottles, some of which undergo shape changes based on the basic design, while others undergo changes in earrings. ("Table 1")

Table 1. Characteristics of changes in the shape of conventional gourd bottles

| Conventional gourd bottle category | Legend  | Features   |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Earless gourd bottles              |  | 1. Change feature 1: The bottleneck is getting longer and the ellipse in the upper hemisphere is becoming thinner.<br>2. Change feature 2: The appearance of peach and apple shaped bottle bodies has a lifting effect.<br>3. Change feature three: the upper or lower half approaches a circular shape from an ellipse. |
| Eared gourd bottles                |  | Change feature 1: The placement position of earring design varies.<br>Change feature 2: Earrings have started to undergo simulated design, such as Ruyi ears, red bat Ears, dragon and phoenix ears, monkey embracing peach ears, and so on.   |

### 2.1.1 Earless Gourd Bottles

The basic types of gourd shaped shapes are diverse and have significant differences. The basic shape changes of gourds mainly have three directions: the first is that the upper sphere is continuously reduced, approximating from a circle to an ellipse, developing from a short straight mouth to a long straight neck, and the arc connecting the mouth and the upper hemisphere is pulled upwards, resulting in a beautiful shape. Some gourd bottles have slightly tilted bottle necks; the second is that the upper hemisphere is peach shaped, round and curved upwards, while the lower hemisphere is apple shaped, creating an upward lifting effect. The waist is adjusted according to the characteristics of the bottle body; the third is to preserve the circular shape, approximating the upper or lower half of the gourd shape to a round shape, with little difference between the upper and lower parts.

The Qing Qianlong blue glazed gourd bottle retains the most basic state of gourds, with a double spherical belly, a short neck at the mouth, and an inward waist. The lower sphere appears to be round and thick, while the upper sphere is slightly smaller than the lower sphere, with a harmonious and durable proportion. The Qianlong style enamel blooming butterfly pattern gourd shaped bottle also retains the basic shape of the gourd, and the melon pattern is spread throughout its body. Qing Qianlong's blue glaze, blue and white glaze, and red three pattern small gourd has an apple shaped lower hemisphere and an elliptical upper hemisphere, with an ultra short mouth diameter and a simple and cute shape. One type is of these two types. The Qing Qianlong peacock blue glazed gourd bottle was made by compressing the upper half into a flat oval shape, slightly smaller, and the lower apple shaped bottle was larger and fuller than before. The curved line connecting the mouth and the upper bottle body was slightly larger, with an oblique opening. In addition to the flat elliptical shape of the upper sphere, the upper half of the ellipse is also elongated, and the neck is elongated and slender. The Qing Qianlong yellow gourd bottle has developed its neck from slender to rough, with a more robust and powerful shape. The Qingqian tea powder glazed gourd bottle weakens the spherical feel of the upper and lower parts, elevates the waistline of the bottle body even more, and the upper part of the lower channel is rounded. In addition, the earth yellow glaze color is even thicker.

### 2.1.2 Eared Gourd Bottles

The gourd bottles with ears were a common type of vessel during the Qianlong period. The design of a gourd bottle with ears mainly has two directions: firstly, the earrings are placed at different positions on the bottle body, such as the neck of the bottle mouth, the center of the upper hemisphere, the waist, and so on; The second is to create a realistic design for the earrings, which corresponds to the bottle design, such as dragon patterns, phoenix patterns, Ruyi ears, monkey hugging peach ears, elephant ears, and so on.

The lower part of the Qing Qianlong tea powder glaze ribbon gourd bottles with ears is spherical, and the upper half is elliptical. The ears extend from the middle of the upper ellipse to the lower abdomen in a ribbon like manner, making it agile and exquisite overall. There are also many styles of double ear bottles, some of which use dragon shaped sculptures to climb up the bottleneck; Some are not as light as straps, but are thick and connected to the abdomen or upper half as decorations; Some have their ears tightly attached to the bottle; Some playfully raise their tails. The double ears of the Qing Qianlong blue and white double ear gourd shaped flat bottle start from the middle neck connected from top to bottom and reach the abdomen of the lower hemisphere, which is different from other types of vessels. The Qing Dynasty Qianlong pink purple ground lotus patterned Ruyi ear gourd bottle divides the ears into pink and yellow parts, which are connected separately. The raised tail at the top is coordinated with the root of the bottle at the bottom, which is tightly attached to the bottle body, like a girl's braid. In terms of glaze color, the glaze color of the ears is generally consistent with the color of the bottle body, and there are also cases where the glaze color of the ears differs greatly from the bottle body, making it more prominent and eye-catching. Decal white fruit gourd bottle is a purple clay implement of gourd bottle, with double monkeys as ears. Each monkey holds peach seeds in its arms. The upper part of the gourd is lush with branches and leaves, while the lower part is a standing frog. The feet are supported by the three legs of Baiguo, walnut, and lotus seed, especially the lotus seed inside the lotus seed can move, exquisite and full of childlike charm.

From the overall color of monochromatic glaze, it can be divided into five major units: cyan, blue, yellow, red, and black color. In different glaze color units, varying degrees of control have resulted in

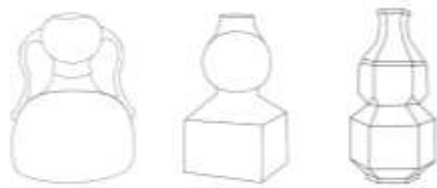
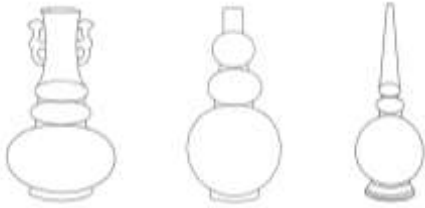


rich cyan visual impairments such as pink green, bean green, and apple green, as well as blue visual impairments such as sky blue, peacock blue, and clear blue. Overall, the regular gourd shape has a variety of shapes, with the upper and lower spheres varying in shape. The short, long, and slanted mouths are naturally matched, and the shape of the vessels is sometimes beautiful and sometimes rich, making it a feast for viewing. On the glaze color, sometimes it is fresh and elegant, sometimes it is

bright and enthusiastic, sometimes it is calm and serene, and rich and colorful.

## 2.2 Special-shaped Gourd Bottles

Special-shaped gourd bottles mainly include flat bottomed gourd bottles, three round gourd bottles, combination gourd bottles, wall vase gourd bottles, etc. ("Table 2")

Table 2. Characteristics of shape changes in special-shaped gourd bottles

| Categories of special-shaped gourd bottles | Legend   | Features   |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Flat bottomed gourd bottles             |     | The bottom is flat and has a cube or hexagonal prism.            |
| 2. Three round gourd bottles               |    | Composed of three balls, the bottom sphere has the largest area. |
| 3. Combination gourd bottles               |  | Including twin gourd bottles and triple gourd bottles.           |
| 4. Wall vase gourd bottles                 |   | Flat hanging on the wall, with a unique design.                  |

### 2.2.1 Flat Bottomed Gourd Bottles

A flat bottomed gourd bottle has a round upper half sphere and a flat bottom lower half sphere; One type is the combination of the bottle body with a cube or hexagonal prism, presenting a distinct

angular shape. The upper half of the Qing Qianlong imitated-ge glazed gourd bottle is elliptical in shape, and the lower part is square in shape, making it simple and unique overall. The lower half of the Qing Qianlong peacock blue glaze embossed flower entangled lotus pattern gourd bottle is a flat bottomed apple shaped bottle with a long waist in

the middle, and the mouth is subtle and blends with the upper half. The Qing Qianlong coral red gold tracing flowers blooming pastel flowers landscape pattern Ruyi ear hexagonal gourd bottle is composed of six distinct rhombic edges, with a pair of Ruyi ears. The coral red bottle body matches the blue glaze Ruyi, with a playful and festive atmosphere.

### 2.2.2 *Three Round Gourd Bottles*

The three round gourd bottle refers to a gourd bottle composed of three circles. The Qing Dynasty Qianlong blue and white eight immortals crossing the sea picture gourd bottle shows in a three ball shape, with an apple shaped shape at the bottom. It is depicted as the Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea, with a round-ball shaped middle and an elliptical upper part, with an angled mouth. The Qing Qianlong soft color flower bottle also appears in a three ball shape, with the difference being that the bottom hemisphere differs greatly from the middle and upper hemispheres, and the mouth is particularly straight and long.

### 2.2.3 *Combination Gourd Bottles*

Combination gourd bottles include twin gourd bottles and triple gourd bottles. In addition to gourd bottles, other types also have eight linked bottles. The form of the triple gourd bottles not only has the type of tightly combined three bottles, but in recent years, there has also been a situation where three gourd bottles are only connected to the abdomen, and the upper part is not fitted.

In the tea powder glaze three-hole bundle gourd bottle, the triple gourd bottle is tied with a belt in the middle of the bottle body. In terms of glaze color, there are both individual glaze colors and colored paintings. The Qing Qianlong imitation official glazed triple gourd bottle is a bean green color, with a round spherical lower hemisphere and an elliptical upper part. The three mouths face upwards, making it unique and unique. The Qing Qianlong imitated official glaze three linked gourd bottles were presented in three different glaze colors. The gourd bottles were only connected on the abdomen, with each individual distributed on top. The glaze colors were blue, red, and white, and the decorative patterns on each gourd bottle were also different.

In addition to ceramic gourd bottles, there are also jade gourd bottles and purple clay gourd bottles. The surface of the white jade carving and

the two immortals gourd bottle with baked patches, with the gourd stem as the lid and two immortals engraved on it. One hand holds a treasure box, and the other holds a lotus flower. The immortal spirit floats up the upper part of the bottle in a auspicious cloud shape, and the overall decoration is in an "S" shape, surrounding the bottle body. The lower half of the white jade big auspicious gourd bottle is in a flat round shape, and the upper part is in a round-ball shape. There are symmetrical semicircular buttons on the buttons, and a pair of live rings is set on the buttons. The ears of the bottle body are deformed from vines, and there are also live rings on the ears. The bottle mouth is equipped with a five bat wing shaped lid, and the upper and lower bottle belly has the word "大吉 (daji, big auspicious)". The Qing Qianlong niebai material set of the three color Fuluwandai gourd bottle also adopts an "S" shaped composition, winding the vines from top to bottom with agility. The lower half of the white glazed squirrel grape gourd bottle is smooth and unmodified in an apple shaped sphere, while the upper half is oval shaped with a curved grape pattern. The decorated squirrels also follow the pattern in an "S" shape, beautiful and holy.

### 2.2.4 *Wall Vase Gourd Bottles*

During the Qing Dynasty, gourd bottles were widely popular, with the emergence of wall bottles hanging on walls. One type only served as decoration, while the other was combined with clock design, integrating aesthetics and practicality. In addition to being square and circular in shape, the wall vase also has a beautiful shape, with the bottle mouth dynamically sloping to the right.

The Qing Qianlong imitation black shark skin clock embedded gourd shaped wall bottle was designed for wall hanging purposes. The overall shape was half gourd shaped, with the lower half being a square shape with clear diamond angles, and the upper half being circular and semi circular, with an oblique slanted mouth. During the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty, there was a pair of blue glazed gourd wall bottles with a dynamic sloping mouth to the right. A gourd vine spread out from the mouth and wrapped around the bottle, surrounded by flying bats. The Qing Dynasty Qianlong powder colored big auspicious gourd wall vase is flat in shape, with a three-dimensional ribbon design at the waist. The upper and lower spheres are each written with the

characters "大 (da, big)" and "吉 (ji, auspicious)", and the font is surrounded by five blue bats.

### 3. STYLING CHARACTERISTICS

During the Qianlong period, gourd bottles had rich shapes in the monochrome glaze section, with a variety of glaze colors. In the bottle body, combinations of spherical, elliptical, apple shaped, peach shaped, square, hexagonal, etc. appear; The length, thickness, and waist length of the neck can also change. In terms of glaze color, there are multiple colors gathered, including pink green, apple green, bean green, and other green systems with single colors; There are blue colors such as peacock blue, sky blue, and clear blue; there are red series such as coral red and clear red; it also includes yellow and tea powder colors. Sometimes the color combination is fresh and elegant, using a unified color scheme; Sometimes a complementary color scheme combining coral red and celadon glaze is used, which is more unique. The eared gourd bottle has flexible changes, mainly focusing on the deformation decoration of the ears: Ruyi ear, dragon pattern, phoenix pattern, vine deformation, etc., changes in placement position, and matching with the color of the bottle. The shape of the special-shaped gourd bottle is not limited to two balls, but there are three balls; Some types of vessels have abandoned rounded shapes and emerged with tough shapes such as cubes and hexagons; Some directly integrate the bottle mouth with the upper half, weakening the visual perception of the bottleneck. In terms of glaze color, there are also various colors, such as the cracking sensation of imitated-ge glaze, the unique color of blue glaze under blue glaze, and the contrast between coral red and blue glaze. In terms of composition, there are common "S" shaped compositions, mainly manifested in vine entanglement, auspicious clouds surrounding, auspicious flowers, etc; Symmetrical composition is often manifested in numerous intertwined patterns, auspicious characters, landscape paintings, etc.; Triangle composition is often manifested in the decoration of melons and bats.

### 4. CONCLUSION

During the Qianlong period, gourd bottles were rich in shape and glaze color. As far as the basic gourd bottle is concerned, its shape is beautiful and smooth, and there is also a rich and honest shape. Overall, the shape is neat and fine, and the craftsmanship level is superb. In addition to

traditional styles, there are also unique and diverse types of vessels, such as flat belly ribbon gourd bottles, upper and lower gourd bottles, triple gourd bottles, hexagonal gourd bottles, gourd wall bottles, and so on. The gourd symbolizes auspiciousness and good fortune. During the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the prosperity of gourd bottles expressed a beautiful wish for generations of continuity, longevity, wealth, and prosperity in auspicious culture.

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