

Analysis of the Spread and Art Form of Spherical Censer from the Tang Dynasty to the Foreign Regions^{*}

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Abstract

The spherical censer produced in the Tang Dynasty have standardized and identifiable art forms. Based on the study of their worldwide cover area, the actual impact of the Tang Dynasty arts and crafts on the development of world art can be specifically analyzed from the microscopic perspective, so as to further enrich the cultural and artistic academic value of the Silk Road. Based on the study of the origin and spread of spherical censer in the Tang Dynasty, this paper further analyzes the art form of spherical censer in foreign regions, by comparing physical form and decorative style, the relationship between the Silk Road and Tang arts and crafts has been analyzed, and the corresponding design principles of creations.

Keywords: Spherical Censer; The Tang Dynasty; The Silk Road; Physical Form; Decorative Style

1 Introduction

Spherical censers in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) have the particularity of multi-scene fusion, and the generation, development, evolution and dissemination path of the art form had the impacts on ancient ornaments, gold and silver craft, ancient mechanics and world art culture, which is of research values. Through the literature review, it could be seen that spherical censer with five functions: accessories, treasure, heaters, domestic decoration and convey of feelings. From modern art perspectives, spherical censers are cross-boundary cultural products, as they can be used in different occasions for different purposes. Their art forms are a blend of Chinese and foreign cultural elements. Gimbals were used, based on gyroscopic principles, to make the bowl inside

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the spherical censer maintain an upright position. The openwork structure design and patterns make the spherical censer more exquisite. However, the existing researches on the spherical censers only focus on the material themselves, lacking the carding of the cultural phenomena behind the art forms and the exploration of the actual influence. This research through the art form for spherical censer in the Tang Dynasty, it could not only interpret the mutual influence between the Tang Dynasty and foreign cultures, but also analyze the specific differences between the east and the west in the aesthetic and cultural needs, and have a glimpse of the development path of art form of spherical censer and the corresponding changes in the ancient arts and crafts environment from a micro perspective.

Among the existing studies on spherical censers of Tang Dynasty, some studies focus on history and archaeology with examples such as “A Study on Gold and Silver Wares of Tang Dynasty” by Qi Dongfang and “Collection of Tang Gold and Silver Wares at Home and Abroad” by Han Wei; some focus on the jewelry art, represented “Chinese Ancient Gold and Silver Jewelry” by Yang Zhishui; a few of them talked about ancient science and technology of “Science and civilization in China” by J-Needham; some zoomed in on the physical structures and the related poems represented by “Spherical Censers of Tang Dynasty” by Shang Gang. Foreign treatises about censer on the field of gold and silver of Tang Dynasty, jewelry art and ancient science technology can be rarely found. Most of the studies put their priority in the physical attribute and structure of spherical censers with their contents overlapping each other. However, “Tang Spherical censers with Openwork Designs and Their Spread in the West” by Ma Wenkuan the focus of worldwide spread of spherical censers blazed a new trail for studies on spherical censers of Tang Dynasty, and also inspired the the research.

Based on the foreign elements of spherical censers and their cultural significance after they were spread abroad, the previous work “Analysis of the Influence from Spherical Censer in Tang Dynasty to the Foreign Countries” [1] focus on the two-way influence between spherical censer in the Tang Dynasty to the foreign art, which has been shown on patterns, incenses used and the spread route – the Silk Road. It examined the longitudinal (time) and horizontal (space) implications of their art forms, and preliminary analyzed the mutual cultural influence between China and other countries. The previous work would be a short paper analyzing the results of preliminary findings.

In this paper, the study of the spread path for spherical censer is further deepened, by research methods of field research, quantitative analysis and drawing auxiliary map, which focus on the analysis of the expression of art form for spherical censer and the reasons of the phenomenon around the world. Data collections from different museums and collection agencies worldwide are very important for this paper.

2 Origin of Spherical Censers in the Tang Dynasty and the Spread Path to the Foreign Regions

According to the Tang Dynasty document “Famen Temple Object Account Tablets” [2], the name and corresponding unearthed object, and the monk Hui Lin, “The Sound and Meaning of the Tripitaka” Volume 6 records spherical censer, used to burn incense, and the material could be copper, iron, gold and silver, the exquisite round work would keep the inside always flat. The description of the concubines is also used to define “spherical censer” to be a spherical metal