

Research on the Management System of Imperial Kiln of Ancient China under Tang Ying

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Abstract: From the end of primitive times of China, the ceramic craft industry had been attached importance by the ruling class. By the time of Yongzheng and Qianlong Period of Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1722-1795), the Imperial Kiln in Jingdezhen reached the peak of development under the supervisor Tang Ying. In the meanwhile, the quality and quantity of the ceramic products made by Imperial Kiln of China had reached a fairly high level. For this reason, the Imperial Kiln of China at that time was called Tang Kiln in memory of Tang Ying. Through the analysis of management aspects of personnel, production and delivery, this research concluded a result that Tang Ying's management liberated the productive forces, improved the production relations, optimized the mode of production, and promoted the marketization of operation as well.

1. Introduction and Dynastic Survey of Tang Yao (Tang Ying's Kiln)

In ancient China, ceramic craft industry was divided into two parts, the civilian kiln and the official kiln. The latter one could be traced to Wu-Di (The Five Emperors) Times (3076 B.C.-2029 B.C.). In classic book *Springs and Autumns of Master Lü*, it recorded Emperor Huang commanded Kunwu to make potteries, [1] and Emperor Shun made potteries by riverside and improved the quality of earthenwares. [2] In Jin Dynasty (A.D. 226-420), the ruling class took part in the regulation and management of handcraft industries, and the central government established Zhenguanshu Office for the management of ceramic craft industry. [3] To Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279) Ciqiku (Porcelain Depot) was established under the administration of Taifusi (Administration Office of Finance). The primary missions of Ciqiku were purchasing white porcelain wares from Mingzhou (today's Ningbo City), Yuezhou (today's Shaoxing City), Raozhou (today's Jingdezhen City), Dingzhou and Qingzhou, and managing ceramic wares in the imperial court.

From Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 1271-1368), institutional, systematic and consistent regulation and administration had begone. In A.D. 1278, Fuliang Ciju (Ceramics Bureau in Fuliang County) based in Jingdezhen was established for managing ceramic craft industry. [4] From then, Jingdezhen became the center of official ceramic craft industry. In Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1644-1911), the Imperial Kiln in Jingdezhen was the largest and most important part of official ceramic craft industry. Held the power of the whole country, and gathered the best craftsmen from everywhere, the Imperial Kiln presented the best quality of ceramic craft of China at that time.

The Imperial Kiln in Yongzheng and Qianlong Period of Qing Dynasty reached the peak of ceramic craft in ancient China. It was mainly due to supervisor and administrator Tang Ying's effort. The Imperial Kiln under his administration is often called *Tang Yao* (Tang's Kiln) in memory of him.

The beginning of Tang Ying's administration of *Imperial Kiln* was up to 1728. As a vice director of Imperial Kiln, he took charge of the specific field of daily management and production. In 1736, Tang Ying became the director of the kiln. And in 1756, Tang Ying died in age 75 shortly after retired.

Table 1 Table Of Tang Ying's Duties

Year	Post of Duty	Place of Office
1697-1723	Officer of Yangxin Hall	Beijing
1723-1728	Councilor of Internal Order Ministry	Beijing
1728-1735	Vice Director of the Imperial Kiln	Jingdezhen
1735-1737	Interim Tax Officer of Huai Custom	Huai'an
1737-1739	Chief Officer of Huai Custom and held a concurrent post of Director of the Imperial Kiln	Huai'an and Jingdezhen
1739-1742	Chief Officer of Jiangzhou Custom and held a concurrent post of Director of the Imperial Kiln	Jiangzhou (today's Jiujiang) and Jingdezhen
1751	Chief Officer of Yue Custom	Guangzhou
1751-1756	Chief Officer of Jiangzhou Custom and held a concurrent post of Director of the Imperial Kiln	Jiangzhou (today's Jiujiang) and Jingdezhen

2. The Personnel Management of Imperial Kiln under Tang Ying

The Imperial Kiln of Qing Dynasty was on the foundation of what it was as in Ming Dynasty. In Ming Dynasty, the kiln workers were treated so unwell that there were several times strikes and riots then. However, The court and government of Qing Dynasty was aware of this situation and made some improvements to avoid the riot of kiln workers. There were three main regulations and policies promulgated by Imperial Kiln:

- 1) Abolishing the regulation of controlling the best craftsmen and forcing them to work for Imperial Kiln.
- 2) Abolishing the policy of Craftsmanship system, and realizing the freedom of craftsmen.
- 3) Keeping a small number of kiln works, and leaving most of the works to civilian kilns with fair price.

When Tang Ying was in charge of the Imperial Kiln, he made a series of further adjustments of personnel management. His principle was liberating productive force and improving production relation. Three new policies was promulgated by Tang Ying:

- 1) Implementing employment. Tang Ying changed the situation that the workers were forced to work in Imperial Kiln, but employed them in fair salaries and respected their willing of work.
- 2) Reduce nonproduction personnel. In Ming Dynasty, the Imperial Kiln had had up to 500 craftsmen and more than 1,000 labors. [5] After Tang Ying's reformation, there were about 300 staffs only. [6] And each of them was clearly aware of his responsibility.
- 3) Introducing the system of rewarding and penalties. Tang Ying offered rewards to hard-working staffs and provided aids to those lived in difficulties.

3. The Production Management of Imperial Kiln under Tang Ying

Under Tang Ying's regulation, the Imperial Kiln produced a large number of porcelain products of complicated technics and high quality. There were 57 kinds of new glazes created in Tang Ying's time. And several types of porcelain products and bionic porcelain sculptures were produced. In conclusion, the Imperial Kiln reached the last peak in history while he was in charge of it, and it was because the following three reasons.

3.1 Tang Ying's Effort on Studying Ceramic Craft.

Tang Ying was not familiar with ceramics until being appointed the position of managing the kiln. In the first three years in Imperial Kiln, he learned and studied hard, and became professional in this field. "In the past, some of craftsmen used to fool me. And I had to be a yes-man. But now it is totally different. It is because I am of high proficiency of clay, glaze, ceramic body and firing", he wrote in *Draft of Letter about Ceramic Craft Industry Management* in the year of 1739.

As a matter of fact, officers including directors of the Imperial Kiln had no need to know very

well about the craft details of ceramic production. Tang Ying was the most professional one among the directors in history.

3.2 Encouraging the Co-operation of Imperial Kiln and Civilian Kilns.

The co-operation of Imperial Kiln and civilian kilns began from Ming Dynasty. It was regarded as an optional choice when the Imperial Kiln could not afford to finish its work on time. However, Tang Ying took it as a method which could complete the production tasks on time with quality and quantity.

There was a record in 21st November, 1743 (Chinese Lunar Calendar), when Tang Ying received the order from the emperor of manufacturing snuff bottles. It was the coldest time in a year so that the porcelain clay was frozen, the Imperial Kiln was closed and kiln workers were on their holidays. Tang Ying gathered civilian kiln workers and made them work overnight. Eventually, the order task was finished on time and the emperor was satisfied with the snuff bottles made by civilian kilns.

This case also showed that the civilian kilns in that time also had a high standard. The Imperial Kiln did not monopolize the best resources and craftsmen.

3.3 Establishing the Team of Consultants of Ceramic Production.

With the efforts of Tang Ying, the Imperial Kiln established a team of production consultants named Changshu Muyou (Advisors of Imperial Kiln Office). According to the historical records, Wu Yaopu was one of the most important team member. In March 1742 (Chinese Lunar Calendar), Wu Yaopu was about to go on the journey to Junzhou (today's Danjiangkou City) and study the craft technology and art of Jun-Kiln there. Moreover, Tang Ying wrote a poem titled *Sending Wu Yaopu to Junzhou in Late Spring*:

*All true men have their ways out of their homes,
But only true friends are always in their hearts.
The success of studying craft depends on your efforts,
And it's all about national treasures of porcelain wares.* [7]

As a result, Wu Yaopu's hard work helped a lot to Tang Ying and the Imperial Kiln for making the copies of Jun-Kiln porcelain glazes after this journey. It was one of the advantages of Tang Ying's trust in the consultants and the friendship between them.

4. The Delivery Management of Imperial Kiln under Tang Ying

4.1 The Management of Delivery to the Court.

Before Tang Ying's time, the products for the emperor and the court of the Imperial Kiln in Qing Dynasty were always delivered in a long path. This path was divided into two parts. Firstly, the products were delivered eastward from Jingdezhen via the path of Chang River, Poyang Lake, Yangtze River and the Great Channel, and finally to Huai'an Custom. It was more than 1,000 kilometers. The products should be packaged again there with wood base and barrels. Secondly, from Huai'an Custom northward to capital Beijing, by the Great Channel. It was about 1,450 kilometers.

Due to the products were delivered to the emperor, there were a lot of soldiers and officers took part in the long trip in case of the safety matters. And it also cost a lot of money and caused so much inconveniences.

Tang Ying wrote a memorial to the throne in 1739. In this memorial, Tang Ying asked the emperor to admit to package the porcelain products in Jingdezhen. So that there was no need to deliver the porcelains to Huai'an anymore. The new plan could save a lot of time and money from delivery. [8]

4.2 The Management of Selling Permission to Market.

Another important change of the management of Imperial Kiln was the permission of selling the defective products to civilians. In Ming Dynasty, the defective porcelains were always broken into pieces and buried. The reason was to keep the design style and technology of Imperial Kiln as a

secret. Otherwise, some of the defective porcelains were stored in the Imperial Kiln and were stolen by some officers and workers of the Imperial Kiln.

Tang Ying wanted to change the situation of the defective porcelain products which had defects only on their surfaces but not in function. There were two ways to deal with those products in Tang Ying's plan:

1) *Send the defective products to Ministry of Internal Order.* The Ministry would store the defective products instead of the Imperial Kiln to avoid the thefts.

2) *Sell the defective products to the market.* The defective but not broken porcelains were needed by many civilians due to its cheaper price. Except the products with royal patterns and symbols, the defective products designed or made by the Imperial Kiln could be sold right there in Jingdezhen.

Especially the latter plan made several effects. On the one hand, the production cost could be salvaged a lot. On the other hand, it promoted the technical exchange between Imperial Kiln and civilian kilns.

5. Conclusion

Under the supervising and managing by Tang Ying, the Imperial Kiln was at the height of its fame then. And it was the last peak of ceramic art and craft in ancient China. From the aspect of personnel, production and delivery, Tang Ying had liberated the production force, improved the relation of production and optimized the mode of production. And the marketing management was also introduced by him, which could bring positive effects to enhance the art and technology of Imperial Kiln. For the great efforts made by Tang Ying, the Imperial Kiln under his management was called Tang Yao in memory of him.

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