

## **The Transformation of Cloisonné in the Qianlong Reign: Focusing on Works in the Collection of the National Palace Museum**

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### **Abstract**

Examples of cloisonné from the Qianlong reign in the Qing dynasty are the greatest in number and most stylistically apparent of the works surviving today. Scholars have attempted to classify this group of cloisonné, but research in the field to date has unfortunately remained at the level of stylistic and form analysis for this period, representing an initial stage without in-depth studies yet. The present effort builds on previous research to first explore the relationship between production and style in examining the cloisonné of this period, clarifying the link between the imperial economy and the development of handicrafts. Next, by combing through and organizing cloisonné in the collection of the Qianlong emperor, stylistic analysis shows how the cultural history of Qianlong cloisonné differs from that of previous eras.

In the Qianlong reign, the court already had a grasp on the firing of cloisonné colors and the import of copper ore. At the same time, gilding technology came under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism and flourished. A combination of geographical and chronological factors, such as the emperor's personal devotion to Tibetan Buddhism and the continued use of cloisonné enamelware from the previous Ming court as a luxury item, led to an increase in the production of cloisonné at the time, the range of use also expanding within imperial life. As production techniques matured and sources for raw materials remained stable, cloisonné of the Qianlong reign reached new heights in terms of varied colors, greater sizes, and spectacular gilding. Moreover, as the Qianlong emperor organized his collection in different formats with curio boxes and the like, cloisonné became one of the crafts selected as such for appreciation at the inner court. Since we do not have any writings by the Qianlong emperor on his views concerning the art of cloisonné, an analysis of the display and collection of cloisonné from the former holdings of the Qing dynasty court allows us to deduce the emperor's views about cloisonné. The results reveal that the Qianlong emperor not only treasured examples of cloisonné with the Jingtai mark in the court collection, he also accorded cloisonné with

the Qianlong reign mark with the same status as the collection standards for painted and Canton enamelware. Among them, European-style cloisonné with inlaid painted enamels, Tibetan Buddhist implements, and cloisonné imitating ancient bronzes and Ming dynasty works were the types most highly appreciated by the emperor.

The results of the present study allow us to better understand the situation concerning cloisonné production in the Qianlong reign and see more clearly how this group of works from the Qianlong reign continued previous art forms, at the same time integrating new and different elements from Western, Tibetan, Chinese, and Manchurian culture, yielding the richness and diversity of types at this time. Examining different aspects, such as religious beliefs, imperial life, and late Ming aesthetics, shows how they influenced the Qianlong emperor to create new heights for cloisonné.

**Keywords:** Qianlong, cloisonné, Jingtai cloisonné, Western enamelware, Tibetan Buddhism

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)