

# Historical Changes and Contemporary Innovation in the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets

Lunhan Dong<sup>1,2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yongning Secondary School, Quanzhou, China

<sup>2</sup> University of Glasgow, Bangkok, Thailand

## Email Address

19729337@qq.com (Lunhan Dong)

\*Correspondence: 19729337@qq.com

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## Abstract:

Dehua ceramic tea sets have a long history. Ceramic tea sets have their own lineage of development in terms of mould with advantages in the creation of both white and blue porcelain as a base, and have undergone a more complete arc of development in terms of materials, functional classification, colour and iconography. However, their mould shows a lack of drive for innovation, with very few new forms developed. This paper summarizes the characteristics of Dehua ceramic tea sets in terms of mould by looking back at historical texts, and explores the path of transformation of Dehua ceramic tea sets mould with the characteristics of the emerging era today.

## Keywords:

Dehua Tea Sets, Dehua Ceramics, Mould, Ceramic History, Paths to Innovation

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## 1. Introduction

Ceramics carry the collision of different cultural values and artistic inspiration from the East and West. However, after entering the 21st century, Dehua ceramic tea sets have also gradually fallen into the predicament of insufficient innovation and narrowing consumer groups. Despite their long history, local policies and industrial advantages, and the continuation of traditional craftsmanship and mould inheritance, their have become a consensus that Dehua ceramic tea ware has gradually lagged behind emerging cultures and markets. [1] This paper explores the contemporary direction and path of innovation in the mould of Dehua ceramic tea ware by looking back at its history, summarising its characteristics and inheritance factors, and combining it with the development connotations of the current era.

## 2. Historical Changes in the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets

Dehua has a long history in the ceramics industry and has been known as one of the three major porcelain capitals in ancient times, along with Jingdezhen and Liling. The natural geographical and historical conditions of Dehua ceramics are rich, and the unique texture, colour and other conditions of Dehua ceramics all originate from the

special porcelain clay deposits in Dehua, where “Porcelain clay ore has a high silica content, contains less special qualities, excellent texture, bright white, finely ground and bleached, and can be made directly without the need to mix other raw materials.”

### ***2.1. The Mould Characteristics of the Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets of the Tang Dynasty***

The beginning of more formal production of porcelain in Dehua dates back to the Tang dynasty. At this time, Dehua produced mainly celadon. [2] In terms of mould lines, ceramic tea sets of the Tang dynasty were dominated by voluptuous, curved lines. This is related to the fact that the aesthetic of Tang society was based on the beauty of plumpness. [3] The overall lines are full and well-proportioned, with “roundness” being a fundamental feature. [4] In terms of motifs, totemic imitation, ecological imitation and plain designs are the main ones, and the aesthetic is simple and generous. The patterns with details are mainly designs of plant, flower and animal motifs.

### ***2.2. The Mould Characteristics of the Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets of the Song Dynasty***

The Song dynasty was a period of rapid development for the Dehua ceramic industry. Tea calendars were made with thicker walls during this period to allow for more froth to be retained. In addition, the green and grey glaze, the soy-brown glaze as well as the black glaze had been developed at the Long Kiln in Pinglun, Gai De bowl in the Southern Song dynasty.

### ***2.3. The Mould Characteristics of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets of the Yuan Dynasty***

During this period of the Yuan dynasty, white porcelain had become a major feature of Dehua. The deepening of links between Quanzhou and the Southeast Asian countries led to the emergence of Islamic religious culture in Dehua ceramics at this time, reflected in the patterns and decoration. [5]

### ***2.4. The Mould Characteristics of the Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets of the Ming Dynasty***

The Jiajing and Wanli years of the Ming dynasty are considered to be the peak of Dehua white porcelain. In terms of mould, the Ming emperor himself ordered a reform of the tea-drinking model, which led to a simplification of the mould of tea sets in this period. [6] Tea sets of the Ming dynasty can be broadly divided into tea-drinking functions, water-boiling functions, tea-washing functions, and storage functions. [7]

### ***2.5. The Mould Characteristics of the Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets of the Qing Dynasty***

The scale of the porcelain-making industry in Dehua during the Qing dynasty was very large. Dehua white porcelain is still not to be underestimated, and the overall texture of the tea sets at this time is fine and of high quality. This is related to the content of potassium oxide in the white glaze of the kilns at which Dehua made its ceramic tea sets, and its ability to enhance the lustre and delicacy of white porcelain. [8]

### ***2.6. The Mould Characteristics of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets in the Republic and After the Founding of China***

The Republican period set the tone for the mould nature of many modern Dehua ceramic tea sets. As for the patterns, due to the development of science and

technology, the patterns and motifs of this period were presented with a high-grade level of refinement, such as the 1980 tea cups made in Dehua, which used Qi Baishi's ink shrimp design and were sold at home and abroad for their exquisiteness.

### ***2.7. Historical Characteristics of the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets***

After the founding of China, a fully mature system was formed. In terms of mould, the trend was towards refinement, with individual teacups showing a tendency towards high-end; in terms of colour, white porcelain gradually became the main line of colour in Dehua ceramics, and in modern times it has completely established its position as the world's best; in terms of pattern, since the Tang and Song dynasties, the application of plant and animal patterns in tea sets was formed, and later on, landscape, character and religious patterns were developed; in terms of material, from the early Tang dynasty a single celadon was used. After the founding of the state, heat-resistant ceramics, semi-porcelain and purple pottery appeared one after another; the vigorous development of pottery was also vigorously carried out after the founding of the state.

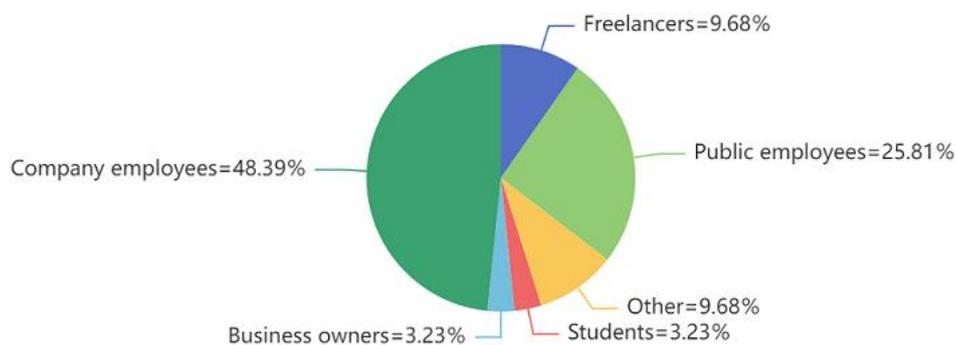
## **3. The Development Dilemma of the Mould Nature of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets**

### ***3.1. The Current State of Development of the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets***

At present, Dehua has established three Taobao towns as well as more than ten Taobao villages, combining ceramic trade with local urban construction to form a complete industrial chain. In 2018, the value of electronic trade in Dehua County was as high as 10.63 billion yuan, with sales of 6.85 billion yuan. [9]

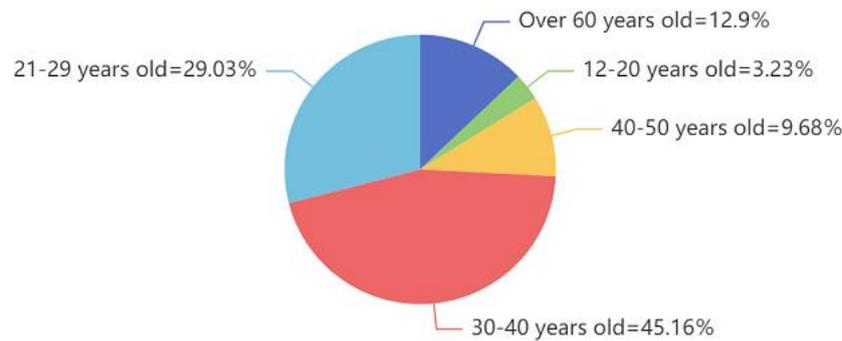
### ***3.2. Deficiencies in the Mould Innovation of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets***

The Dehua ceramic teaware industry is still essentially a profit-oriented, market-driven business activity, so the ultimate goal of creation, innovation and production is to make the industry better and to make Dehua ceramic tea sets more popular with a wider audience. The following chart shows the composition of consumers' occupations in this questionnaire.



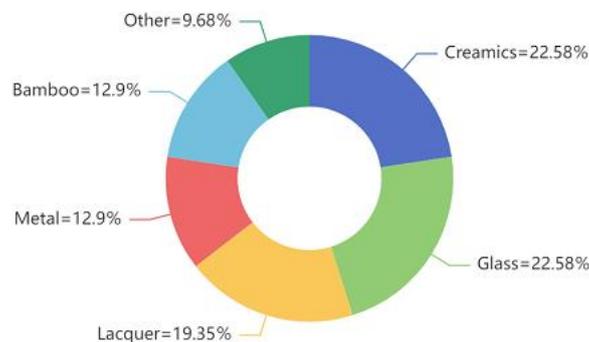
***Figure 1.*** Analysis of the occupational composition of consumers in the questionnaire.

As can be seen, business and public employees make up the majority of the workforce, while freelancers and students make up a very small percentage. The specific age structure is shown in the following chart:



**Figure 2.** Analysis of the age composition of consumers in the questionnaire.

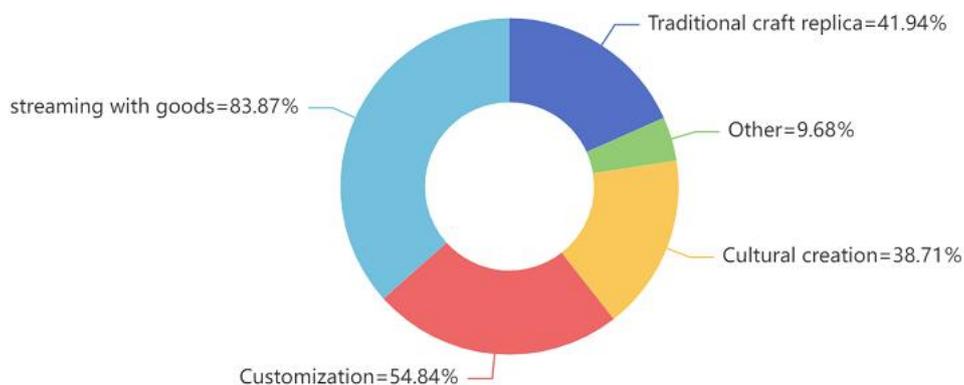
The younger age group is still a minority, but this may also be due to the fact that the main purchasing channel for the under 30s is the internet. Secondly, the increase in the number of different materials has led to a decline in the competitiveness and market share of ceramic tea sets.



**Figure 3.** Graphical analysis of the material composition of tea sets purchased by consumers in the questionnaire.

Another reflection of this is that 45.16% of consumers are drinking tea with their meals. According to the questionnaire for producers/operators, 56.67% of the 30 ceramic practitioners involved in the survey had their production units producing porcelain, mainly Buddha statues and sculptures, while only 16.67% had daily use porcelain.

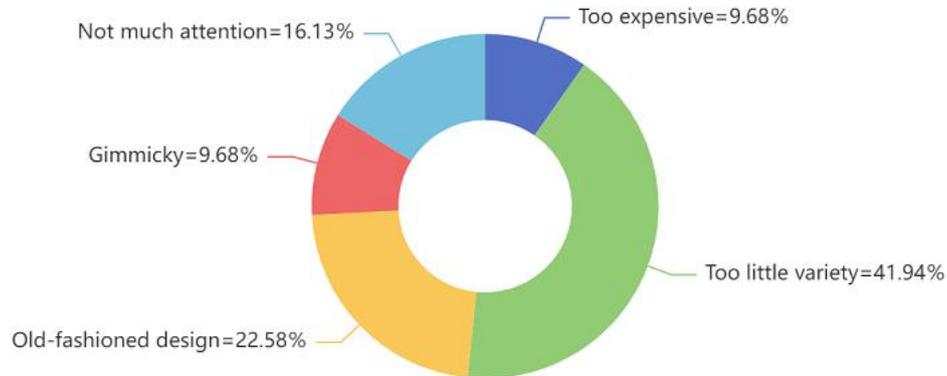
In addition, new distribution channels as well as models have become absolutely dominant, see the following chart:



**Figure 4.** Analysis of the composition of consumers' willingness to purchase types of tea sets in the questionnaire

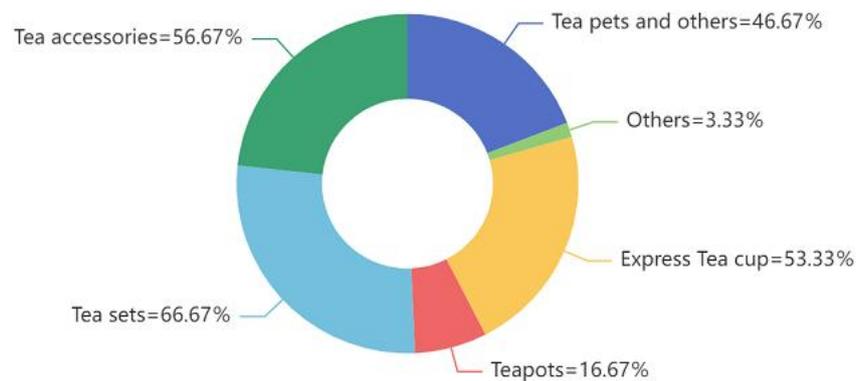
Of the 30 companies I researched in the same period, 19 still use physical sales as their main sales channel. Only 2 companies have internet sales as their core. In the “whether to choose the brand” survey, 87.1% of the population chose “will focus on

the brand”, which hit the pain points of the Dehua ceramic tea industry. In addition, in the question “Have you ever bought a Dehua ceramic tea set”, 22.58% of the population answered “I don’t know if it is made in Dehua”. Finally, the lack of variety is still a chronic problem. The percentage of defective choices of tea sets currently on the market in the eyes of consumers is as follows”



**Figure 5.** Analysis of the composition of defects of commercially available tea sets as perceived by consumers in the questionnaire.

“Too little variety” has become the main consumer's eyes ceramic tea set defects, in addition, “old-fashioned design” “fancy” and “too expensive” are also the main reasons. From the practitioner’s point of view, the types of tea sets recently produced by his unit are mainly as follows:



**Figure 6.** Analysis of the types of tea sets produced by the practitioners in the questionnaire.

In the survey for this study, it was found that the market in Dehua is dominated by traditional shapes and patterns and colour combinations. The older generation of producers and designers have a distance in accepting new things, but those with a younger cultural background are reluctant to return to investing in the design and innovation of tea sets.

### 3.3. Factors Influencing Innovation in the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets

The consumer market for ceramic tea sets has seen a narrowing of the population. Firstly, one of the most important factors influencing the innovation of the mould of Dehua ceramic tea sets is the talent. [10] The second influencing factor is the cost of inputs. The development of a new style or mould of ceramic tea set, in terms of production, firstly affects the wages of the workers, thus increasing the input costs of the operator.

## **4. An Innovative Path to the Mould of Dehua Ceramic Tea Sets**

Many traditional porcelain-making techniques and creative ideas need to be passed on to the people of today. However, while there is a lack of talent willing to carry on traditional craftsmanship, it is not an effective development path to remain in the “comfort zone” of the market and complain about the “downturn” in the market.

### ***4.1. Policy Path: Promoting Talent Acquisition and Market Protection***

The Dehua government has invested a great deal of money in the introduction and training of talent, but it is necessary to strengthen the concept of local intellectual property protection in Dehua and the implementation and introduction of relevant local regulations, so as to create an environment for the innovation of ceramic tea sets mould and to protect the legitimate rights and interests of input developers.

### ***4.2. Conceptual Path: Adherence to Traditional Craftsmanship and Conceptual Innovation***

Dehua ceramics still has many unique natural advantages at the present time. In addition, Dehua also has an innate accumulation of experience in the firing methods and techniques of various types of porcelain. As such, these excellent traditions that have characterised the development of the ceramic industry in the Middle Ages for thousands of years should be upheld. A conceptual shift to meet the aesthetic and functional demands of the new century.

### ***4.3. Model Path: Cultural Addition to Ceramic Tea Sets***

With new types of marketing such as “Li ZiQi” and “ChaYan YueShSe” and the spread of new internet culture, the “Internet+” model can grasp the latest market dynamics. This will further promote the transformation of ceramic tea sets in terms of their mould nature in response to the times and the ability to quickly grasp the new cultural vane, thus promoting the transformation of ceramic tea sets.

### ***4.4. Technology Path: Diffusion and Use of Advanced Technologies***

The application of high technology in this context has the following implications: firstly, it reduces the cost of development and innovation; secondly, it increases the efficiency of development and innovation; and thirdly, it opens up more diverse development paths and mould directions.

## **5. Conclusions**

In terms of future mould classification, Dehua’s ceramic tea sets should be further integrated into the lifestyles of a wider group of people. In terms of colour, Dehua’s traditional strengths in white porcelain and celadon should be relied upon to develop more new colour presentations, and only when the development and application of colour has matured will it be possible to offer consumers a wider range of choices.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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