



Art-Historical Action Protocol (English)

1) Title

Imperial square-section vase with irises and peonies on a relief “brocade/pearl” ground. Yongzheng mark and period (1723–1735), Qing dynasty.

2) Abstract

This is a rare square-section bottle vase of the early eighteenth century, thinly potted, with turquoise interior glaze and overglaze famille-rose (fencai/yangcai) enamels. The principal décor is a luxuriant spray of irises and peonies with a hovering butterfly, set against a pale blue **brocade ground** (jindi) combining a reserved **key-fret lattice** and raised yellow rosettes (so-called **pearl ground**, zhudi). The neck and shoulders bear lotus scrolls on yellow and turquoise bands; the foot is encircled by a lanceolate leaf frieze with dividing borders. The base carries a neatly written **four-character Yongzheng reign mark** (雍正年製) in underglaze blue within a square cartouche over a turquoise glaze. Potting, palette, border grammar and enamelling quality align with imperial Jingdezhen production of the Yongzheng reign.

3) Keywords

Yongzheng; Qing dynasty; imperial kilns; famille-rose / fencai / yangcai; brocade ground; pearl ground; key-fret (leiwen); iris; peony; butterfly; four-character reign mark.

4) Object

- **Form:** Square-section bottle (fangping) with cylindrical mouth and circular foot ring; crisp arrises.
- **Dimensions:** Substantial cabinet/presentation size (exact measurements not provided).
- **Body & Technique:** Hard-paste porcelain; interior coated with turquoise/aquamarine glaze; exterior painted in famille-rose enamels with fine sepia/iron-red pencilling and soft tonal shading.
- **Ground:** Pale blue **jindi** with reserved **key-fret** lattice and elevated yellow pearl-rosettes, yielding a woven textile effect.
- **Primary decoration:** Naturalistic **peonies and irises** on tall stems; **butterfly** in flight as a compositional counter-point.
- **Ornamental registers:** Yellow lotus scroll at the neck; turquoise foliate scrolls on the shoulders; basal frieze of lanceolate (banana) leaves above dividing borders.
- **Mark:** Four-character seal-script **Yongzheng nian zhi** in underglaze blue within a square panel on a turquoise-glazed base.
- **Constructional features:** Even wall thickness; cleanly finished lip; unglazed biscuit footrim with natural wear.

5) Methodological Basis

Stylistic and technical examination of potting, glaze and enamel build-up; iconographic reading of floral and insect motifs; comparison with published Yongzheng yangcai pieces featuring **brocade/pearl grounds** and square-section forms in the Palace Museum, V&A, British Museum and the Met; assessment of border grammar and reign-mark morphology against standard imperial examples.

6) Main Observations

- **Ground & borders:** The blue **brocade ground** integrates a reserved **key-fret** diaper with raised yellow rosettes (**pearl ground**), producing a tactile, light-catching surface; framing bands include meanders, lotus and ruyi-derived motifs—devices typical of early-Qing imperial border grammar.
- **Flower painting:** Three large **peony** blooms shaded from white-pink to plum, and a ribbed **iris** with yellow beards; cool green foliage with subtle veining. Sepia linework and translucent washes create volume—hallmarks of high-grade Yongzheng famille-rose.
- **Insect:** A lemon-yellow **butterfly** with pencilled antennae and veining animates the field.
- **Shoulders & neck:** On yellow, a tight lotus scroll with pink rosettes; on the shoulders, turquoise ground with foliate/berry scrolls.
- **Foot zone:** **Lanceolate (banana) leaves** on yellow, separated by orange/black fillets.
- **Interior & base:** Continuous turquoise glaze; square **four-character Yongzheng mark** in well-proportioned seal script; biscuit footrim exhibits natural wear consistent with firing and age.

7) Interpretation

- **Symbolism:** Peony (**mudan**) denotes wealth and rank; **iris** conveys refinement and spring purity; the **butterfly (die)** signals joy and, by homophone with 耄 (*dié*), blessings of longevity in advanced years. The ensemble reads as an auspicious rebus of prosperity and well-being suited to palace display.
- **Framing logic:** The key-fret and pearl-dot brocade act as a protective, textile-like field that disciplines the surface and heightens the delicacy of the floral painting—an aesthetic closely associated with **Yongzheng** taste (formal restraint paired with painterly subtlety).
- **Style & significance:** The conjunction of **fangping** form, turquoise interior, refined fencai palette and brocade-pearl ground is characteristic of the Yongzheng court's programme of elegant innovation in enamelled porcelain.

8) Conclusion

Attribution: Imperial kilns at Jingdezhen, **Yongzheng mark and period (1723–1735)**. The quality of potting, the distinctive brocade/pearl ground, border grammar, famille-rose technique and the well-drawn four-character seal-script mark support a court manufacture at the highest level. The vase is a rare high-court work of the early eighteenth century.

9) References

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- ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4867-9074>.