

## Maritime Silk Road and Cultural Exchange and Dissemination of Chinese and Western Artifacts: From the Perspective of Porcelain Trade

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### Abstract

Porcelain is the core competitiveness between China and Western trade and representatives of Chinese artifacts. In 16<sup>th</sup> century the world’s marine trade from the Portuguese made porcelain become an important link between the East and West culture, in the five hundred years of the sea Silk Road exchange process, porcelain trade promotes the spread of Chinese culture to the world, to build a porcelain culture circle which affects the world. But with the success of European imitation of Chinese porcelain and the development of the industrial revolution, Chinese porcelain which once led the world’s advanced cultural trend faded out of the world trade stage. China, once the porcelain export country, began to import porcelain from Europe and America. Porcelain, which is the representative of Chinese culture, began to be both a reflection of Chinese culture and economy in the context of globalization. It is also an epitome of the awkward position of Chinese artifacts in the process of modernization. Under the Pre-modernization and modernization contexts, porcelain trade embodied the national identity and cultural identity.

**Key words:** Porcelain culture circle; Local; Culture identity

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### INTRODUCTION

The Silk Road on the Sea originated in the Qin and Han Dynasties around 200 BC, and the original trade and cultural exchanges were mainly in Japan and North Korea in East Asia. Due to restrictions on navigational and economic conditions, until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Silk Road was expanded to the east coast of Africa and influenced by the trade of artifacts to the culture and living habits of the Middle East and Africa. After the establishment of the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He’s voyage flourished the official maritime Silk Road trade. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal and Spain opened direct maritime routes to trade with the East and extended the Silk Road to the world. In the long-term trade, China’s artifacts, as a representative of Chinese culture and economy, transported to the world affect the European cultural habits and lifestyles. But this up to 500 years of maritime trade is an European-led economic and cultural exchange system.

Chinese porcelain, as the representative of the Chinese artifacts, takes the Chinese consumer attitudes, cultural beliefs, social systems, etc. to the world, an important medium for cultural exchanges between China and the West. Compared with silk and tea, porcelain is more of Chinese cultural characteristics, but also because of porcelain fragile characteristics, a large number of porcelain is transported through the sea silk to the world, so the sea Silk Road is also known as the ceramic road. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century originating in the Sino-Western porcelain trade, great changes took place in the European life and social development. But by the end of the nineteenth century, European society was almost no

longer imported Chinese porcelain, and by the twentieth century, a large number of exquisite European porcelain began selling well in China's upper class and big cities. Porcelain, a symbol of Chinese culture in the context of globalization trade bring in such a large contrast. The nation became more powerful behind the changes and the right to speak and the daily aesthetic culture changes are the core factor.

At present, the academic circles have carried out a series of studies on ceramic trade and cultural exchange, and have achieved certain results. In the export porcelain, many scholars studied the porcelain trade exchanges, and analyzed the different historical period of Sino-Western trade, but this research more focused on export porcelain, and ignore the cultural identity behind the object. This paper explores the national identity and cultural identity behind the changes of porcelain culture in different contexts from the pre-industrial civilization period to the development of modern industrial civilization.

In the first stage, the Chinese porcelain culture has a relative advantage of the right to speak, the development of European civilization had a certain impact; but industrial civilization until today, the Western modern civilization has dominated the direction of world cultural development, and then affect the Chinese culture. Why is this kind of transformation and how to find out the way out of Chinese culture in the contemporary context is the main content of this paper. The globalization of the author's discussion here refers not to the globalization of the modern trading system that has been built after the cold war, but to the beginning of the discovery of the new continent by the European explorers, and the formation of the world trade system, including cultural exchanges and spread in the pre-modern and modern societies.

## **1. PORCELAIN TRADE IN THE PRE-MODERN CONTEXT AND THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST**

In 1497 Vasco da Gama's fleet entered the Indian Ocean through the Cape of Good Hope, began a direct trade between China and Europe, and opened the curtain of world globalization. In 1517, the Portugal ambassadors to China requested the establishment of trade between China and Portugal trade, and in 1534 achieved normal trade. Since then, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom has made the right to maritime trade, opened the Chinese and Western trade and cultural exchanges. Although in the early porcelain trade, we cannot count out the clear figures, but the number is amazing. Only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch East India Company and the Chinese porcelain trade reached an astonishing 11 million pieces (Volker, 1954, p.218). After 50 years of 1720 Sino-British

porcelain trade, the British sales of Chinese porcelain were more amazing and reached nearly 30 million pieces of porcelain, and brought huge trade profits (Le, 1974, p.4), although in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the tea became the absolute demand for Chinese goods, but from the trade volume, the porcelain is still an important item in the Sino-Western trade. A large number of marine shipwreck archaeological excavations from another level proved the prosperity of Chinese and Western porcelain trade. In 1752 the Dutch East India Company "Gite Mosson" shipwreck in 1985, discovered a total of 150,000 pieces of Chinese Qing Dynasty Qianlong porcelain. 1775 sinking of Swedish "Goteborg" salvaged porcelain out of 500,000, and these are just one-third of the number of sunken porcelain. In 1822, the Nanyang "Taixing" in 1999 salvage, found a total of 350,000 Chinese porcelain (Wu, 2003, p.37). The King of Poland, Augustus II has more than 57,000 Chinese porcelain, he used 127 heavily armed guards in exchange for 127 Chinese porcelain from Prussia Frederick. William I, which interpreted Chinese porcelain was the most popular. But the Augustus II is not alone, the French King Louis XIV and British George IV are also almost obsessed with the Chinese porcelain collection. Chinese porcelain has also become a symbol of status. For the European aristocratic family, entertaining guests with Chinese porcelain tableware and tea, is a symbol of identity and strength. Many aristocrats use Chinese porcelain vases and porcelain sculptures to decorate their own rooms, highlighting the distinctive taste of the owner. Many people even think that porcelain can detoxify, and even wake up the lost soul. Italian famous painter Giovanni Bellini's paintings "gods feast" in the three blue and white decorative porcelain is a symbol of holiness. Exquisite style and beautiful decoration made the European community more crazy with Chinese-made porcelain, porcelain is beyond the political and historical representatives of a global culture. Even when Europeans were able to produce, they began to imitate Chinese porcelain at the beginning. "The vast majority of porcelain produced in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century seemed to be made of Chinese porcelain in terms of skill, shape, color, pattern, etc., especially in the Netherlands." (de Kebd, 1984, p.218)

Under the influence of artifacts, European society began to be interested in Chinese traditional culture and triggered a trend of "Chinoiserie" that lasted more than a century. Europe entered the period of Chinese culture. German classical philosopher Leibniz (2002, p.456) praise the Confucian culture: "We used to believe that in this world there are more perfect than our ethics, the more progressive national existence, and now from the East to China, So that we awaken." Under his influence, Hegel, Schopenhauer and other philosophical ideas are also affected by Chinese culture. Voltaire (2002, p.456) praised the Chinese culture and political system more, "for

the Chinese people's advantages, even if not five-body cast, but at least we can recognize the organization of the empire is the world's best." Altai's culture from China has risen to Chinese politics, arguing that Chinese politics and state organizations are the best, reflecting the identity of China's countries behind it. In addition, European missionaries and philosophers translated a large number of Chinese works, especially by the French missionary Duhard's "Chinese empire" as the representative. These classic works were accompanied by Chinese porcelain into Europe thousands of households, so that a large number of European people accepted the Chinese culture. We can find that it is in only after a period of time when the Chinese porcelain was input to Europe that aroused the European society of Chinese culture praise. Artifacts carrying cultural functions began to play out, the European society had a certain impact. At the same time, the introduction of culture makes Western society to accept the Chinese artifacts, and formed the interaction of artifacts and culture.

A great demand for porcelain and high profits stimulated the process of development of porcelain in Europe, especially for porcelain fanatical Augustus II. Through his strong support, Germany finally burned a similar kind of white porcelain in 1708, and began the history of independent development of European porcelain. But Augustus II understands the success of burning means that high profits, so absolutely prohibit developers to leave Meissen's factory. The real transmission of Chinese porcelain technology to Europe is the French missionary Yin Wuxu (Père Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles), he observed and learned in Jingdezhen in china with more than 10 years, in 1712 and 1721 he wrote to the European Jesuit, in this letter he described the porcelain production methods in details, which triggered the whole of Europe to find kaolin frenzy, and eventually fired successful porcelain. The successful firing of European porcelain and the development of the industrial revolution, Chinese porcelain sales in Europe stalled, accompanied by the Chinese culture is no longer accepted by the Europeans. Therefore, in a sense, porcelain is a symbol of Chinese culture, the Europe and the world's acceptance of Chinese culture began with the acceptance of Chinese artifacts.

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## 2. PORCELAIN TRADE AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

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Owing to the success of its own ceramic firing, Europeans can accord to their own cultural characteristics to produce in line with national culture and aesthetic needs of porcelain, which reduces the demand for Chinese ceramics. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the world's most critical period of globalization, China's ceramic industry due to

the reduction of export porcelain, lost the opportunities to exchange with the world. In 1792, the British commander Macartney visited China, brought the British porcelain. When asked about the characteristics of Chinese and British porcelain, the British think they have their own advantages.

And especially pay attention to Tebai Yao porcelain, watch for a long time, ask me: which is better Chinese porcelain or your porcelain? Our China is famous for export, if the porcelain is not well-done, the ambassador will never bring them to the emperor. But the merchants ship to Guangdong every day to bring a large number of porcelain and sell them, which proved that your porcelain is welcomed by Chinese, but the price is high, so we cannot judge them and rank them. (Liu, 2006, p.68)

The British mission brought their porcelain to prove that the British had entered into the relatively mature porcelain production stage. In 1851, the British held the world Expo, the history of mankind began to enter the era of large-scale production. During this period, the European porcelain production took a scientific temperature control and material analysis, and cultivates a large number of ceramic modern science and technology talent. Germany Mai Sen porcelain factory in order to improve the level of painting, established their own school, training professionals. In terms of glaze, Europe can produce more white porcelain than Chinese porcelain; in the picture and modeling, the Europeans began to innovate to produce a more beautiful picture, richer porcelain. In this period, Jingdezhen, the center of porcelain industry, Jingdezhen porcelain quality is far from being able to compare with Europe, the status of ceramic production power has been challenged. The greater threat to China's porcelain production is that with the spread of the machine manufacturing industry in Europe, porcelain production from the manual era into the era of large machines, porcelain decorative process from hand-painted into a decal. Porcelain with neat picture and white glaze were sold in the world, and even into the Chinese market, and caused concern in the community. "And foreign porcelain input turns the overwhelming trend, China is famous for porcelain but its market is filled with the foreign porcelain. We can see that the industry is decadent and the products are not good." (Zhang, 1930) to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan and Europe started selling porcelain in China.

Compared with traditional Chinese porcelain, European porcelain is more white, uniform picture. Because of the strict inspection, porcelain is flawless. In terms of porcelain ornaments, the picture of Chinese porcelain is still the traditional picture, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China's social changes are surging, the upper and young people can accept the new type and decoration. Relative to Chinese porcelain with straw packaging unsanitary, Europe and the United States porcelain is exquisite packaging which can cause social resonance. The upper class in Shanghai, Beijing, Hankou and other

cities like more fine packaging porcelain, such as soot cylinder and so on. In addition, the introduction of the European lifestyle also brings a new type of porcelain, which was lacking of traditional Chinese porcelain, such as coffee set, which is precisely the symbol of social life luxury at that time.

Basically, at that time, European and American have the right to speak, and the traditional Chinese culture becomes a symbol of backwardness, naturally porcelain which represent Chinese culture is a symbol of backwardness. During the Republic of China, once the porcelain exporting countries began to import porcelain in Japan and Europe. According to Jianghai customs statistics, "from January to September, the number of foreign porcelain imports is amazing, the value is 291,773 customs unit."<sup>1</sup> Even once the symbol of Chinese porcelain Jingdezhen is also in trouble.

The porcelain is not made to the society needs, which are old style and not improved so that the porcelain is not welcomed by the world. Therefore, the national porcelain is gradually knocked down, especially in Jingdezhen which sell porcelain best, gradually get into the trouble.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the modern states also believe that China's tradition is a symbol of backwardness.

Interestingly, just as European accepted the Chinese culture, In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, China first thought that the artifacts lagged behind the Western society, Chinese need to learn from the West, But in this period European artifacts is not the traditional sense of Chinese handicrafts or other works of art, but technology-led modern vessels, guns and machines. But the Chinese soon discovered that we lag behind because of the backwardness of culture-dominated technology and began a large-scale introduction of Western culture. And then under the influence of this culture, began to accept all aspects of Western artifacts and lifestyles, and this effect has continued until today. And in this process, the way Europe has accepted the Chinese artifacts and culture is amazingly similar.

### 3. THE EXCHANGE AND INTEGRATION BEHIND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Fernand Braudel, a founding father of the French yearbook, put forward the "long-term theory", that is, "the social sciences are engaged in observing and thinking about the whole time in the long-term theory." (Braudel, 1987, p.119) He believes that there are many factors in the development of social history, from a longer period of time and a broader perspective to explore social development will help a more clear and comprehensive understanding of social and cultural changes. Long-term

<sup>1</sup> Declaration. *Nine months, foreign imports of porcelain amazing value Erjiuwan silver customs*. November 22<sup>nd</sup>. 1935.

<sup>2</sup> Jingdezhen Literature and Historical Data Editing Committee. *Jingdezhen historical materials* (fifth series, p.141).

analysis of Sino-Western porcelain cultural exchange allows us to more clearly perspective of the deep cultural identity. More than 500 years of Sino-European porcelain trades just after a reincarnation, behind the Chinese and Western culture in the unique historical stage of the reflection. As mentioned earlier, due to the love of Chinese porcelain, and then let the whole of European society have a strong interest in Chinese culture, Chinese society on the appreciation of European and American ceramic culture is the same situation. But the difference is that Chinese porcelain into the European and American markets is through the normal world trade, so there is a first exposure to Chinese artifacts after the recognition of Chinese culture. The European and American porcelain into the Chinese market is to rely on war, although we are also the earliest in the war through the European weapons to recognize its culture, but the porcelain into the Chinese market is recognized in China after the Western culture as one of the cultural symbols as an artifact.

McNeil (1995, p.26) believes that all civilizations are not isolated but in constant contact, communication and interaction with each other. But this interaction is not simply passive, in the face of the impact of exotic culture, an ethnic reflection is the local. After the Chinese porcelain into the European market, due to cultural and aesthetic differences, they want to produce their own products to meet with their needs. So they do a good job in Europe and design, and then bring to China to process. In the Chinese export porcelain, a large number of European culture reflect the Christian pattern, the family pattern and the European art style porcelain appeared in large numbers, forming the famous heraldic porcelain and Clark porcelain. Especially the late, when the Europeans are not satisfied with the Chinese works, they began to import white porcelain, and then to produce their own porcelain which reflects their cultural traditions. In the cultural exchange, the Chinese porcelain artists have been open and inclusive to produce their works, in accordance with the requirements of some European design. Although compared to a large number of Chinese-style porcelain exports, these products are relatively few, but still reflects the differences of different cultural identity. The same situation also occurred in China, although in the process of modernization of more than 100 years, we are deeply affected by the modernization of Europe and the United States, especially Europe and the United States modern ceramic firing technology and a variety of realistic creation techniques, but in ceramic art creation we still insist our own development model. In terms of cultural aesthetics, it is also difficult for us to accept the aesthetic of European and American ceramic art, so whether it is in the daily porcelain or art, can see the imprint of Chinese culture.

Another worthy of our concern is that in the cultural identity behind the porcelain trade, the initial Chinese porcelain opened the door to Europe, it is the period of intense turbulence in Europe, religious forces and secular

power interests of the game, the people desire a free and harmonious society, and at the same time Chinese society is in the cultural and economic development of the prosperous period, the Confucian culture is relatively inclusive of the European desire. Therefore, a vigorous “Chinese style” is not surprising. The same situation also appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, with mechanization and modern science and technology representative of Europe and the United States advanced culture swept China, the Chinese people find themselves behind the core of culture is backward, change the culture is to change the artifacts and production methods. With these origins, modern China has witnessed a vigorous study of Western sports, suits, western food, western film art, painting and literature. In different time and space under the relatively backward so that each of the exotic culture had a good impression, and began to learn. But in any case, both sides in learning have achieved a successful experience of reference, whether the premise of this reference is peaceful or force.

## CONCLUSION

To explore the Sino-Western trade in the context of globalization, there are not any utensils like porcelain which can be so fully reflected the Chinese and Western culture in the modern historical context of agile fusion. Originating from China, porcelain culture circle nearly five hundred years of changes is also a reflection of changes in the world’s cultural and economic center. I also admit that cultural differences in heterogeneity have aroused the frenzy of Chinese society on Chinese porcelain at that time. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why in the 20<sup>th</sup> century European and Japanese porcelain is the best seller in China. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese culture is in the booming, but also the pinnacle of the world’s traditional culture, which aroused the pursuit of European society is not surprising. Similarly, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the technological revolution dominated by modern science and technology has changed the world. It is also normal for relatively backward China to learn Western science and technology. To explore the cultural turn behind porcelain trade, we can be sure that any artifacts behind the trade are a manifestation of cultural identity and national identity.

Over the past 30 years, with China’s rapid economic growth and national strength, China has more and more voice in international affairs, Chinese culture is more and more welcomed and attended. But it is undeniable that in recent years there have been many unethical cultural exchanges which make us realize that how to better achieve our own cultural strategy in the cultural differences between China and the West, the political system and spiritual differences. For us, the reality of

society is that although we have become the second largest economy, but cannot become a powerful country, especially the power of culture. Although times have passed and circumstances have changed, we can find ways and means from the past successful experience of Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges. In fact, these experiences have also been used by other advanced countries in the world, in recent years, the United States Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Hollywood, Apple mobile phones are outstanding representatives of American culture, in the artifacts exchange, the United States achieved the world’s cultural “Invasion”, which constructed the successful “American model.” with the different ideology in the world, China’s strategy of “going out” need get the world’s identity. Building a full range of national cultural system dominated by artifacts culture is the future direction of efforts and the inevitable way.

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