

12. THE SPREAD AND INFLUENCE OF CHINESE PORCELAIN IN EUROPE DURING THE 17TH-18TH CENTURIES

Li Xinxin,²⁴⁷
Iarîna Savițkaia Baraghin²⁴⁸

Abstract: *This article discusses the spread of Chinese porcelain in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries and its impact on European art, culture, and economy. Fueled by global trade networks, Chinese porcelain entered the European market through the East India Companies, becoming a luxury item for aristocrats and the upper class. As demand for porcelain grew, Europe gradually began to imitate and develop its own porcelain industry, exemplified by Germany's Meissen. Chinese porcelain not only had a profound influence on material culture but also shaped European artistic creation through its styles and decorative patterns. By analyzing the economic, artistic, and cultural impacts of porcelain trade between China and Europe, this paper reviewed the general overview of porcelain exchange during the 17th and 18th centuries.*

Key words: *Chinese Porcelain, European porcelain, 17-18 century, cultural exchange, artistic influence*

1. Introduction

In the 17th and 18th centuries, as the global trade network continued to expand, Chinese porcelain entered the European market as an important luxury item and cultural artwork. Chinese porcelain became the object of European aristocracy and the upper class because of its exquisite luster and unique exotic decorative style. Through Chinese porcelain, not only did it change the lifestyle of European people, which was mainly based on pottery and metal utensils, but it also had a profound impact on art, design, crafts and other fields. This influence is not only reflected in the imitation and innovation of porcelain, but also directly promoted the development of the European ceramic industry and promoted cultural exchanges between China and Europe. This paper aims to explore the spread of Chinese porcelain in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries and its impact on European culture and art, and analyze the process of cultural interaction between China and Europe through the medium of porcelain.

2. Chinese Porcelain Enters Europe

In the mid-16th century, Portugal was the first to open up a maritime trade route to China. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company was established, monopolizing the maritime trade between the East and the West, and shipping a large amount of Chinese porcelain to European countries. Subsequently, countries such as Britain and France also gradually participated in the ceramic trade. Through these trade activities, Chinese porcelain became an important luxury and work of art in Europe, greatly influencing the cultural, artistic and economic development of Europe. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Chinese porcelain played a vital role in global trade.

²⁴⁷ Candidate Doctoral, China, Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, Chișinău, Republic of Moldavia, email: 952442064@qq.com, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5277-7612>

²⁴⁸ Associate Professor PhD., Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, Chișinău, Republic of Moldavia, email: iarina.savitkaia-braghin@amtap.md, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4932-0609>

Due to the fragile nature of porcelain, transportation costs were very high. European high society commonly collected Chinese porcelain as interior decoration, and porcelain that crossed the seas became a symbol of wealth. To meet this demand, Jingdezhen and other Chinese kilns began producing porcelain specifically customized for the European market. The earliest custom-made porcelain involved adjusting the shape, size, and decorative patterns to suit European preferences. This included armorial porcelain and Jesuit porcelain. Despite incorporating Western elements, these custom-made porcelains still retained the elegance and delicacy characteristic of Chinese style. "By the late 17th century, royal and noble collectors began to set up special rooms to display their porcelain collections. These 'porcelain display rooms' evolved from the art cabinets and 'antique display rooms' that had been popular in courts large and small since the Renaissance. At the time, porcelain was considered precious, and thus, it deserved its own display room." [1 p. 9]

King Louis XIV of France had a dedicated porcelain collection in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. In 1670, the Porcelain Trianon was built at Versailles to house a collection of blue-and-white porcelain. Monarchs and nobles in Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and other countries also established porcelain display rooms, with Germany having the most such collections."At the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin, the display rooms housed over 2,000 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain from the late 17th century to the early 18th century, until the outbreak of World War II." [2 p. 194] "In the 12th year of Emperor Yongzheng's reign (1734) alone, 400,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain were exported to the Netherlands, and 68,000 pieces to France. During the 18th century, even by the most conservative estimates, more than 60 million pieces of Chinese porcelain were imported into Europe." [3 p.6]

3. The Influence of Chinese Porcelain on European Art and Culture

The late 17th century and the 18th century marked the peak period of porcelain trade between European countries and China. Chinese porcelain gradually shifted from traditional forms to styles that suited European lifestyles. Some pieces featured Chinese shapes with European patterns, while others combined European shapes with Chinese patterns, including items like coffee pots (Fig.1), ice buckets, beer mugs, shaving basins, and porcelain picture frames. Both the decorative patterns and shapes were adapted to incorporate European styles, such as densely arranged floral basket motifs and seasonal floral patterns.

The craftsmanship and decorative arts of the Qing Dynasty had a significant impact on the development of Rococo art during the reign of Louis XV in France. Japanese scholar Kobayashi Taichiro noted: "The main color tones of Rococo—blue and yellow—are, in fact, the two major characteristic colors of Chinese decorative arts. Moreover, the unique and enchanting light of Rococo art also originated from Chinese silk and porcelain." He stated that "the main features of so-called Rococo art are entirely derived from Chinese decorative arts." [4 p.67]

What he referred to as "Chinese decorative arts" specifically pertains to the craftsmanship of the Qing Dynasty, which spread widely across Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. In terms of interior decoration and furniture design, both styles emphasized ornamentation, frequently using relief carving, inlay techniques,

and elaborate gilded and painted designs. They were intricately crafted, with complex and varied forms, aiming to achieve a luxurious and elegant artistic style. Later, with the rise of Neoclassical art, the influence of Chinese decorative arts waned, but it resurfaced in the design of the Art Nouveau movement in France at the end of the 19th century.



Fig.1. Guangcai Coffee Set from the Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty



Fig. 2. Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, Nautilus Cup and Other Objects 1662



Fig. 3. Breakfast 1739

At the same time, the influence of Chinese porcelain arts expanded into other areas of art. European painting in the 17th and 18th centuries developed a new style by absorbing and borrowing from Eastern art, particularly Qing Dynasty decorative arts. The Dutch master of still life painting from the 17th century, Willem Kalf, depicted blue-and-white porcelain from China in his still life paintings, with one of his representative works being *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, Nautilus Cup, and Other Objects* (Fig. 2). Jan Vermeer often used yellow and blue in his paintings, and some European scholars believe that he was inspired by the colors of Chinese porcelain.

This reasoning stems from the fact that Vermeer's hometown, Delft, was a center for the mass importation and early imitation of Chinese porcelain in the Netherlands. Delft pottery often adopted "Chinese-style" designs, which Europeans considered the closest to Oriental aesthetics. The famous French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau not only depicted Chinese figures and scenes in his works, but the romantic mood, fluid brushstrokes, and decorative style in his paintings also drew inspiration from Chinese art. Another French painter, François Boucher, was an avid

collector of Chinese artifacts, and his works exude a strong Chinese influence. For example, in *Breakfast*, he carefully depicted Chinese porcelain and Buddha statues displayed on either side of the fireplace (Fig. 3).

4. The Progress and Innovation of Porcelain Manufacturing Techniques in Europe

Before Chinese porcelain was imported on a large scale, European potters primarily used low-fired ceramics or tin-glazed pottery. Italian Majolica and Dutch Delftware are notable examples. These ceramics imitated the smooth, glossy appearance of porcelain by applying an opaque white tin glaze to the surface and then painting blue decorative patterns on top, in an attempt to replicate Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. However, these early imitations could not compare to Chinese porcelain in terms of texture, gloss, and durability.

The creation of Meissen porcelain marked a significant breakthrough in European ceramic manufacturing. In 1708, German alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, with the support of the Elector of Saxony, successfully developed the first hard-paste porcelain in Europe. His success was attributed to his discovery of a type of kaolin suitable for high-temperature firing, which was similar to the raw materials used in Jingdezhen, China. Early Meissen porcelain primarily imitated Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, but the company continuously explored new designs, gradually incorporating European artistic elements to create a distinctive European style. For example, a shell-shaped porcelain dish housed in the Bavarian State Museum in Munich, produced by Meissen around 1730, features a scene on the left with a monkey and a strange animal amusing a horse, and on the right, a Chinese person riding a horse. This design clearly draws inspiration from the Chinese auspicious motif of "promoting to noble status on horseback."

In the 18th century, Dutch Delftware imitated Chinese blue-and-white qilin-patterned jars and multi-colored quail-patterned plates, while German Meissen replicated multi-colored flower basket-patterned plates. English Derby porcelain produced multi-colored octagonal plates with floral and bird designs. These imitations were remarkably similar to Qing Dynasty Jingdezhen kiln products. The blue-ground, overglaze-pink-decorated gourd vase produced by Chelsea in England closely resembled the original 17th-century Jingdezhen pieces in shape and decorative layout, although it replaced the original plum blossom design with Western figures. From the 1750s onwards, the Nymphenburg Porcelain Factory in Munich, Germany, gained fame for its Chinese figurines and other ceramics with Chinese motifs. In 1731, Meissen was the first to produce porcelain with relief decorations modeled after Chinese Dehua kiln pieces, and the Berlin factory, established in 1751, also produced white porcelain with relief patterns similar to Dehua kiln.

Founded in the mid-18th century, Sèvres in France emerged as a strong competitor to Meissen porcelain. Sèvres porcelain is renowned for its exquisite overglaze and glaze techniques, particularly holding a significant place in the creation of French Rococo-style porcelain. Although Sèvres porcelain was inspired by Chinese porcelain, its decorative style placed greater emphasis on European Baroque and Rococo artistic styles.

5. Conclusions

The spread of Chinese porcelain in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries had a profound impact on European art, culture and economy. Chinese porcelain not only brought aesthetic innovation and changed European artistic styles and decorative techniques, but also directly influenced the development of the European ceramic industry. As the China and Europe porcelain trade flourished, European craftsmen not only imitated but also pioneered new ceramic techniques, such as Meissen porcelain and Sèvres porcelain, while giving rise to the "Chinese style" design trend and influencing the Rococo and Neoclassical art movements. In essence, the spread of Chinese porcelain in the 17th and 18th centuries was not just a commercial exchange, but a dialogue that transcended geographical and cultural boundaries, a phenomenon that had a significant impact on European art and culture.

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