

Analysis on the Dissemination of Jingdezhen Traditional Porcelain-making Techniques in Europe and Its Influence

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ABSTRACT

The traditional porcelain making techniques of Jingdezhen, as a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, contain profound cultural heritage and artistic value. This article deeply explores the dissemination process of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques in Europe, analyzing the background, main channels, and profound impact on the European ceramic industry. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical documents and archaeological materials, this article reveals how Jingdezhen porcelain occupied a dominant position in Sino-European trade during ancient times, and how European countries promoted the innovation and development of its own ceramic industry by learning and imitating Jingdezhen porcelain making techniques. This study not only enriches the history of cultural ceramic exchanges between China and Europe, but also provides historical references for promoting the international dissemination of Jingdezhen ceramic culture in the context of the current national pilot zone construction.

KEYWORDS

Jingdezhen; traditional porcelain-making techniques; European countries; dissemination; influence

1 Introduction

Jingdezhen, an ancient city located in the northeastern part of Jiangxi Province, has been renowned for its porcelain industry since ancient times due to its unique geographical conditions and abundant mineral resources, and is known as the "Capital of Porcelain". After more than a thousand years of development, Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques have formed a unique production system, creating the most brilliant history in the history of Chinese ceramics. It not only occupies an important position in the history of Chinese ceramics, but also has a wide and profound influence on the world's ceramic culture. Its porcelain is deeply loved by domestic and foreign consumers for its unique style of "white as jade, bright as a mirror, thin as paper, and sound like a chime".

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, with the development of navigation technology and the prosperity of East-West trade, a large number of exquisite ceramics produced in Jingdezhen were shipped to European countries and became treasures that both the nobility and commoners vied to purchase. These porcelain not only changed the lifestyle of Europeans, but also had a profound impact on European porcelain-making technology and artistic style. As an important consumption area, Europe's acceptance, learning and imitation of Jingdezhen porcelain making techniques not only promoted the innovation of the European ceramic industry, but also deepened cultural exchanges between China and European countries.

2 The spread of Jingdezhen porcelain in Europe

The spread of Jingdezhen porcelain in Europe is inextricably linked to the opening of the ancient Silk Road and the Age of Discovery. The ancient land and sea Silk Road was a link between Eastern and Western civilizations. Chinese goods such as silk, tea, and porcelain were continuously transported to Western Asia, Europe, and other places through the Silk Road, while European goods such as glassware, wine, and clocks were also continuously imported into China. Among them, Jingdezhen porcelain has become a shining pearl on the Silk Road with its exquisite craftsmanship and unique style.

Before the 15th century, due to the limitations of navigation technology and the long distance of the journey, Jingdezhen porcelain was extremely rare in Europe, mainly being collected by royalty and the church. These porcelain items, with their exquisite craftsmanship and rare quantity, were given a high social status and became symbols of power and wealth. In 1499, Vasco Da Gama (1469-1524) returned from his first voyage to India and presented a dozen Chinese porcelain items brought back from India to King Manuel I of Portugal. This was one of the important events that marked the official entry of Jingdezhen porcelain into the European court. With the advent of the Age of Discovery, Chinese porcelain began to enter the European market in large quantities from the 16th century onwards. In 1517, the Portuguese fleet arrived in China and began to customize exclusive porcelain for its king. These porcelains were painted with the private coat of arms of the Portuguese king and the symbol of the great voyages, and became one of the important commodities in the Sino-European trade. Europe also became one of the most important markets for Chinese porcelain industry.

With the establishment of trading institutions in China by the East India Companies of Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, Jingdezhen porcelain began to be shipped in large quantities to Europe for sale, and quickly became a sought-after product in the European market, with royalty and nobility competing to purchase it at great expense. Augustus II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, even owned more than 35,000 pieces of porcelain. He used 600 Saxon soldiers to exchange 151 pieces of blue and white porcelain from the Kangxi period with Frederick William I, being well known as the “Dragoon tank”. According to scholars’ estimates, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the East India Companies of Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, France and other countries shipped back hundreds of millions of pieces of porcelain from China^[1]. These porcelain not only changed the table manners, interior decoration and life style of Europeans, but also had an important influence on the development of the European ceramic industry.

3 The dissemination of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques in European countries

In the 13th century, the famous Italian traveler Marco Polo (1254-1324) vividly described Chinese porcelain and its exquisite production techniques in his travelogue. When he traveled to Dali in Yunnan and Dehua in Fujian, he witnessed those exquisitely beautiful white porcelains with his own eyes and named them “Porcelain”, praising them for being as white as jade, having a delicate texture, and seeming to be made from shell powder. Marco Polo’s travelogue was quickly circulated around Europe, which inspired Europeans’ strong interest in and yearning for the mysterious porcelain from the distant East. Several centuries later, as the cultural exchanges between the East and the West deepened, the dissemination of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques in Europe ushered in a new climax. Among them, the active exploration by French missionaries and the translation and introduction of ancient Chinese ceramic books by Western Sinologists became two important forces driving this process.

3.1 The missionaries’ exploration of porcelain-making techniques

During his missionary activities in Jingdezhen, the French Jesuit François-Xavier d’Entrecolles (1664-1741) played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between Eastern and Western ceramic cultures, and was instrumental in introducing Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques to Europe. In 1688, five “mathematicians of the king” carefully selected by Louis XIV embarked on a long journey to China, starting from Ningbo to explore this ancient land in depth. These Jesuits not only carried the mission of missionary work, but also had an infinite love for science, and were committed to conducting scientific investigations in China and transmitting valuable scientific and technological information to Europe. In 1698, the French Jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656—1730) led a team of 10 Jesuits on another journey to China. After meeting Emperor Kangxi, he sent d’Entrecolles to Jingdezhen to explore the secret formula for porcelain making. After arriving in Jingdezhen, he quickly integrated into local life and actively developed believers, especially those potters engaged in porcelain production. Through in-depth exchanges with his fellow believers, he gradually discovered the source of raw materials and the process flow of porcelain making. At the same time, he also actively made friends with local officials and extensively consulted relevant books including the *Local Chronicle of Fuliang County* to gain more comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of the porcelain industry.

After years of dedicated research, through personal observation, inquiries with fellow church members, and consulting Chinese written materials, d’Entrecolles completed two long letters on September 1, 1712 and January 25, 1722 respectively, detailing the various raw materials, processing procedures, decoration, and firing techniques required for porcelain production. He also sent the porcelain raw materials Kaolin and Petuntse back to Europe along with the second letter for scientists to analyze their main components^[2]. These letters caused a great stir in Europe, playing a key role in bridging the gap between them and gaining experience in porcelain making. They were soon included in the *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses Ecrites des Missions Etrangères* and widely circulated through works such as Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743)’s *Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-tartary* and Denis Diderot (1713-1784)’s *Encyclopedia*, opening a window for Europeans to understand China’s porcelain-making techniques and promoting revolutionary changes in the European ceramic industry.

3.2 Translation and introduction of ancient ceramic books by Western sinologists

At the same time, Western sinologists have also developed a strong interest in ancient Chinese ceramic books. They know that these ancient books contain rich knowledge of porcelain making and profound historical and cultural heritage. So they began to translate and introduce these ancient books, in order to pass on the essence of traditional Chinese porcelain making techniques to more Europeans.

In 1856, the French sinologist Stanislas Aignan Julien (1797-1873), published the *Histoire et fabrication de la porcelaine chinoise*, the French translated version of *Ching-te-chen T’ao Lu*. This was the first foreign translation of Chinese ceramic

literature and the only authoritative one that European scholars could refer to when studying Chinese ceramics at that time. It provided an important reference for European society to explore the porcelain-making techniques in Jingdezhen and had a significant impact on the production and development of the French ceramic industry^[3]. In 1910, Stephen Wooten Bushell (1844-1908), a famous British sinologist and ceramic collector, translated *T'ao Shuo*, written by Zhu Yan in the Qing Dynasty, out of his interest in appreciating and collecting Chinese ceramics. His English translation version was widely spread and accepted in Europe^[4]. In 1951 and 1959, Geoffrey R. Sayer (1887-1962) translated *T'ao Lu* and *T'ao Ya* into English and published them in London.

Thanks to the efforts of sinologists, French and English translations of ancient Chinese ceramic books have been published one after another, which have aroused strong repercussions in Europe. These translated versions not only faithfully convey the content of the original work, but also provide an in-depth and easy-to-understand interpretation of porcelain-making techniques through the addition of annotations, illustrations, and other methods. With the widespread dissemination of these translated works in Europe, more and more European ceramic craftsmen began to have a strong interest in Chinese porcelain-making techniques. Through reading these books, they gained a deeper understanding of the essence of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques and attempted to apply these techniques to their own creations. In this process, many European craftsmen not only successfully imitated the exquisite appearance of Chinese porcelain, but also innovated on this basis, developing a porcelain style with European characteristics. These innovations not only promoted the rapid development of the European porcelain industry, but also provided new opportunities for the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western ceramic cultures.

4 The influence of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques on the European ceramic industry

The traditional porcelain-making techniques of Jingdezhen have had a profound and extensive impact on the European ceramic industry, not only boosting technological progress and innovative development in the European ceramic industry, but also promoting the diversification and prosperity of European ceramic culture.

4.1 Technological progress and innovative development

The introduction of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques led to a significant technological breakthrough in the European ceramic industry. In 1708, the Dresden Mason Porcelain Factory in Germany pioneered the production of hard porcelain through Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682-1719)'s continuous experiments. In 1740, they successfully produced high-temperature hard porcelain with blue and white, gold-coated, and underglaze blue colors^[5]. In 1768, the French chemist Pierre-Joseph Macquer (1718–1784) discovered kaolin in the south of Limoges, France, and soon France produced hard porcelain. After that, European countries established their own ceramic factories one after another. European craftsmen gradually mastered the firing technology of hard porcelain by learning the production process and raw material formula of Jingdezhen porcelain, and began to produce hard porcelain on a large scale. In addition, the introduction of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques also promoted the innovative development of the European ceramic industry in glaze research and development, color application, and decorative techniques. European craftsmen, building upon the foundation of Jingdezhen porcelain, blended their own aesthetic preferences and craftsmanship characteristics to create ceramic works with distinct European characteristics. These works not only retain the exquisite and unique features of Jingdezhen porcelain, but also incorporate European cultural and artistic elements.

4.2 Artistic diversity and cultural integration

The introduction of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques played an important role in promoting the diversity and cultural prosperity of European ceramic art. Under the influence of Jingdezhen porcelain, European ceramic art began to exhibit diverse styles and characteristics. From the Baroque style to the Rococo style, and then to the Neoclassical style and the Modernist style, European ceramic art has continuously developed and evolved under the influence of Jingdezhen porcelain. In the 17th century, Delft, the Netherlands, began to mass-produce imitations of blue and white porcelain, using Clark porcelain and transition-period porcelain as templates, skillfully integrating exotic Chinese porcelain decoration with local artistic characteristics, ultimately giving birth to a unique Dutch-style ceramic decoration style that promoted the popularity of "Chinese style" in Europe^[6]. At the same time, the introduction of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques also promoted the exchange and integration of Sino-European ceramic culture. During the process of learning Jingdezhen porcelain-making techniques, European craftsmen not only understood the cultural and artistic characteristics of China, but also further broadened their knowledge and

understanding of Eastern culture through exchanges and cooperation with Chinese craftsmen. This cross-cultural exchange not only enriched the connotation of world ceramic culture, but also promoted the continuous innovation and development of global ceramic art.

5 Conclusion and Implication

Through a comprehensive review and analysis of the translation, introduction, and dissemination of Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques in European countries, this paper reveals the profound impact of Jingdezhen ceramic culture on the European ceramic industry. Jingdezhen traditional porcelain-making techniques not only drove innovation and development in European ceramic technology but also promoted diversity in European ceramic art and cultural integration between China and the West. This historical experience offers valuable insights into the international dissemination of Jingdezhen ceramic culture under the circumstances of the construction of the National Pilot Zone, specifically it is not a one-way export but rather a two-way exchange and fusion achieved through interaction with European ceramic culture. This exchange not only enriched the connotation of European ceramic culture but also provided new inspiration for the innovation and development of Jingdezhen ceramic culture. In the ongoing construction of Jingdezhen National Pilot Zone for the Inheritance and Innovation of Ceramic Culture, emphasis should be placed on the inheritance and innovation of ceramic culture, promoting the integration of traditional techniques with modern technology to create more ceramic cultural products with contemporary characteristics. Meanwhile, exchanges and cooperation with the international ceramic community should be strengthened by organizing international ceramic exhibitions, seminars, and other events to build bridges for cultural exchanges with the international ceramic community. Modern media should be fully utilized to enhance the international dissemination of ceramic culture, thereby elevating the world influence of Jingdezhen ceramic culture, with the aim to further promoting its international dissemination and innovative development.

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