

The Interactions between Chinese Export Ceramics and Their Foreign ‘Markets’: The Stories in Late Ming Dynasty

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(Compared to the previous lecturers, the topic I will talk about is very recent in time. I have been engaged in the research on Export Ceramics, China-Western Maritime Trade and Cultural Communication for 3 years, and writing the graduation thesis named *The Chinese Ceramics and Its Westward Maritime Trade in Late Ming Dynasty*, therefore, I will focus on the Late Ming Dynasty to observe various cultural phenomena, trying to understand the interactions in the cultural communication between China and other countries and districts through the archaeological discovery of Chinese export ceramics.)

Sino-Western maritime trade has a long history since the southeast coast of China opened its overseas routes at a very early time. According to Hanshu 汉书, at least in the Western Han dynasty, envoys have sailed from the northern gulf of Xuwen 徐闻, Hepu 合浦, China, to Sri Lanka and the surrounding area to undertake some simple tribute and trade activities.¹ Due to the development of shipbuilding and marine technology since then, as well as the abandonment of land transport, China's maritime trade developed at an amazing pace since the mid Tang dynasty. Then the ceramics began to be exported in large amounts and sold in overseas markets as a unique type of international goods. Correspondingly, the frequent contact and interaction promoted by the business affairs also accelerated the development and fusion of the local cultures of different countries and districts.

When time goes to the 16th century, the Western world had entered the Age of Discovery, and the Portuguese and Spanish were the first explorers to reach the southeast coast of China, which was the first time China and the West were directly connected. While the maritime trade led by the Portuguese and Spanish finally started the history of direct trade between China and West, the Indian and Pacific Oceans' maritime transportation routes became unobstructed and the markets in Europe and the Americas opened up, all creating an unprecedented opportunity for Chinese export goods. This promoted the maritime trade of China to its peak time despite the negative policies of the government.

¹ (汉)班固撰 (唐)颜师古注:《汉书》,卷二十八《地理志》,北京:中华书局标点本,1962年。

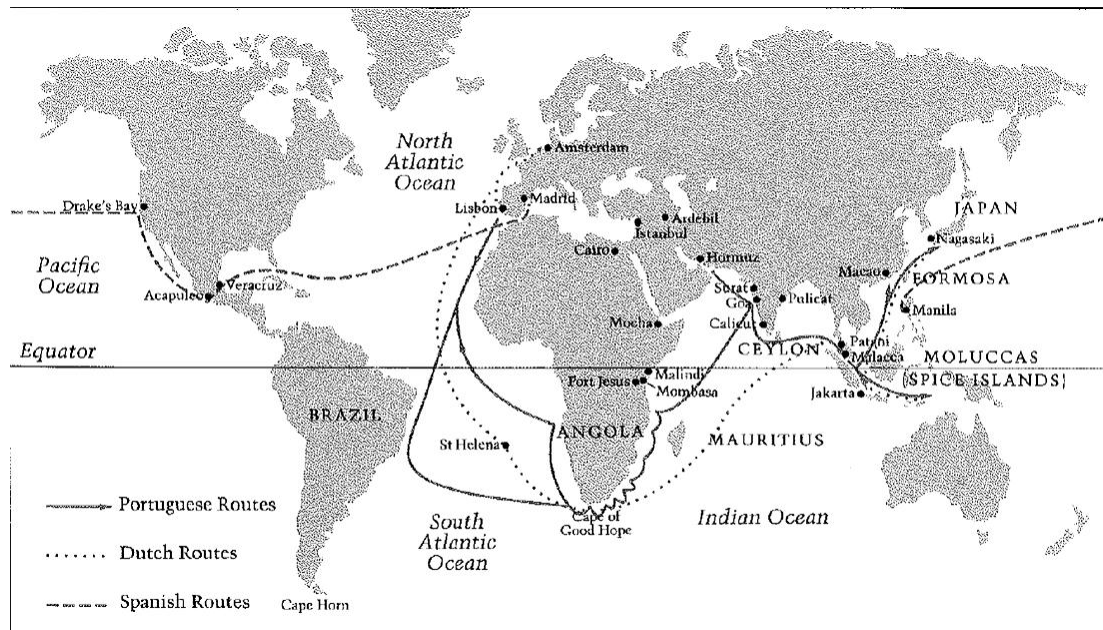


Figure 1 International maritime trade routes, 16th and 17th centuries.²

As shown above, there 3 important maritime trade routes as follows : The western route conducted by the Portuguese is Macao-Malacca-Goa (India) -Africa-Lisbon, The Sino-Japan rout conducted by the Portuguese is from Macao to Nagasaki, and the eastern rout conducted by the Spanish is Macao/Guangzhou-Manila-Drake's Bay-Acapulco-Madrid (Figure 1). During this time, the Chinese productions, such as silk and ceramic are the most important commodities to the West and many districts in the Sino-Western maritime trade as important participants and promoting factors of the trade, as well as crucial carriers of culture and technology. The ceramics, compared to other productions in the same period, is fragile but not perishable, retained in large amount till today and continues to be found. According to the existing materials, there are lots of Ming ceramics in Asia, Africa, America and Europe.

It is visible that track the cultural communication and conflicts between maritime trade/ cultural circles during late Ming through the archeological discoveries is important way to understand the global cultural interaction. Therefore, we will first expound the traditional function and cultural connotation of the Chinese ceramics and then overview some important cultural/trade circles, the Chinese ceramics collected and found there to discuss the interactions between local market (, people) and ceramics, the representative of Chinese culture.

1. The traditional function and cultural connotation of the Chinese ceramics

² Harrison, Barbara. *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia, Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, Kuala Lumpur ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Ceramic was first produced in China, some utensils of Shang and Zhou Dynasties unearthed by archaeologists has basically met the standard of a porcelain production. We can say that protoporcelains were already widely produced during that time in China. After the consolidating and developing in Han and Three Kingdoms Dynasties, the rapid growth in Sui and Tang Dynasties and the enriching in Song and Yuan Dynasties, Chinese ceramic reached heyday in Ming. To the Late Ming, ceramics have 3 main functions: practical device, display device and the grave-goods. In addition, from early Ming to the middle and late period the Curt also used ceramics, which were copied from the ancient bronze rituals as shape origin, as sacrifice utensils.³

Ceramics used as practical devices are mainly dietary utensils 饮食, stationeries 文房 and daily life utensils 起居. Among them, eating utensils consisted dish, bowl, cans, pot, bottle, cup and so on. This kind of artifacts is mainly tableware, tea and wine vessels, therefore they are often plain in shape and easy to use, and the surface are usually depicted with lots of patterns (sometimes with texts), including Religious Design with Taoist and Buddhist symbols such as the Eight Diagrams and Sanskrit, the implied meaning of auspicious Happiness 福 character, longevity 寿, Wanfutongyou 万福同攸, and Fuguijiaqifugui 富贵佳器, etc. In addition, there all kinds of characters, plants, horses, fish, butterfly...the decorative patterns which were popular in public (Figure 2 and 3).⁴



Figure 2 Blue and White Porcelain Bowl

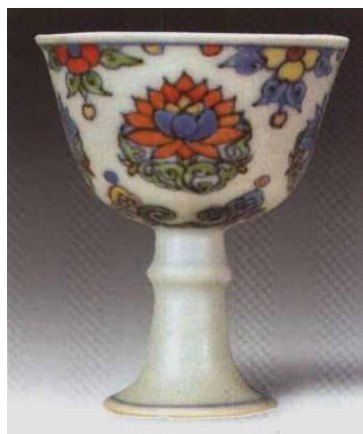


Figure 3 Standing Cup (For wine)

The stationeries 文房 takes the Brush rest, brush pot, water injection and porcelain ink slab as the most common. The word Wenfang 文房 was first used in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and in the Tang Dynasty, it become the indicator of the place for scholars to study and do routine activities. Due to the universally respected to Confucianism in Song Dynasty, the conception of Chongwenyiwu 崇文抑武 was popularized and the intelligentsia

³ 中国硅酸盐学会主编：《中国陶瓷史》，北京：文物出版社，页 78。

⁴ 耿宝昌：《明清瓷器鉴定》，北京：紫禁城出版社，1993 年。

increasing the largely use of stationeries, which were made in porcelain, bamboo, wood, jade and other materials. During the mid- Ming Dynasty, scholars, officers and merchants all became the enthusiasts of stationeries art, the porcelain stationeries were in great need (Figure 4 and 5).⁵ In addition, the daily life utensils are in a relatively small number and consists porcelain pillow, drum stool, screen, candlestick, etc (Figure 6 and 7). Display device got rapid development in Ming Dynasty. There were various types such as character statues, flower Vase and dragon jar in big size when time goes to the Late Ming period (Figure 8-10).⁶



Figure 4 Blue and White Porcelain Brush Rest



Figure 5 Brush Pot



Figure 6 Stool



Figure 7 Candlestick

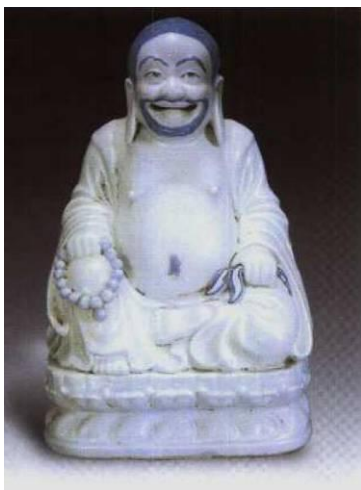


Figure 8 Statue



Figure 9 Flower Vase



Figure 10 Big Jar

⁵ 朱建等：《反瓷文房用具雅赏》，《收藏界》2007年04期，页71-74。

⁶ 景戎华等：《中国明代瓷器图录》，北京：中国商业出版社，1999年。

The ceramics used as the grave-goods has a long history, expressing the Chinese Funeral concept of treat the dead like alive 事死如生. The practical device and display device used by the dead will also be buried together with him/her as the grave-goods and besides some of the artifacts special for grave use, the Porcelain Tablet with Epitaph was also very common. The whole group of grave-goods can always reflect the lifetime experiences, religious belief, wealth , social status and other various information of the dead. (Figure 11-14).⁷



Figure 11 Porcelain Burner with Sanskrit



Figure 12 A pair of little Bottles



Figure 13 A pair of Vases



Figure 14 Porcelain Tablet with Epitaph

Therefore, the production, sale and use of ceramics are of rich connotation in the Chinese cultural background. The dietary utensils used for the perfect match of food and tableware, the tea and wine cultures with important content of enjoying the wares, the display device to meet the needs of artistic appreciation, comparison on refinement and wealth , and the funeral artifacts carrying the conceptions of treat the dead like alive 事死如生 and Filial for the first 以孝为先 which made up part of the Chinese culture features in the late Ming Dynasty. However, when these artifacts go out from the original background, as a kind of unique China commodity

⁷ 彭明瀚：《江西纪年墓出土明代景德镇民窑青花瓷研究》，《故宫博物院院刊》，2007年1期，页24-47。

sold in the overseas markets, many interesting cultural phenomenon occurred.

2. Chinese ceramics in southeast Asia

In worldwide, Southeast Asia is one of the culture regions which contacted Chinese porcelain the earliest. Early to the Tang and Song Dynasties, the maritime trade between Chinese and west in its first rise, besides the Arab traders who dominated the Indian Ocean route and were active in trade affairs, the local people of Southeast Asia involved in trade directly by precious metals, spices, pepper, and other local commodities. The Sumatra island, Java and the malacca strait which is still playing a central role in the Sino-Western maritime trade once successively become commodity distribution centers there.

According to the historical records, early in the 9th-10th centuries, Chinese ceramics have already begun to influence the native everyday life in Southeast Asia. The use of ceramics as diet wares changed the eating habits of many residents in Southeast Asia. These ceramic containers makes better sanitation for food saving and keeping, reduce the amount of the local disease and mortality rate. In addition to the mystery feeling and trusting of this foreign culture, in some Southeast Asian tribes, the use of porcelain as witchcraft artifact became popular, in some ceremony, the witch took porcelain as the container of the holy water which is used to treat all disease. In the long history, the ceramics were endowed with holy significance, some local people in Southeast Asia always use clean and beautiful ceramic plate as the container of an neonatal baby when it is born, completing a baby born ceremony. As shown below, the plate was once used by the Buginese raja family in South Sulawesi area (Figure 15).⁸

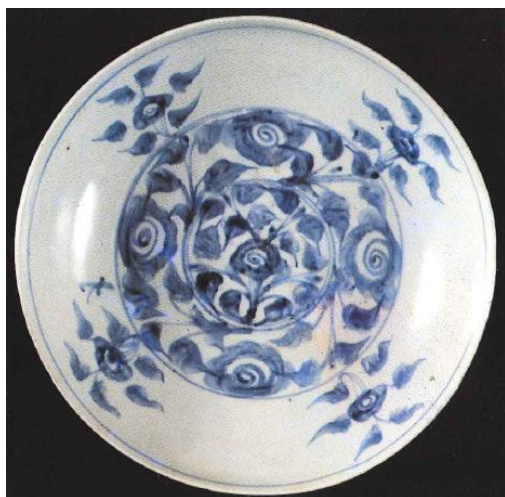


Figure 15 Big Plate

In addition, just the same as Chinese, in Southeast Asia area, ceramics used as porcelain as

⁸ Sumarah Adhyatman. *Keramik Kuna Yang Ditemukan di Indonesia (Antique Ceramics found in Indonesia, Various Uses and Origins)*, Jakarta: Jayakarta agung offset, 1981.

grave-goods and buried together with the dead was also a consuetudinary for long, As shown in Figure 16 is a tomb excavated by the archaeologists in the 1960s in Manila district, the dead is a mother and her child. Judging by the grave-goods, they should be members of one of the richest local families (Figure 16).⁹ Because the ceramics were still not easy to be got in large amount and very expensive here, their function of being representation of someone's wealth and social statue was constantly strengthen, for the lives, a kind of big celadon jar with dragon statues mainly produced in Guangdong, China gradually became important symbol of their wealth and status (Figure 17 and 18).¹⁰

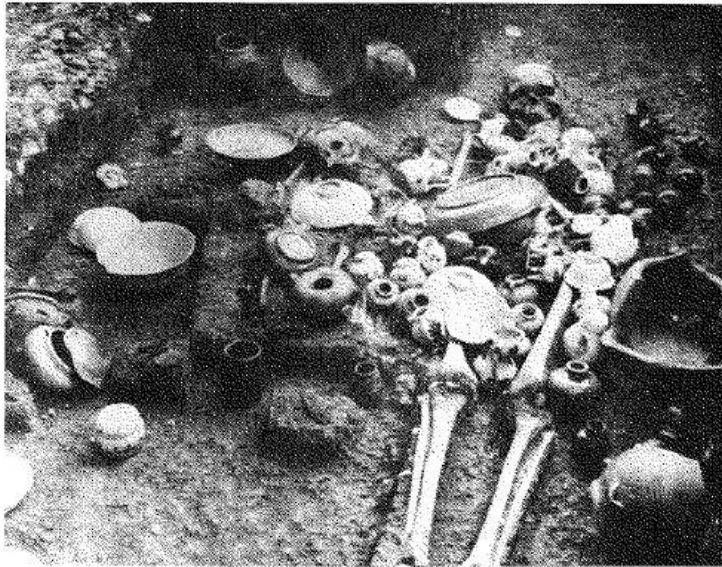


Figure 16 Grave of a mother and her child, Manila, Phillipine

⁹ Locsin, Leandro and Cecilia Locsin. *Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines*, Rutland, Vt. : Tuttle, 1967.

¹⁰ Harrison, Barbara. *Later Ceramics in South-East Asia, Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, Kuala Lumpur ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

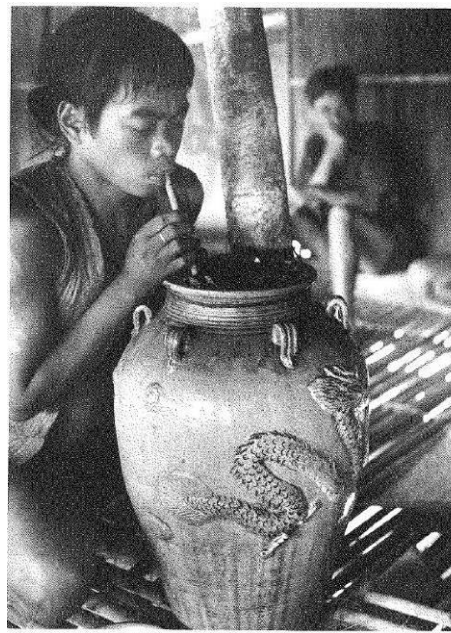
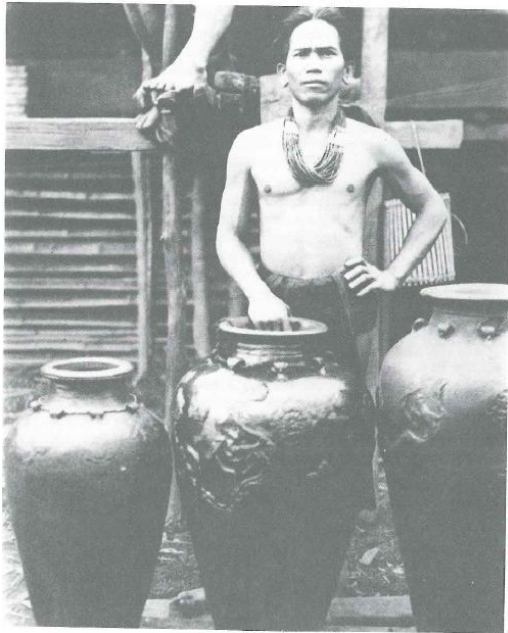


Figure 17 An aristocrat of Balawit, Kalimantan Figure 18 A Murut man drinking rice-wine from a Chinese jar, on the Padas River, Sabah

3. Chinese ceramics in America

From the 16th century, Portugal and Spain successively started the maritime travel route to the southeast coast of China. Due to the tight-fisted control of Africa, India, Malacca and the whole Indian Ocean by Portugal, Spain had to seek new routes, traveling across the Atlantic to the southeast coast of China and then opened the silver trade of more than 200 years in 1620s.¹¹ According to the archaeological excavations, Chinese ceramics distribute widely in the district which was once the Spanish America in the colonial time, including productions from different kilns as Jingdezhen, Fujian, Guangdong, Zhejiang, etc.¹²

In Mexico, archaeologists note that Chinese ceramic products of good quality are often unearthed in the areas in which Spanish business and politic affairs are concentrated during the colonial. Take the excavation of Spanish colonial strata in Zocalo region for example, the districts which have large amount of Chinese ceramics unearthed include the praetorium, cathedrals, city hall and some blocks. While in the Santa Fe region, there were also many late Ming ceramics unearthed in the ruins of the praetorium. On the other hand, during the Galleon time, the Philippines as core Bridge during the trade, the product style in its local market, have greatly influenced the businessmen's choice of the artifacts sold to America. At the same time,

¹¹ Benito Legarda, Jr.. *Two and a Half Centuries of the Galleon Trade*, Philippine Studies, No.4,Vol.III, December 1955.

¹² George Kuwayama. *Chinese ceramics in colonial Latin America (Peru, Guatemala, Mexico)*, Doctoral Dissertation of University of Michigan, 2001.

some Southeast Asian residents, especially the Filipino took transatlantic travel to America to seek business opportunities and wealth, improving the cultural connection between the two.¹³ From the archaeological discovery of ceramics, we can see, some daily used ceramics found in America are very similar with the unearthed products in Southeast Asia, which corroborates the intense cultural impact from Southeast Asia to America.

However, different from Philippines, America's west coast is not belong to the Asian trading networks before the 16th century. Therefore, when the port cities, important area where resources and traffic core located interacted with China and Southeast Asia in an unprecedented scale, there was still a large area in America staying in the edge of these activities. Take the findings in Drake's Bay in San Francisco as an example, the Spanish direct colonial domination set up here in 1769, so in the late Ming period, here lived the Miwok Indian tribes which is almost no cultural exchanges with the outside world. The excavations on this historical sites lasted from 1940s to 1970s, thousands of pieces of Chinese ceramics in late Ming Dynasty (From at least 235 pieces of ceramic artifacts) were found in the garbage dumps from local life. There were many debates on details of how these ceramics reached the tribes, like the ships sank and the cargoes were carried off shore by waves, or the ships stop here for recharge and the crew bartered with the tribal members with ceramics. But it should be the tribal residents' first exposure to so many Chinese ceramics. During this period, the Miwok tribes mainly lived on hunting and fishing, just the same as other Indian societies, they had no pottery-making tradition and agriculture. Many functions of pottery were replaced by stone wares, shell containers and well weaved baskets. According to the research from Arnold on the Chumash Indians in Southern California, their society were developed in shells processing, shells grinded in pearl disc shape were used as currency. The Miwok tribe also uses processed shells in exchanging, ceremony and displaying the wealth and honor status.

By knowing the above background, we can now fully understand the unique shape of Chinese ceramics unearthed here that the Miwok people took the ceramics in form of the shell concept when dealing with this new objects and processed them as shells (Figure 19 and 20). These ceramics, some of whose edges have traces formed by struck, some have been directly grinded into pearl shape, and some still preserved the trace of drilling, are all the direct reflection of local shell manufacturing and stone technology. Without the pottery-making tradition, in the Miwok people's opinion, they treat these new artifacts as they were native outspread of their existed artifacts and tools to accepted them into the original cultural structure.¹⁴

¹³ Mercene, Floro L. Diliman. *Manila men in the new world: Filipino migration to Mexico and the Americas from the sixteenth century*. Quezon City : University of the Phillipines Press, 2007.

¹⁴ Docter Limin's paper, in press, UCLA



Figure 19 the ceramic shards unearthed in Miwok settlement sites, Drake's Bay



Figure 20 The semi finished 'shell decoratifs' from ceramics, Miwok settlement sites, Drake's Bay

To sum up, staying an important position of trade during the Galleon time as America, its own cultural received the double shock from both colony and maritime trade, crisscrossed by the Southeast Asian civic culture, the European official aristocrat' benefit-pursuing, and out of there Spanish colonial center area, more districts retained the culture characteristics of Indian Protohistoric period (1542-1769).

4. Chinese ceramics in the Middle East

The relationship between Middle East and China established as early as the time of Central Asian land traffic's opening in Han Dynasty. According to the historical literature and archaeological evidences, at the beginning of the ceramic exporting in Tang and Song Dynasties, the Arab region which controls the Indian Ocean and active in the maritime trade soon became the main market and commodity distributing center. During the Yuan Dynasty, close contacts of the ruling class promoted the continue of trade and cultural communications. Chinese ceramic

exported to the Middle East in a very considerable scale (Figure 21 and 22).¹⁵

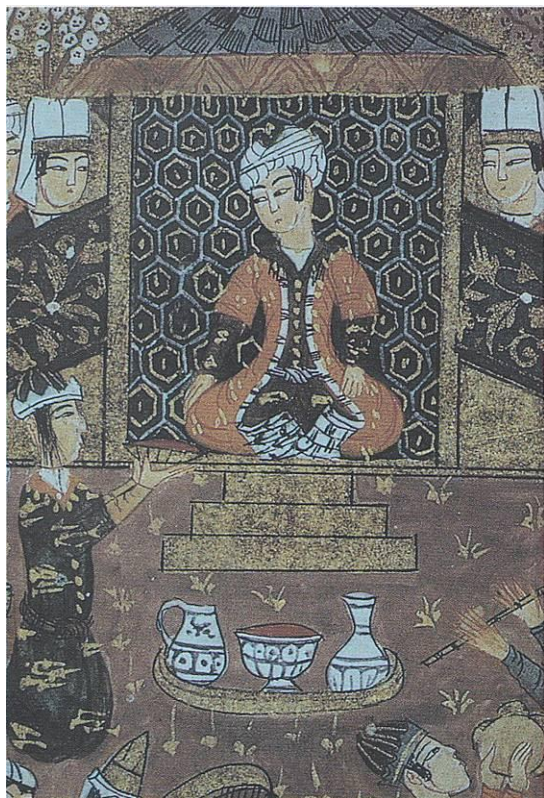


Figure 21 The Sultan and His Court (Detail), from al-Katibi, *Divan*, c.1450-60. It depicts the Sultan with his janissaries, with several pieces of blue and white in front of him.



Figure 22 Album painting from Samarkand or Tabriz, 15th century. It depicts a procession through the desert with a cart full of blue and white porcelain.

To the Late Ming period, Chinese ceramics has been completely engaged into the Middle East People's daily life. The ceramic tableware was honorable as the golden and silver vessel (Figure 23). Located between the west and China, the Arab traders can still grab huge profits from the

¹⁵ Carswell, John. *Blue & white: Chinese porcelain around the world*, London: British Museum, 2000.

trade although have lost their control of the sea. Due to their deep knowing of both Chinese ceramics and European consumers' needs, the reprocessing industry on Chinese ceramics in Middle East is very mature (Figure 24).¹⁶ On the other hand, the tastes of the Middle East were also back to China as feedbacks in great quantities in the long-term cultural exchanges also. The archaeological discoveries indicate that, many of the ceramics produced in Ming Dynasty were designed especially for the Middle East market. These artifacts directly reflected the Arabs' enthusiasm geometrical graph in the traditional culture and their religion demand, some of them even have Arab character and scene as decorative themes (Figure 25).¹⁷

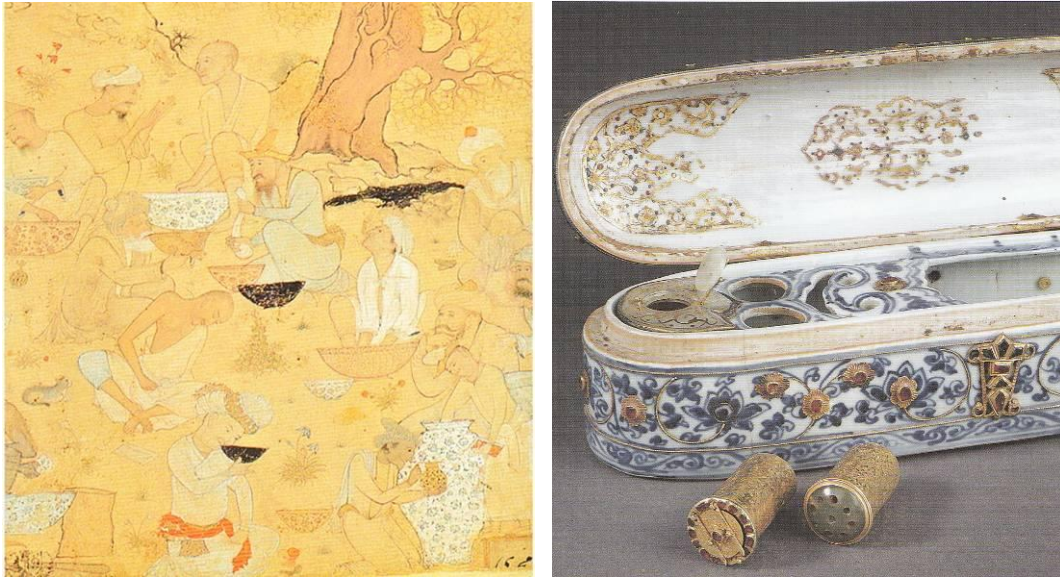


Figure 23 Persian painting, late 16th century. A landscape with figures preparing food, using Chinese blue and white bowls and other utensils.
 Figure 24 Pen box of blue and white porcelain, based on an Islamic metal prototype. With Ottoman gold hinges and fittings inset with rubies and other jewels, and gold leaf decoration inside the cover.



Figure 25 Dish inscribed in Arabic and Bowl with Doranic inscriptions

Besides the widely unearthed Chinese ceramics, the Middle East is also famous with large quantities of high-quality ceramics collection. The Topkapi Museum, Istanbul, Turkey and the

¹⁶ Carswell, John. *Blue & white: Chinese porcelain around the world*, London: British Museum, 2000.

¹⁷ Krahl, Regina and Nurdan Erbahar. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul : A Complete Catalogue*, London : Sotheby's Pubns. , 1986.

Ardebil Shrine located in Iran both collect huge amounts of Chinese ceramics from Yuan to Qing Dynasties which show the close relationship between China and the Middle East and the special courtesy to Chinese ceramics here (Figure 26).¹⁸

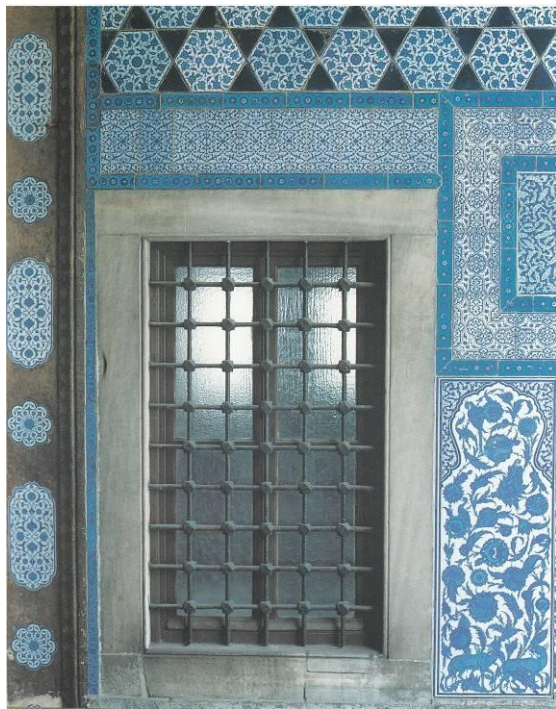


Figure 26 Ottoman blue and turquoise glazed tiles, on the facade of the Sunnet Odasi, Topkapi Saray, Istanbul.

5. Chinese ceramics in Europe

Only after the beginning of great maritime era in the 16th century, Europe could gradually come into contact with large numbers of Chinese ceramics, so for the European local market, Chinese ceramics soon become a new kind of luxury good. Besides the exquisite ceramic itself, the risk and cost from the long-distance maritime transportation, European's curiosity and fanaticism on the Orient, were all prompting the ceramics as artwork and luxury for a long time pursued by the upper-class European aristocrats and officials, while only a few implements were actually used in daily life.

The Chinese ceramics as luxury goods were sometimes reprocessed by the European local workshop or some workshop in Middle East and often appearing in a more costly form. The craftsman often set clasp made in gold, silver or other precious metals around the mouth and bottom of ceramics, sometime gems will also been decorated on the surface of ceramics to

¹⁸ T. Misugi. *Chinese Porcelain Collections in the Near East: Topkapi and Ardebil*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1981.

Ayers, John. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Sayay Museum*, Philip Wilson publishers, 1986.

stress its precious degree (Figure 27).¹⁹ Meanwhile, the ceramics as art often become the main objects depicted in the still life at that time and some painters also enjoyed adding Chinese ceramic elements in their creative paintings (Figure 28 and 29).²⁰ In the Santos palace located in Lisbon, Portugal, there are huge amount of Chinese ceramics enchased on the pyramidal ceiling, indicated the desire to show off their Chinese collections of the royal family (Figure 30).²¹

However, with the passage of time, the Chinese porcelain began throw into the European market in influx. The European consumers have also built up their own taste and aesthetic standards on ceramics instead of the initial blindly adoring. Some European officials in Southeast Asia attempted to send ware and decorative pattern designed in European style to the production center in China by medium merchants or direct contacts, ordering some memorial artifacts with personal or aristocratic family characteristics and symbols.²² The exchanging habit on Chinese ceramics among the Upper-class also promoted the rapid spread of this trend, thus to late Ming period, besides the implements decorated with oriental patterns, the European royal courts, and some aristocratic families often had their own characteristic ceramics. Archaeologists found large scale of armorial ceramics in Macau and Portugal in the late Ming period sites and these were still of big quantities of armorial ceramics collected in the local museum there (Figure 31 and 32).²³

¹⁹ Lach, Donald F. *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1998.

²⁰ Jarry, Madeleine. *Chinoiserie : Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art 17th and 18th Centuries*, New York : Vendome Press, 1981.

²¹ Impey, Oliver. *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration*, London: Oxford University Press, 1977.

²² Howard, David and John Ayers. *China for the West: Chinese Porcelain & Other Decorative Arts for Export Illustrated from the Mottahedeh Collection*. London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1978.

²³ *Chinese Export Porcelain From The Museum Of Anastacio Gongalves', Lisbon*, Lisbon: Philip Wilson, 1996.



Figure 27 Blue and white porcelain with Elizabethan silver-gilt mounts, Wanli period.

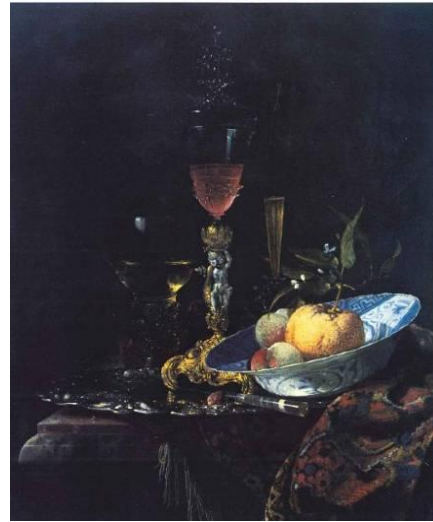


Figure 28 Still life of Millem Kalf, *Oil on canvas*, The Cleveland Museum of Art.



Figure 29 Giovanni Bellini, *The Feast of the Gods* (Detail), 1514

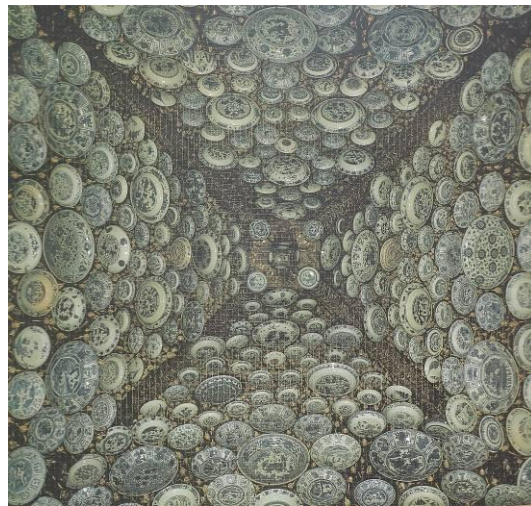


Figure 30 The pyramid ceiling of the De Santos Palace in Lisbon

In the initial time when Chinese ceramics were entering the European market, they were extremely popular in the Upper-class. However, as time goes on, the European consumers are not content to only accept the existing decorative patterns and began their attempts to give feedback and influence the porcelain production in China. In late Ming, the Jingdezhen kilns, closed and far away from Europe in Jiangxi, China, finally produced painted all kinds of ceramics with western character, scene, badge and texts and burn out many new types during the imitation on western artifacts. The broad scope of communication between China and the West, the depth of cultural influence are both obvious.

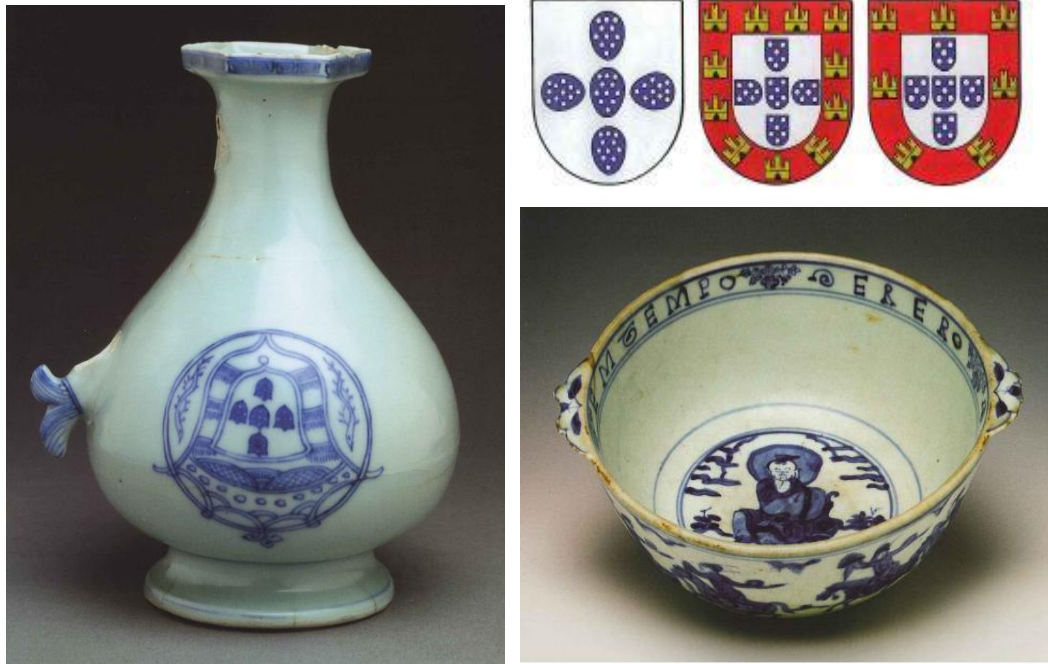


Figure 31 Ewer with The Royal Arms of Portugal, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 32 Bowl with Portuguese inscriptions (The name of some Portuguese explorer)

Conclusion

By reviewing the worldwide flowing of Chinese ceramics, the mode and degree they were accepted by the local, we can see, at the beginning of the globalization process, the true attitudes in dealing with foreign cultures shown by the countries and regions in different culture process and cultural traditions. It helps us to understand the forming process of today, the era that a new culture can be promoted rapidly into every corner of the world. In addition, it encourages us to think again, this kind of globalization which push the original enriched local cultures into the more similar 'world culture' is the future or end of the human civilization.