

Jingdezhen Export Ceramics of Ming and Qing Dynasties in the View of Soft Power

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Abstract. Soft power as a special kind of diplomacy, to this point in the history of Chinese ceramics is very obvious. "The porcelain - jingdezhen" starting from the song dynasty and blue white porcelain of jingdezhen famous at home and abroad, Jingdezhen blue white porcelain both at home and abroad. In Yuan Ming and Qing periods, porcelain in western eyes with the same name in China. Enough to prove that China's influence abroad. Jingdezhen porcelain of sell like hot cakes on the one hand reflects the European porcelain behind, on the other hand also see that the international cooperation and exchange of toughness strength.

Keywords: Soft Power; Jingdezhen; Export Ceramics; Ceramic communication.

1. Soft Power and Cultural Soft Power

In 1990, Harvard professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr. put forward the concept of soft power, a positive, attractive and absorbing power, and a worship power following strength and might. The term of soft power was coined in contrast to hard power, which is a tough power of deprivation and coerce. Soft power is an influence of national culture and ideology, including culture, life-style, ideology, national cohesion and international mechanism. As a branch concept, cultural soft power is a kind of internal flexible vitality and influence, which has a strong penetrable and absorbing power, using cultural influence and charisma to affect the development of other countries or nations.

As early as 10,000 years ago, ancient Chinese had learnt to make ceramics with clay, and then burnt them into various shapes for daily use. As time went on, ceramics decorated with various patterns had been gradually developed. With the development of ceramic making plus frequent contact with foreign countries, ceramic production met not only domestic demand, but foreign demand as well.

After its invention, great quantity of ceramics had been exported in Tang Dynasty to other Asian countries like Japan, Philippines, and Egypt and East Africa. Until the end of 14th century, Chinese ceramics could be found around every corner of the world. During the period of Song and Yuan dynasties, Chinese ceramics had already been shipped to overseas. Arabs controlled the trade of Chinese ceramics at this time. Merchant ships sailed from Guangzhou and Quanzhou of China to Egypt. Chinese ceramics crossed the vast oceans and arrived in North Africa along with Chinese and foreign merchant vessels. Remains of three-colored glazed potteries, blue china of Yue kiln, white porcelains of Xing kiln, blue-and-white porcelains of Yuan Dynasty and blue porcelains of Changsha kiln had been excavated in Africa. Relying on convenient seaways, the foreign trade of Chinese ceramics had reached its pinnacle during Ming and Qing dynasties. As the center of Chinese ceramic production at that time, Jingdezhen focused mainly on the production of blue-and-white porcelains. During this period, blue-and-white porcelains made in Jingdezhen exported not only to other Asian countries and Africa, but even to many European countries.

2. Jingdezhen Export Ceramics in Ming and Qing Dynasties

In the beginning of Ming Dynasty, Zhenghe led seven maritime expeditions to the Western Seas and visited more than 30 countries and regions in west Pacific and the Indian Ocean, as far as to the coast of the Red Sea and the east coast of Africa, bringing with him huge amount of Chinese ceramics,

silk, tea, iron wares, musk and metallic coins. The introduction of smaltum was crucial to the development and spread of blue-and-white porcelains during the ruling period of Yongle Emperor and Xuande Emperor of Ming Dynasty. In *History of Chinese Ceramics* (edited by Wu Jingren), the author wrote: "Pigments like blue-and-white, used on ceramics of Ming Dynasty, were mainly imported from foreign countries. In the beginning, Suni and Boqing were the major materials. When Suni and Boqing were used up, Huiqing took their place." This proves that smaltum was very popular in Ming Dynasty and that this kind of porcelain painting was popular among Islamic countries at that time. In the wake of Zhenghe's expeditions, foreign diplomats came to China and paid their tribute with Islamic handicrafts. Among the blue-and-white porcelains of Yongxuan Period, there are many exotic and mysterious shapes – a unique style exactly the same as that of the handicrafts made in the Islamic world in Arab region.

During the ruling of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong in Ming Dynasty, Chinese ceramic export had reached its pinnacle. Europe had become the biggest market for Jingdezhen ceramics. In order to accommodate the overseas market, Jingdezhen ceramics had evolved into artistic painted ceramics with a unique style, which combines Chinese culture with Western characteristics. Armorial porcelain is one example of this style. In the West, coats of arms, including family badge, national emblem, city badge, army emblem, and institution badge, symbolize pride and decent as well as social identity and status. In Ming and Qing dynasties, Jingdezhen kilnmen shipped the white ceramic embryos to Guangzhou where these embryos would be painted and burnt. According to the requests of the European buyers, Guangzhou's kilnmen painted the ceramics with the designs, colors and patterns favored in Europe. Due to the differences between Chinese and Western culture, Chinese kilnmen sometimes could not understand the meanings of the patterns. As a result, they painted some patterns neither Chinese nor Western style but mere copies of the original patterns. Nevertheless, these armorial porcelains were popular in Portugal, Spain, Holland, France, Britain, and Germany. Armorial porcelains, exotic and a combination of eastern and western arts, played a significant role in political, economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries and became an epitome of eastern and western cultural exchange. Except the abundant armorial porcelains, Europe's kings and nobles cherished Jingdezhen ceramics. Regular Chinese ceramics became very expensive in the West and only aristocrats had the opportunity to use them. They would rival and brag about the Jingdezhen ceramics they possessed. Before 17th century, the daily utensils in the West were mainly potteries, carpentries, and metal wares. Potteries, in particular, were widely used in daily life. The bright, clean, and beautiful ceramics took the place of the rough, heavy, and ugly potteries, becoming the favorite in the European market.

The great amount of imported Jingdezhen ceramics changed European's life-style, eating habits, and aesthetic orientation. Generally speaking, Jingdezhen ceramics imposed a profound impact on European culture and accelerated modern European civilization. With the development of science and technology, Europe's ceramic making had made a great progress. Because Chinese ceramics were extremely expensive, European porcelain makers began to learn how to make them. In the beginning, they comprehensively used glass technology. In 15th century, Venice Antonio glass blue painted potteries had been invented. Nader. Pelling, a glass engineer in Nuremberg, Germany, burnt the first glazed potteries with glass texture in 16th century. In 1709, alchemist Johann Friedrich Bottger burnt Europe's first piece of white glazed porcelain. In 1710, the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory was established in Meissen, Germany, supplying custom-made quality porcelains for European upper class. Meissen-style porcelains exerted a huge influence on the whole European ceramic industry for a long period of time. Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles, and 18th century French priest, came to China during the ruling period of Kangxi Emperor and lived in Jingdezhen for seven years. In the letters about his observation at China's kilns, he wrote about the materials, working process, decoration methods and burning of Jingdezhen porcelains, suggesting an accurate approach for Europe's porcelain making. Here is one paragraph:

"From time to time I have stayed in Jingdezhen to administer to the spiritual necessities of my converts, and so I have interested myself in the manufacture of this beautiful porcelain, which is so

highly prized, and is sent to all parts of the world. Nothing but my curiosity could ever have prompted me to such researches, but it appears to me that a minute description of all that concerns this kind of work might, somehow, be useful in Europe.”

On the one hand, European porcelain was the imitation of Chinese counterpart. Take Willow Patter for example. The blue-and-white porcelain is a copy of Chinese garden with rich Chinese characteristics like small bridges, murmuring streams, and flying birds. On the other hand, European porcelains were a far cry from Chinese ceramics. European porcelains showcased glass texture, instead of jade-like bright and clean. Shapes were also different. Most of European porcelains were made catering to Europeans' life-style and aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, they were popular in European market. In 2012, an important international communication show, *Passion for Porcelain: Masterpieces of Ceramics* from the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, was held at National Museum of China. Export porcelains from early Ming Dynasty, European-customed Chinese porcelains, and Europe's imitations of mid-Qing Dynasty porcelains were displayed on the show, restoring a little-known history of communication and clash between eastern and western cultures triggered by porcelain trade.

3. Conclusion

With the development of history, cultural communication blossoms in the flowing time and the spreading space. When an advanced culture permeates another relatively backward one, certain rejection and conflict are inevitable. A cultural common ground has been shaped after a period of absorption and digestion, and selection and reformation after the clash between foreignness and aboriginality. Jingdezhen export ceramics in Ming and Qing dynasties are such an exemplar of cultural fusion. In thousands of years, Chinese ceramics have become common daily utensils. But in the West, the expensive and precious Chinese ceramics were first copied and then reinvented. It is in fact a result of clash and shake of porcelain culture exchange. Unlike military occupation and economic plunder and expansion, this national and international soft power changed the world in a gentle and dynamic manner.

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