

Chinese Porcelain Interpretation in Europe: History of Chinese and European Porcelain Cultures Relationships

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Abstract—In the XVII-XVIII centuries, European countries experienced spread of a new fashion for all Chinese due to expansion of European missionaries and diplomatic missions and establishment of trade relations between Europe and China. This Chinese trend inspired many Europeans resulting in the emergence of "chinoiserie" style in the West. The XVII century "chinoiserie" was marked by the merger of Western Baroque and Chinese artistic tradition, while in the XVIII century it was a mix of the Rococo and elements of Chinese art. Artworks and crafts produced by European artists reflected the process of interaction between Chinese and Western cultures: European masters, who studied foreign art, were eagerly looking for different artistic methods and discovering ways of reading them. Thus, works of art such as porcelain can be read as a "text" or an "encoded message" constituted of different elements of language of art, the study of which is necessary in order to the understanding of the text and to the providing the reliable reading.

Keywords—Chinese porcelain; European porcelain; chinoiserie; language of art; text

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1708, in Saxony the German alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, working with the physicist Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, finally succeeded in the attempts to uncover the secret of white porcelain mass, the main component of which was kaolin clay [1]. Kaolin clay was found in the town of Schneeberg in Saxony, the so-called "shnor land" [2]. Kaolin clay, which was used in China, was discovered on Mount Gaoling, Fuliang County, Jiangxi Province and was named after this toponym. Kaolin was used in China in the Shang period (1766 - 1122 BC) for the production of "proto-porcelain". Solid porcelain was made in the period of Eastern Han (25 AD - 220 AD) with a greenish tint, and in the period of Northern Qi (550 - 577) - with a white glaze. They are called "qingqi" (celadon porcelain) and "baici" (white porcelain), respectively [3].

As early as 1710 by order of Augustus II the Strong, Elector of Saxony, the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, the first porcelain factory in Europe was established in Meissen. It began to produce items whose

material was very close in quality, composition and appearance to porcelain imported from China [4]. Eight years later, in 1818, the Augarten Porcelain Manufactory, the second after the Meissen one, was opened in Vienna. Its founder was Claudius Innocentius du Paquier, who for the next 25 years was granted the imperial privilege of exclusive porcelain production, which drew the royal attention due to its commercial value [2]. In the 1720-s and 1740-s, porcelain manufactories were founded in Stockholm (Rörstrand, 1726), Florence (Doccia Manufactory, 1737), Vincennes (Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, 1745) and other European cities.

II. EARLY PERIOD: IMITATION OF CHINESE PORCELAIN

Since the discovery of the "secret" of porcelain production, European masters made comprehensive copies of Chinese samples, sought to reproduce not only "the material basis, composition and properties of the mass, but also use individual principles of form modeling, techniques and motifs of its decoration" [5]. In 1709, J. F. Böttger already set forth his artistic concept in the treatise "Not-Unmistakable Idea" ("Unvorgreifliche Gedanken"): "He wanted only tea and coffee utensils to be executed according to East Asian standards, since good practice was formed in those countries because of long use..." [6]. J. F. Böttger was quite interested in imitating the decoration of East Asian designs. On the sides of the Böttger porcelain, scenes with Chinese houses, pagodas, fences, bridges and junks were often depicted. At the early stages of porcelain production, Meissen artists made considerable efforts to copy Chinese ornament as accurately as possible. Thus, starting from 1710, on Böttger ceramics we find square signs of repeated embossing, which partially imitate embossing on Chinese Yixing ceramics [6]. The ruler of Saxony, Augustus the Strong, was a great lover and collector of ceramics and porcelain from China. Presumably, he provided Böttger with collected items as a reference for study and further imitation.

In addition, Europe became acquainted with oriental porcelain art through illustrated albums performed by travelers and members of diplomatic missions, prints, as well as a significant number of exported original porcelain items.

An example is the report of Jan Neuhof, a member of the Dutch Embassy in China in 1656, supplemented by one hundred and fifty illustrations. Subsequently, the report was compiled and published for the first time in 1666 in Dutch, and later translated into Latin, English, German and French. In this illustrated report, Jan Neuhof presented to the Europeans a subjective perception of the eastern world, its image reflected in the eyes of a Westerner. The graphic motifs depicted in the illustrations of the report “after half a century were readily borrowed by engravers who created compositions in the chinoiserie style” [7], for example, by Johann Christoph Weigel. An important role in the interpretation of exotic oriental realities and the formation of Europe's ideas about the East was played by the “China Monumentis” by the German scientist Athanasius Kircher in 1667 and the “Beschrijving van tween en terie gezantschap naar China” by Olfert Dapper in 1670 [7].

III. CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE PORCELAIN IN EUROPE

Export items coming from China to the European market, in turn, were generally represented by three types: products, the decoration and forms of which were practically indistinguishable from products made for the Chinese domestic market (see "Fig. 1"), porcelain developed specifically for export purposes in accordance with the aesthetic tastes and requirements of the Europeans, and objects that embodied the ideas of Chinese masters about the Western world [8]. An important role in familiarizing the Chinese artists with the Western world played European missionaries involved in creative activities at the imperial court, including the Italian Jesuit monk Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), the Italian missionary Nicolo Tomacelli (1722–1725), the French priest François Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664–1741), etc. They introduced the Chinese potters to Western civilization, helping craftsmen to understand the foreign culture, as well as the preferences and aesthetic views of the foreigners. Their activities in workshops at the Chinese court were organized in such a way that it was they who largely determined the style of export art. The Qing Emperor Kangxi paid special attention to the issue of expanding the marketing of Chinese crafts in the international art market and sought to establish a state control system in this area. “For most of the 18th century, overseas technologies, forms, and themes in Qing art stimulated trade with Europe and acted as cultural innovations of the ruling dynasty.” [9]



Fig. 1. The dish. Porcelain. China. The first quarter of the 18th century. 38 cm. State Hermitage Museum.

Europeans, in turn, in accordance with their aesthetic preferences and cultural ideas put forward certain requirements for porcelain, which Chinese artists sought to satisfy. So, they often offered specific projects and sketches of murals, which were to be performed by Chinese masters. Such products went exclusively to the foreign market and were not welcomed in the domestic one. The Chinese also drew certain knowledge about Europe from observations of the life of foreign traders whom they met in Guangzhou. In addition, the decoration of Chinese export products shows imitation of European engraving surrounded by Far Eastern ornaments, Chinese masters also paint portraits of Western people on the porcelain in a peculiar manner [10]. A vivid example of this is the Chinese creamer with a lid of the 18th century, in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (see "Fig. 2"). A creamer against a background of nature depicts a pair of Europeans – young man and woman, in all likelihood, lovers. They are transmitted by the Chinese master based on the principles and techniques of Chinese ink painting. Also, such a product as a creamer is not characteristic in its form and function for the Chinese tradition, and so we can conclude that export products were made to fit not only aesthetic tastes, but also the lifestyle of European customers.



Fig. 2. A creamer with a lid. China, 18th century. Porcelain, icing. Overglaze painting. Height: 12 cm (with lid); height: 10 cm (without lid); diameter: 4 cm (neck). State Hermitage Museum.

Products that meet the tastes of foreigners were new to Chinese art and to some extent contributed to the development of decoration techniques and the expansion of both domestic production and the art market. One can conclude that to the European market often came adapted Chinese products, which were quite far from the original oriental designs, did not have such a deep symbolism and often lost the semantics of texts of oriental works of art. "The color scheme of the decorations was too colorful, not characteristic for the oriental style, and superfluous flowers and plants twisted into intricate plexuses were added to the composition. All this looked romantic, even somewhat sugary, and should have made a proper impression on the inhabitants of Europe. It was these specially made for Europe goods that made on the Europeans the impression that inspired them to create their own designs in Chinese style" [11]. In this regard, we can speak about the discrepancy between the artworks that came to Europe as the "original" oriental art and the works of the Chinese domestic market, which by itself caused even greater difficulties for Europeans to understand the eastern art tradition.

IV. CONVERGENCE AND INTEGRATION OF WESTERN AND EASTERN CULTURE AND ARTISTIC THOUGHT IN PORCELAIN

Acquainted with the "exotic" oriental art and having received rather fragmented and superficial ideas about it, Western artists only imitated foreign products, imitating the language of Chinese art and not suspecting the existing rules of use and the meanings of linguistic elements of art products' decoration. Interest in the East was rather limited and narrowly focused; Europeans did not have deep knowledge in the field of Chinese culture, philosophical and religious thought, history and aesthetics. The Europeans first of all demonstrated their enthusiasm for the concepts of the

ancient Chinese thinker Confucius, which were the basis of the ancient Chinese civilization and included the ideas of a "perfect wise" ruler, decency (li), "humanity" (ren), etc. Confucius put forward the criteria of a "noble husband", a person who possessed ideal spiritual, moral qualities, such as "justice, modesty, truthfulness, affability, respectfulness, sincerity, caution, the ability to restrain one's desires" [12], etc. These concepts turned out to be very relevant for the Western world in the Age of Enlightenment and led to the formation of the ideal utopian image of the Chinese state among Europeans with a wise monarch, a competent and reasonably built system of government. "The Celestial Empire turned out to be the antithesis of the West - the world of exquisite wisdom". [13]

In Chinese porcelain Europeans discovered subtle beauty and deep wisdom, so they began to more actively study and interpret the Chinese tradition [14]. The first European porcelain artists borrowed and copied oriental themes in their works. Russian Sinologist, researcher of Chinese Porcelain T. V. Arapova notes: "Oriental motifs read by European masters often get a kind of interpretation that is different from the original. The plots take the form of funny grotesques, are depicted with the grace inherent in the Rococo style" [15]. Thereby, in their work, artists began to embody the image of China, "as real as it was fictional" [16].

Thus, in the 18th century, European art of Rococo absorbed the elements of the expressive language and techniques of Chinese art and at the same time played a significant role in the convergence and integration of Western and Eastern culture and artistic thought [17]. Chinese porcelain art, due to its various forms, sophistication and exquisiteness, gave inspiration to Europeans, accustomed to more strict, symmetrical and orderly forms. In particular, Chinese porcelain pieces, covered with pale pink opaque enamel containing gold particles, gained wide popularity in Europe, since they corresponded to light faded shades and delicate combinations prevailing in the era of the Rococo style [18]. Chinese porcelain, distinguished by subtlety, lightness and elegance, fully corresponded to the aesthetic concepts and tastes of the Rococo period.

European masters created their own texts and works of art, likening them to oriental wonders, shrouded in mystery. In fact, they endowed their work with the necessary social, cultural and moral values, bringing Chinese elements in line with the requirements, aesthetic views and tastes of people of their era. Due to the differences in Western and Eastern culture, aesthetics and philosophy, misunderstanding of language and artistic symbolism, a distortion of the original meanings occurred, while the discovery of genuine meanings was not possible. In the works of art, Western masters often embodied their own subjective perception of the world of oriental culture, with each artist striving to create its unique image.

In the Meissen manufactory, samples of oriental motifs created by different artists to be embodied in porcelain were collected in a separate publication - the so-called "Schulz-Codex", published in 1922. The Codex contains more than a thousand sketches devoted to China and representing scenes

of the daily life of the Chinese, which, however, the authors have never seen. Most of the sketches were made by Johann Gregor Heroldt, the head of the Manufactory and one of the most prominent court artists who worked in the style of chinoiserie.

V. RETHINKING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ARTISTIC LANGUAGE OF CHINESE PORCELAIN

Johann Gregor Heroldt not only imitated Chinese decorations and forms, but made in them certain stylistic changes. For example, Chinese artists for a long period created their works in the form of a scroll - these features they transferred to porcelain. This feature was not understood by Europeans, who were accustomed to object relations in the two-dimensional space of paintings. To adapt their own ideas and create works corresponding to Western artistic thinking, European masters deliberately used the method of unsystematic scaling and random arrangement of objects.

Before Heroldt, artists usually focused on conveying landscapes, and among the hills, trees, pavilions, pagodas, bridges and other buildings they in a somewhat random order depicted rather large-scale figures of people and animals. An example is the painting of the teabowl and saucer of the inventor of European porcelain, J. F. Böttger, which was made in 1722-1723 (see "Fig. 3"). On the teabowl is an image of a Chinese man, slightly bent under the weight of a pole, on which two birds sit. The character's figure is very large and occupies most of the painting space. Behind the hero there are disproportionately small mountains, on one of which a tree is depicted, which is comparable in size to the tail of one of the birds. On the saucer, the figures of the characters form the foreground. The middle plan is created by an arched rock, attributed by the artist to the left side of the painting, and it is crowned with an unstable and somewhat banked Chinese-style building, emphasizing the precariousness of the whole composition. The miniature architectural structures form the long-range plan. The horizon line both on the teabowl and on the saucer is too low, which indicates the lack of artist's understanding of the methods of spatial organization on three-dimensional porcelain items.



Fig. 3. A teabowl and saucer. Porcelain. Painting by J. F. Böttger. Teabowl: 7.5x6.6 cm. Saucer: 2.7x13.3 cm. Private collection. 1722-1723.

Thus, it turned out to be impossible to transfer the principles of composition and perspective inherent in Western painting to the early paintings of European porcelain. The characteristics of the early chinoiserie style in porcelain painting include the fragility of architectural structures, as well as the grotesqueness of the characters [19], which in turn can be traced in the mentioned item by J. F. Böttger. For J. G. Heroldt, on the contrary, the figures of characters became more important, and the organization of images now began to follow Western compositional principles. As a rule, in his paintings the figures are proportional to each other, and with the introduction of landscapes the principles of perspective are observed. This indicates the formation of artists' understanding of the principles and features of creating paintings on three-dimensional porcelain.

Summarizing the foregoing, we can conclude that, only starting with the work of the German artist J. G. Heroldt, the features and elements borrowed from the artistic language of Chinese porcelain began to undergo a process of rethinking and interpretation. In general, Europeans had a peculiar and rather distorted understanding of the oriental decor of decorative and applied art and put forward a different "correlation of the composition of the drawing with the shape of the object" [20]. "Having stopped making copies of Chinese things, Europeans began to stylize them, which look like "inspired nonsense" on a Chinese theme, like using arbitrary Chinese motifs in random places, or like an outspoken grotesque" [21].

Gradually, European masters began to comprehend the linguistic tradition in Chinese porcelain art, endowing it with new content, connotations and symbolism. The decors made by Johann Gregor Heroldt showed a fabulous image of China, an exotic world where a carefree existence is possible. The characters in the paintings led an idle life filled with pleasures: they smoked, drank tea, played and walked. On the sugar bowl, painted by J. G. Heroldt in 1723-1724, for example, the images of two Chinese men playing musical instruments outdoors are depicted. Their faces and postures testify to the harmony of life (see "Fig. 4"). Heroldt created a peculiar utopia, heaven on earth in his art [22].



Fig. 4. Porcelain. Sugar Bowl. Painting by J. G. Heroldt. Dresden, Dresden State Art Collections, China Collection. 4x10.2x7.4 cm. 1723-1724.

Many artists worked under the leadership of Johann Gregor Heroldt, while the style of the paintings of four of them was close to his works: Johann Christoph Horn (1692 - 1760), Philipp Ernst Schindler (1695 - 1765), Johann Ehrenfried Stadler (1701 - 1741) and Christian Friedrich Herold (1700 - 1779). The works of J. E. Stadler were distinguished by a high degree of abstraction, the combination of individual motifs and bright color parts; the images of his works are very expressive, and the pictorial manner demonstrated the artist's confident hand. C.F. Herold expanded the range of subjects with portraits of sailboats, merchants and workers (see "Fig. 5"), which was not characteristic of earlier European works. Adam Friedrich Löwenfinck (1714 - 1754) in his paintings united European and Asian landscapes, figures of Chinese and Western merchants, mythical animals. Unknown fantastic and fairytale animals is a distinctive feature of A. F. Löwenfinck work (see "Fig. 6") [22].



Fig. 5. Porcelain. Painting by C. F. Herold. Casket for tobacco, Dresden, Dresden State Art Collections, China Collection. 2.8x7x5.1 cm. 1730-1735.



Fig. 6. Plate. Porcelain. Painting by A. F. Löwenfinck. Dresden, Dresden State Art Collections, China Collection. 5.1x30 cm. 1735.

Copies of Chinese porcelain made by Meissen Manufactory often had pseudo-Chinese characters [23]. These items were often sold in other European countries at a high cost. In addition, many porcelain manufactories perceived Meissen porcelain as a role model. As a result of this, there was, for example, the idea of "the secondary and imitative nature of the Viennese pictorial decoration of the du Paquier period" [24]. Nevertheless, Natalya Kazakevich notes that both German and Viennese manufactories used original samples from the same sources. At the same time, the researcher cites differences between Viennese and Saxon paintings in the style of chinoiserie: the first "is different from Meissen's fantasy compositions of Heroldt, since it remains faithful in general and in details to the engraving-model ... For Vienna porcelain after 1725, similar paintings with scenes of "chinoiserie style" are characteristic, when the decor is dominated by a baroque ornamental frame, and figure painting is limited to small medallions" [24]

It should be noted that in the process of borrowing and reception of literary Chinese texts, a significant distortion of the original meanings sometimes occurred. A striking example of this is the change in the functions of small plastic works. This is confirmed by researcher M.S. Maksimova, noting in her thesis that various images of animals used by the Chinese in funeral rituals, were borrowed by Europeans for a different purpose: to decorate salons and boudoirs [25].

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, during the Europeans' spontaneous reception of images, structural features and elements of the language of the Chinese tradition of porcelain production, enrichment and transformation of the language of European art took place. European artists have made various attempts to interpret and receive the language and characteristics of Chinese works of art. The original linguistic elements distinguishing Chinese art objects were borrowed in Western countries, often with a loss of their original meaning and content. Europeans endowed the perceived original texts of works of art with their own meanings and content, semantic meanings, giving a new impetus to the development of European art during the periods of the Baroque and Rococo styles in the 17th – 18th centuries.

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