

Chinese Visual Language in European Chinoiserie Porcelain: Lost Meanings and New Ways of Artistic Expression

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ABSTRACT

European potters, having become acquainted with Chinese porcelain, in the 18th century launched an investigation of the methods and ways of reading structural and semantic formations characteristic of the language of foreign art. Chinese artists painting porcelain items sought not only the beauty of form, composition and color, i.e. visual aesthetics, but at the same time conveyed deep philosophical meanings and truths. This system of traditional representations was adopted by the Europeans, who, through the prism of their own ideas and tastes, inserted their subjective understanding in their creative works. The study is aimed to discuss European and Chinese reading/ translation strategies to interpret and translate visual language and texts in the process of artistic communication between the two traditions in the context of intercultural dialogue. Comparative analysis of visual language characteristic of Chinese ceramics and European chinoiserie makes possible identification of particular symbols and ideas which were lost or misread in the process of interpretation and translation, as exemplified by the study of porcelain pieces.

Keywords: visual language, Chinoiserie, Porcelain, China, European art

I. INTRODUCTION

The art of porcelain can be considered as a means of reflecting the process of interaction between Chinese and Western culture, as well as a "text" constructed with units of the sign system, codes and conditional elements. European potters, having become acquainted with Chinese porcelain, in the 18th century launched an investigation of the methods and ways of reading structural and semantic formations characteristic of the language of foreign art. However, this process was not unidirectional: at the end of the 17th and 18th centuries through imitation, adaptation and recreation Chinese art developed a renewed visual language rooted deeply in European artistic tradition.

Thus, the present study is aimed to draw attention to the continuous process of enriching European and Chinese art through interaction in the field of porcelain. The study proposes discussion on European and Chinese reading/ translation strategies to interpret and translate visual language and texts in the process of artistic communication between the two traditions in the context of intercultural dialogue. This essay also offers comparative analysis of visual language characteristic of Chinese ceramics and European chinoiserie to identify particular symbols and ideas

which were lost or misread in the process of interpretation and translation, as exemplified by the study of porcelain pieces.

II. CHINESE VISUAL LANGUAGE IN EUROPEAN READING AND TRANSLATION: THEORETICAL ISSUES

Contemporary science provides significant empirical evidence on the significance of arrival of Chinese and to a lesser extent Japanese porcelain in Europe. In his prominent study Leidy concludes that it gave birth to numerous innovations that changed European porcelain unprecedentedly in the aspect of technology, forms, shapes, and designs. As Leidy states, "[t]he rich visual language of Chinese culture depicted on these works – including landscapes..., flowers and birds..., fruit..., mythical.. and real... animals, figures..., narrative tales..., as well as religious imagery.. – was introduced to and reinterpreted in the ceramics traditions of western countries, including Germany, France, England, and ultimately, the United States, after direct trade with China was established in 1784. One could say that as the use of porcelain became a global language, Chinese forms and motifs provided the grammar, and they continue to do so even today" [1].

Odell distinguishes two categories of porcelain where she sees "the European depiction of a *European* subject in a Chinese style as distinct from a European depiction of a *Chinese* subject in the imitation of a Chinese manner.." [2] Still she concludes that the first way of the application of Chinese style to European imagery was extremely rare in Europe. "Its rarity may also be related to the fact that it does not aim to translate style, in other words to take Chinese content and reposition it in a European (or a European interpretation of a Chinese) visual language, but to "speak" in Chinese, to look at European subject matter through Chinese eyes" [3]. Another important observation made by Odell is that European eighteenth-century craftsmen following and adopting Chinese visual model did not attempt to imitate foreign aesthetics. "By quoting imagery drawn from the descriptive tradition of illustrated books about the non-European world, they referenced not the Chinese original but a body of accumulated knowledge *about* China in order to signal authenticity of place if not origin of manufacture" [4].

The art of porcelain is always shaped within different cultural contexts. It reflects to a large extent social, religious, aesthetic experience of people, human everyday life. National porcelain tradition is a rich imaginative and symbolic world which is shaped by culture. Being capable of retaining and transmitting cultural information via artistic images which act as symbols, the art of porcelain may be interpreted as a complex semiotic system which implies a combination of communication options intended for delivering a message. So what would happen in case of interaction between two different artistic traditions? Miscommunications are inevitable. For example, early export wares from China "were decorated with freely painted flowering trees and birds, scenes from popular Chinese novels and dramas, Immortals and sages, antique vases, formal paneled designs and flower baskets, their meaning and symbolism lost on their western owners but conveying image of that mysterious far-off land of China" [5].

Le Corbeiller points out the inventive and creative approach of European potters to Chinese porcelain. In her study of Delft blue and white wares she concludes that those porcelains were produced not as a form of a substitute based on the idea of the correctness and accuracy with respect to the original. The reading and translation process of Chinese visual language and imagery implied something she calls "a highly subjective "feel" for the thing" [6]. As Le Corbeiller states, Dutch craftsmen reflect deeply on creativity of Chinese artists, finding the ways to make their works independent and creative on their own. She also highlights the appropriateness of the term "translation" to be used in this context: "Perhaps it would be more accurate to think of them as translations... as a rule we

are not satisfied with a literal translation from one language to another; we require not a point-by-point correspondence, but an equivalence of intention-of spirit, of effect. What we accept as a "good" translation is in fact one that, being essentially idiomatic, is really a paraphrase of the original. Each translator must analyze and choose the idioms and elements of design that will produce what he feels to be an equivalence... Success depends, in effect, on the purpose and style of the translator, and in evaluating the legitimacy and originality of a translation contemporaneity appears to be an important factor: what we accept as enthusiasm for novel ideas or techniques we tend to dismiss as eclecticism, pedantry, or outright calculation when it appears at a later period" [7].

The directions identified within this theoretical framework will provide conceptual and contextual foundations for analysis of particular porcelain pieces I conduct in the following section.

III. CHINESE VISUAL LANGUAGE IN EUROPEAN READING AND TRANSLATION: LOST MEANINGS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The success in producing porcelain similar to Chinese products in Europe is linked with the name of the German alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, who succeeded in creating red ceramics based on Yixing ware and then, together with physicist Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, started to develop solid white porcelain. Since Böttger, European craftsmen sought to reproduce Chinese designs. In the early Böttger's pottery, there are traces of attempts to copy certain forms of ware, for example, jugs and a bowl. Böttger "wanted only tea and coffee utensils to be made according to East Asian models, because in those countries, due to long use, good practice was formed ..." [8].



Fig. 1. *To the left*: a teapot with a relief in the form of a flowering branch. Meissen. 1710-1712. Böttger's ceramics. Height: 8.5 cm; *In*

the middle: a coffee pot with a relief in the form of a flowering branch. Meissen. 1710-1712. Böttger's ceramics. Height: 15.4 cm; To the right: a teapot with a relief in the form of a flowering branch. Dehua. Porcelain. 1675 - 1725. Height: 7.4 cm.

A comparison of Chinese originals and Meissen porcelain clearly shows Böttger's approach. At first glance, a teapot with a relief in the form of a flowering branch of 1710-1712 ("Fig. 1", to the left) almost completely copies the Chinese original in its form and plastic decor ("Fig. 1", to the right) - the craftsman gave it only a slightly higher and narrower form. However, a more detailed analysis reveals German master's misunderstanding of the specifics of the Chinese art language. In terms of the compositional organization of the plastic decor, obvious differences can be found. Chinese artistic tradition is characterized by a desire to convey the concept of weight in a planar composition; as a rule, images should create a sense of unbalanced parts, their asymmetry. At the same time, Chinese masters, while depicting trees, tend to preserve their physical stability, i.e. plants should be thicker down and become thinner up. The European author, organizing flowers and branches, seeks to distribute them evenly on the surface of the teapot, while the branch itself does not look stable in its physical structure. You can compare the ratio of the thickness of the branches: in the Chinese sample the difference in thickness is more significant than in the European copy. In addition, it should be noted that the branch on the Chinese teapot seems to grow from the very base of the product, while on the European sample it is located much higher.

The harmony and spirituality of "qiyun" occupies a key place in traditional Chinese art. *Qi* means the life force of nature and the universe, *yun* indicates the state of objects. In other words, this is a state of dynamic fusion of bodies in the natural world. For example, many plant images acquire dynamic forms, as if created under the blow of the wind. In this regard, the plastic decor on the Chinese teapot can be compared with the samples of Guohua Chinese painting, given in the "Album of pedagogical landscape studies of shanshui by Gong Xian" of the 17th century ("Fig. 2") [9]. At the same time, in Europe, the significance of the evergreen branch, which symbolized in China stamina and strength, as well as female beauty, was not known [10], and the European master embodied only a subjective understanding of the perceived appearance, but not the significance of the image.



Fig. 2. Gong Xian. Album of pedagogical landscape studies of shanshui by Gong Xian. Ink on paper. 25.2x36 cm. 17th century.

In general, an analysis of the Böttger's works shows that he carefully worked with the Chinese samples of the Augustus the Strong collection and carefully studied them, since his ceramics in material, shape and decor show a significant similarity with the Yixing items. At the same time, researcher Ulrich Pietsch calls Böttger a determined opponent of copying, which the alchemist considered reprehensible. He notes that Böttger was primarily a creator and a discoverer, therefore he often only focused on East Asian forms, which he considered clumsy and irregular and, therefore, not suitable for European use [11]. In fact, Böttger gave a more ordered organization and form to Chinese items with asymmetric and irregular elements.

An example of this is a hexagonal teapot with a high handle, decorated with mythical animals ("Fig. 3", to the right).



Fig. 3. To the left: Teapot. China. Yixing. Yixing pottery. 1662-1722. Height: 14.9. cm; To the right: Teapot. Meissen. 1712. Böttger's ceramics. Height: 13.4 cm.

On the handle of the original teapot ("Fig. 3", to the left), an image of two dragons playing with a pearl is depicted. This symbol originates between 202 BC - 8 AD. According to the legends, two dragons defeated the bear, and as a result the goddess Xiwangmu granted them a pearl, which allowed them to ascend to heaven.

That is why the image of the dragon began to embody courage, duty and mercy, and also became a benevolent symbol and a happy omen in China. On the handle of a German teapot, creatures are more reminiscent of snakes fighting for food, a feeling of distortion of cultural symbolic content is created. The scales of the creatures are made differently - on the European item it is organized in ordered rows, while the dragon scales on the Chinese teapot form a more complex texture. The handle shape of the Meissen teapot on the inside has bends, apparently having a practical purpose and contributing to a convenient grip of the teapot.

The vertical parts of the handle of a Chinese teapot are decorated with an ornament in the form of water or clouds, which are quite difficult to distinguish. However, it is more likely that this is an ornament in the form of water. This assumption is based on the fact that the dragon above is more likely the water dragon, since it has no horns, and not the golden dragon Jinlong, which usually has a mustache, horns and five claws on its feet. Perhaps the water dragon was depicted in order not to create confusion with Jinlong, since objects with the image of the latter could only be used by the Emperor. Thus, the description of the hornless dragon is found in the ancient "Collection of rhymes of the old and new eras" [12]. Moreover, in most legends, dragons live in water, so it can be assumed that the Chinese craftsman choose to create the ornament in the form of water. In general, in Chinese arts and crafts objects, ornaments in the form of clouds and water require a disordered organization of lines. The European master also choose to depict this ornament and tried to reproduce it in his product, but in a more organized manner than in the Chinese original.

In terms of form, the Chinese craftsman proceeded from his own visual experience and turned to the aesthetics of China's traditional architecture. The shape of the teapot can be analyzed from the point of view of its correspondence to the structural principles of the pavilion: the bodies of the dragons resemble a roof, the pearl resembles a ridge of the roof, and the ornament in the form of water is a column supporting the roof. Dragons look as if they are vigorously jumping out of the water (clouds), creating a feeling of rapid rise - this may mean the prosperity of the family. In the German copy, the handle in its form resembles a not too regular arch.



Fig. 4. The image of Suanni in Chinese folklore.

On the lid of the Chinese teapot, in all likelihood, is depicted a plastic image of a mythical creature - the ninth son of a dragon named Suanni ("Fig. 4"). In the collective work of scientists of ancient China, created in the 3rd — 2nd centuries BC under the name "Erya" ("Approaching the correct (language)"), in the chapter "Interpretation of animals" it is indicated that Suanni is like a tiger with a rare coat, feeds on tigers and leopards [13]. Suanni was an animal similar to a lion, associated with the Buddhist religion, and was often placed next to Buddha, in Buddhist temples or on the legs of incense burners. Suanni was a patron of scientists and educators, a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment [14]. He had a calm character, loved incense and was often portrayed in a meditative pose, with his paws tucked under him [15]. During sacrificial rituals, people could set fire to figurines of Suanni and use them as candles. In addition, Suanni carried a protective function. The animal images on the censers in the temples of the ancestors were called upon to protect the family. In his work, the European master made a creature that was closer in appearance to the Western understanding of the lion and somewhat resembled a tiger in Chinese folk art ("Fig. 5"). In the temples of the ancestors, the descendants offered sacrifices to deceased representatives of the family, lit incense to honor their memory and demonstrate the continuation of the family. That is why the image of Suanni can be associated with the idea of procreation and veneration of ancestors.



Fig. 5. New Year's toy in the form of a tiger.

Based on the decor on the teapot, we can assume that this item was intended for a woman who had a high social status:

Firstly, on the body of the teapot there is an image of a dragon with four fingers on its paws, and in the framework of the system of norms and rules of feudal society of the 17th - 18th centuries only officials and their wives could use objects with this image. In addition, the skillful execution of the product indicates that the teapot was not intended for a family of ordinary people.

Secondly, according to the natural philosophy of yin-yang and the doctrine of the five elements, the teapot is associated with water, which is linked to yin and associates with the feminine. Moreover, the water dragon lives in water, in the Baopuzi, encyclopedic treatise by Ge Hong named "[Book of the] Master Who Embraces Simplicity", written in 320, mother dragon is a water dragon [16]. All this in terms of cultural symbolism indicates the intended use of the product for a woman.

Thirdly, in China, a woman was responsible for the birth of descendants and procreation, so the craftsman used many symbols related to the performance of duty, mercy, protection and development.

Based on the above, we can assumed that the main meaning of the teapot was instructions to a woman based on the moral principles of Chinese feudal society.

The Chinese item is not only distinguished by a subtle transmission of images, but at the same time it embodies the social moral standards of the era. The European version indicates that the symbolism of traditional Chinese culture is unknown to the author. This item shows a comprehensive study of the original by the European master and his desire to as much as possible preserve the original elements, which were not recognized and understood. In terms of technological process, we see some simplification of the German teapot compared to the Chinese one. At the same time, the European master in his design improved its practical characteristics, which manifestes, for example, in the ergonomics of the handle.

It is also interesting to compare these two teapots with a coffee pot ("Fig. 1", in the middle), which retained the relief described above in the form of a flowering branch, but received a new shape that, in its practical function, met the needs of European society. At the same time, an original plastic decor was reproduced here, imitating an item of Yixing ceramics. The authorship of this work belongs to I.Ya. Irminger. It is believed that the tetrahedral shape of the coffee pot was inspired by the objects of "English Huguenot silver", as well as by the oriental samples - Chinese versions of sake containers [17]. "Chinese influence can be seen in the scroll handle with a toothed molding, the pagoda-

shaped finial, and the fish-head spout with tendril mount" [18], as well as in a bridge between the upper part of the spout and the body.

The Elector of Saxony and the king of Poland, Augustus the Strong, who had a significant collection of oriental porcelain, sought to ensure that European masters were able to reproduce oriental designs not only in terms of technology and form, but also from a cultural and artistic point of view [19]. In this regard, new achievements were made by masters of the Meissen manufactory later.

Valuable exhibits of the Augustus the Strong collection were Chinese lanterns, the technology for which was developed at the beginning of the 18th century. In the collection of Augustus the Strong there were two lanterns from Jingdezhen, painted in the range of the "五彩" "green family" (wucai) [20] and copied by European masters. The ornaments in the range of the green family got its name thanks to translucent enamels with several shades of green, which were combined with red, yellow, eggplant-violet and black, as well as an underglaze blue pigment, which was later replaced with blue enamel [21]. In such ornaments, the outline of black or, more rarely, red color was often found, they were characterized by decorativeness, complexity and sophistication, as well as the richness of ornaments [22]. Murals made in the range of the "green family" greatly enriched porcelain ornaments, showed an exact genre division in accordance with the classification of the traditional painting of guohua into landscapes of "mountains and water" shanshui, "flowers and birds" huaniao, as well as genre painting of renwuhua [23].

Let us cite as an example one of the samples of the lantern of the reign of Emperor Kangxi ("Fig. 6"). "The water-thin and transparent body, the blossom-leaf-shaped supports done in the challenging openwork technique, and the delicate and detailed depictions of a lively southern Chinese river landscape, create a harmonious unity" [24]. The ornaments of the item can be attributed to the plot of renwuhua (the image of people, genre painting): it contains several figures, as well as landscape motifs with the image of water and plants. The depiction is complete and subtle, fully follows the changes in the shape of the item. It is characterized by the thoughtfulness of compositional organization, as well as attention to small details. Separate elements of the mural are given in rectangular fields, which were an innovation of the Kangxi era. The work demonstrates the balance of background and composition, the combination of a light green background with red and dark blue chrysanthemums and spiral curls. The frames used by the artist complement and emphasize the main images, enhancing the decorative effect. Above the main images, where the landscape acts as a backdrop for the scene, geometric ornaments are made on four walls,

inside of which are scalloped cartouches with images of aquatic inhabitants and flowers. The painting is distinguished by its clarity, rhythm in the arrangement of figures, portrayed with the correct proportions, as well as by the many details that reflect the life of ordinary people of the Qing Dynasty. This image fully demonstrates the freedom and high skill of the craftsman in terms of depiction of space, postures and movements of the characters. The painting is distinguished by a sense of dynamics, filled with expressiveness and rhythm.



Fig. 6. To the left: a lantern painted in chinoiserie style. Meissen. 1727 (1728). Painted by Iohann Ehrenfried Stadler. Height: 39.8 cm; To the right: a lantern with boats in a river landscape. China, Jingdezhen. 1700 - 1722. Height: 34.3 cm.

This item was replicated in 1727 (1728), and painted by the artist Iohann Ehrenfried Stadler, 1701 - 1741). In the ornament we can find the artist's monogram - it is on a piece of paper in the hands of a Chinese boy [25]. The shape of this item was a significant challenge for European masters - attempts to replicate it have been undertaken since 1724, but succeeded only in 1727 (according to other sources, in 1828). The main problem was in replicating such thin and even walls of the tetrahedral container so that the light of the candle could be seen through them. However, the Meissen item did not have a practical function, since it was intended for the Japanese Palace [26]. It could be said that European masters accurately replicated the shape of the original item.

In his linear painting, which neglected perspective and avoided symmetry, Iohann Ehrenfried Stadler offered his own understanding of chinoiserie style, different from the works of Johann Gregor Herold. He

depicted natural landscapes with abstract characters, not so much repeating the decor as he "quoted individual motifs" [27]. Unlike the green painting by a Chinese craftsman, Iohann Ehrenfried Stadler worked in brown-red and golden hues. The mural reveals an arbitrary arrangement of objects, without reference to the principles of perspective image organization. The artist retains only certain elements of the Chinese-style mural, in his own way embodying individual features of the landscape. In general, many compositions of the artist's murals are distinguished by arbitrary proportions of the bodies of the characters and unnatural relationships of quantities [28].

An almost perfect copy of the Chinese item, according to the German researcher Ulrich Pietsch, is a plate with a willow painting ("Fig. 7"): "it is only slightly smaller in size" [29]. Comparing the two items, we see that both plates have a golden border, the geometric ornaments of both works are presented in the form of golden rhombuses and red crosses in which the flowers are inscribed. The inner circle of the geometric ornament is a rhombo-meander swastika ornament, which contains cartouches with flowers inside the Chinese apple tree, as well as four golden chrysanthemum flowers. The core of the plate is reserved for painting in the form of a willow, the branches of which fall on lotuses. A "pseudo Chinese mark - leaf of a wormwood in a double blue ring" is found on a Meissen plate [30].



Fig. 7. To the left: a plate with a willow. Meissen. 1730. Diameter 22.9 cm; To the right: a plate with a willow. China, Jingdezhen. Kansi period (1662 - 1722). Diameter: 34 cm.

A more detailed analysis of the two items shows that, for certain reasons, the German master made a lot of simplifications in terms of the ornament's lines, while the colors of the Meissen pattern are not so complex and rich, possibly due to different cultural concepts, materials, and techniques. The Chinese plate is distinguished by the large number and complexity of its symbolic content - in it, not only each individual symbol has its own meaning, but their combination also leads to new meanings. In this regard, we can point out the simplification of the German copy, in which certain formal changes of the original symbols occurred and

resulted in the loss of the original meanings. Therefore, the Meissen copy was not able to fully embody the cultural connotations of the Chinese item.

In the original plate, the central image - willow - occupies the largest space. The Chinese master portrayed a dried up old tree giving new shoots - this idea is linked with the idiomatic expression *chengyu*: "kumu fneqchun", which literally means "spring comes to the withered tree", i.e. involves gaining a new life, getting a new lease of life [31]. Obviously, in terms of color and lines, the German artist could not fully reproduce the features of the dried tree image, and as a result, the important meaning of the work was lost.

Analyzing the importance of invariable turnaround, two levels of its content in Chinese culture can be distinguished: the common level and Buddhist one. The common meaning of *chengyu* conveyed by the expression "the spring comes to the withered tree" arose late enough and began to mean vitality, in the broad sense - the good health of an elderly person.

The Buddhist meaning of *chengyu* stems from "Lamp-Notes by Jing De", a Northern Song treatise (960–1127) written by monk Shi Daoyuan. According to the treatise, Buddhist laws are not secular, but stem from them, and it rarely happens that "the spring comes to the withered tree" [32]. The meaning of this is that Buddhist teaching is difficult to comprehend, while Buddhist truths require deep insight, which is achieved by accidental and rare vision or comprehension of man. Thus, the phrase "the spring comes to the withered tree" began to mean a person comprehending Buddhist teachings, "withered tree" indicates a person's ability to learn Buddhist truths, and "the onset of spring" symbolizes a new spiritual life.

Therefore, the interpretation of the original Chinese ornament should take into account the combination of secular and Buddhist meanings in it.

Symbols such as willow, plum blossoms, chrysanthemums, lotuses and peonies can be found in the ornament. Willow is an important symbol in Chinese culture, its spreading branches brought shadow to travelers and were sung by poets and artists. It was believed that willow contributed to the expulsion of spirits and evil spirits, was a symbol of fertility and harvest. In Buddhism, willow is associated with meekness and compassion, as the bodhisattva Guan Yin "sprinkles with living water using a willow branch" [33]. Lotus is also an important Buddhist flower, a symbol of purity, perfection, nobility, sophistication. In Confucianism, it is associated with the best qualities of an intellectual, as he grows in the mud, but retains his purity.

In general, plum blossoms, chrysanthemums and lotuses were linked with the literary artists of ancient China, i.e. scientists-intellectuals in Confucianism, and

were the embodiment of worthy human qualities. In folk culture, these three flowers were not only symbols of high moral qualities, but also a praise of the healthy physical form of a person, and in combination with the flowers of the Chinese apple tree, they acquired even more favorable meaning. Therefore, we can assume that this item was of a ritual one.

From a secular view, chrysanthemum symbolizes a person who is not subject to negative influence. In addition, on the 9th day of the 9th month according to the lunar calendar, the holiday of the double nine or the Holiday of chrysanthemums, *Chunyanjie*, is celebrated. The number nine in China is a symbol of longevity, so the holiday itself gradually evolved into Longevity Day. It was believed that the chrysanthemum blooming in autumn is not afraid of cold weather, therefore the flower also became a symbol of the health and longevity of older people, in works of art it often appeared with the hieroglyph "壽" *shou*, meaning longevity (see "Fig. 8").



Fig. 8. Decor in the form of chrysanthemums and hieroglyph "longevity" "壽". Min period (mid-14th - mid-17th centuries).

On the inner border of the original item, combinations of four chrysanthemums with the flowers of the Chinese apple tree are found. The flowers of the Chinese apple tree symbolize prosperity, in addition, the hieroglyph "棠" "tang" from the name of the flower "海棠花" (*haitanghua*) is consonant with the hieroglyph "堂" "tang", which means "hall", as well as "clan, family", therefore in combination with chrysanthemum as a symbol of longevity, the ornament takes on the meaning of wishing longevity to the whole family. The combination of four chrysanthemums and flowers of the Chinese apple tree probably means a wish for the family to prosper, since there is the expression "四世同堂" "sishi tongtang" (four generations under one roof). However, such a combination can also be a result of an aesthetic choice.

Plum blossoms symbolize modesty, stamina, elevation and purity. They bloom in the cold period - after the Spring Festival - therefore, like chrysanthemums, they have significant vitality. Around the plum blossoms, combinations of swastika and sauvast signs "卐", "卐" are depicted, which, in all likelihood, have a connection with Buddhism and vitality.

Summarizing the above, it is possible to confidently conclude that this plate was created as a gift with a benevolent meaning - a wish for longevity, and was used as a decorative item during family celebrations, but did not have a practical function. Its symbolic meaning is concentrated in the middle and gradually expands and becomes more mundane towards the borders, from obvious Buddhist meanings in the center gradually moving to general wishes around the edges.

It can be assumed that this plate was intended for a very wealthy representative of the intelligentsia who believed in chan Buddhism. The symbolism of the ornament extols the qualities and virtues of the intellectual (plum flowers, chrysanthemums, lotuses) and at the same time confirms the depth of his faith. The combination of Buddhist symbolism and the wishes of longevity show the connection of Buddhism with the secular domain, and also have the significance of spreading Buddhist values.

In general, these ambiguous and rich symbols of Chinese culture were not reliably read by a German artist in terms of meaning, which was partially lost in the copy. This is also confirmed by Ulrich Pietsch, pointing out that "the author interpreted the branches of the weeping-willow tree as stalks of wheat, much in the same manner as the Meissen painters of the so-called Zwiebelmuster had taken the Chinese pomegranate for an onion" [34].

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, Chinese artists painting porcelain items sought not only the beauty of form, composition and color, i.e. visual aesthetics, but at the same time conveyed deep philosophical meanings and truths. This system of traditional representations was adopted by the Europeans, who, through the prism of their own ideas and tastes, inserted their subjective understanding in their creative works. However, in this process many of the deepest meanings of Chinese art were misread and lost.

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