

The Characteristics of Islam—Based on the Blue-and-white Porcelain during the Period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty

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Abstract—Islamic culture is popular in the Arab region, it has a style of its own and plays an important influence on the process of human culture. Islamic culture started to be spread and developed in China rapidly in the Ming Dynasty. During this period, impacted by the Maritime Road and Land Silk Road, Chinese foreign culture communication and foreign trade represented by porcelain were very common, so that manufacturing skills of Blue-and-white porcelain in the Ming Dynasty were greatly impacted by Islamic culture and presented new cultural and artistic characteristics. In this paper, features of Islamic culture were analyzed in details by stressing on studying typical characteristics of blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty.

Keywords—Blue-and-white porcelain; Ming Dynasty; Islamic culture; Yongle and Xuande

I. INTRODUCTION

Porcelain is an important contribution of China to the world. Moreover, a communicative bridge between China and overseas world is established for this reason—"Maritime porcelain Road". The external exchange of porcelain in ancient China started in the period of WeiJin and Southern and Northern Dynasties and was further developed in the period of Tang and Song Dynasties. Moreover, it reached a period of great prosperity in the period of Ming and Qing Dynasties. The reason that blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Ming and Qing Dynasties was extensively popular should be attributed to multiple aspects, including high skills of Chinese porcelain. Moreover, Chinese ceramic industry has constantly absorbed overseas technologies and cultural elements in the development process, especially for export-sales porcelain, which was fabricated with characteristics of foreign lands for the sake of satisfying special demands of foreign culture. In lots of foreign cultures, the Islamic culture is an important element that impacts the development of Chinese porcelain industry. Particularly, the development of blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Yongle and Xuande has left the profound stigma of the Islamic culture.

II. THE ISLAMIC CULTURE IN THE PERIOD OF MING AND QING DYNASTIES

Generally speaking, the Islamic culture is a cultural system that is based on the Islamic belief, integrates with the ancient East and West culture has profound Islamic characteristics. It is one of the five major cultural systems coexisted with the Chinese culture. It plays an extremely important role on the development of human history. In the golden age, economy and culture of Muslim have obtained prosperity and development; This also has greatly promoted the sea and land communication in the East and the West. During the period of the Middle Ages, Arabians came to the distant China along the Land Silk Road. During the period of Ming Dynasty, the cultural exchange between Islamic civilization and Chinese Confucian culture reached the deeper level. Islamic writings were translated into Chinese. Moreover, the Islamic culture with the Chinese characteristics was generated.

During the period of the Ming Dynasty, ZhengHe went to the West for seven times and this constructed a communicative bridge between China and Arab countries, so Arabic civilization could be known by Chinese. Moreover, Chinese culture was brought to the world, especially for bringing lots of Chinese porcelain. According to later statistics of historians, at least 18 kinds of Chinese porcelain imitated Islamic glassware and metal ware. The blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty exactly learned from elements of the unique Islamic culture, so that Chinese porcelain is equipped with attractive exotic styles. It is exactly because the close relation between the blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Yongle and Xuande and the Islamic culture, the characteristics and unique charm of the Islamic culture can be presented from another perspective by studying blue-and-white porcelain.

III. THE EASTERN SPREADING OF ISLAMIC POTTERY TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCES ON CHINESE PORCELAIN

It is approved that ceramics of Islamic countries in the Arab region has the very important status in the world pottery skills in the academic circles. Once upon a time, ancient Egyptians mastered the enameled technology

skillfully. In the period of WeiJin, Southern and Northern Dynasties in China, Persians that lived in the Central Asia have already been good at fabricating porcelain. In the 7th century, Arabians started to improve a technology of fire five-color glass and invented a method of faience processing creatively, so as to replace a lagging method of inlaid work. Compared with Chinese porcelain in the same period, though the pottery quality was not as exquisite as Chinese porcelain, the glazes were more gorgeous than Chinese ceramics.

Afterwards, Arabians brought these unique ceramic machining methods to China. In the Tang Dynasty, the land Silk Road that communicated with western and eastern civilization has already been extremely prosperous. In the varieties of Chinese porcelain, the famous one that can represent the phenomenon of prosperous Tang Dynasty is the famous tri-colored glazed pottery of the Tang Dynasty. It exactly uses ceramic skills in Islamic countries for reference. The new ceramic modeling with exotic features, such as pots with phoenix's head and cups with dragon's head, etc., reflect open delight of life in the Tang Dynasty and extensive ambition and cultural self-confidence with eclectic foreign culture. In plenty of ceramic productions represented by tri-colored glazed pottery of the Tang Dynasty, there are many Arabic images. The relatively typical one is the camel tomb figure. A camel stands on a quadrate seat with four music tomb figures on its back and a dancing tomb figure in the middle. There is Pipa in the left hand of a person, which was the ethnic group in Chinese history. Pipa is the four-chord Pipa with Persia style.

After the Tang Dynasty, our porcelain technology benefited a lot from ceramic skills of Islam and the famous one was blue-and-white porcelain. Blue-and-white porcelain in China started to greatly be presented in the Yuan Dynasty. At that time, blue-and-white porcelain with the representative of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi had numerous varieties and has already been sold to foreign countries. Many scholars at home and abroad think that blue-and-white porcelain in Yuan Dynasty in China has been greatly impacted by Persian culture. Some raw materials and production skills were introduced from Persia. With the foreign trade in Central Asia and Western Asia in the Yuan Dynasty, as well as teaching of porcelain craftsmen in Chinese Central Asia, our craftsmen started to master the technology of ash glazes and blue-and-white color materials skillfully. This can be observed from the decorative patterns with Islamic styles in blue-and-white porcelain unearthed from the Yuan Dynasty. Thus it shows that before the Ming Dynasty, Chinese porcelain manufacturing industry has already learned and integrated many excellent technologies from Islamic ceramic skills. This generates a very important influence on the development of Chinese porcelain.

IV. THE ISLAMIC CULTURAL FEATURES FROM BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN IN THE PERIOD OF YONGLE AND XUANDE

The main purpose of going to the west for seven times by ZhengHe aimed at Islamic countries in the Arab region. The reason that blue-and-white porcelain was extensively welcomed by the Islamic world was because of the white

bottom and blue flower for decorative pattern of blue-and-white porcelain, implying purity and nobility. This is extremely identical to the doctrines of Islam. Meanwhile, in order to cater to special demands of Arabic countries, official ware in the period of Yongle and Xuande applied many graphic decorations and modeling with Islamic characteristics. Thus it can be observed that blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty greatly embodied cultural features of Islam.

A. *The Special Doctrine Culture in the Islamic Region*

The cultural and artistic region of Islam has large taboos. The core lies in adoring sovereign Allah. Therefore, countries that believe in Islam forbid the heathenism in any other forms and don't allow presenting some figures that embody human secularity. No matter it is a human image or an animal image, there are no sculptures and figure paintings in artistic works of Islamic countries, resulting in having most of calligraphy ornamentation and plant ornamentation in the ornamentation of blue-and-white porcelain in Islamic countries during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty. However, artists in Islamic countries have great originality and apply some Arabic alphabets and some mathematically geometric patterns artistically to decorate the Mosque of Islam elegantly and magnificently. Such the industrial art also can be reflected on the blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Yongle and Xuande.

B. *The Unique Decorative Style of Islamic Region*

The typical feature of decorative art in Islamic countries is to present dense layout with eyeful flowering branches. Such a feature was extremely obvious shown on blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty. Cultural elements of forming such a feature can be summarized as two points: First of all this is a kind of mental compensation for desolation in Central and Western Asian regions. Due to drought and scarce water in most of Islamic regions, the paradisiac scene described in the Quran is shown as follows: clean rivers, flourish forests and birds' twitter and fragrance of flowers. Secondly, it is the doctrinal instruction. Islam adds a kind of mysterious religious meaning to the blankness. According to the statement of Islam, world space is filled with ghosts, thus it is necessary to use dense ornamentation to fill it, so as to prevent from showing ghosts. What's more, Islam thinks that Allah can exist at anytime and anywhere. There is no real "void" in the world.

Most of ornamentation described on implements of blue-and-white porcelain with Islamic characteristics during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty was abstract transformation and exaggeration. Most of them were rooted in characteristic plants in the Central Asia. In numerous flower categories, passion flower is the most popular one. Passion flower is a flower variety of which petal is between the Chinese chrysanthemum and lotus. It was originated from Syria in the eastern coast of Mediterranean at the earliest. It is an extremely elegant plant with bending branches and leaves and florets in the Islamic region. It is also called as dahlia. Such a figure was

extremely common in carpets of the ancient Persian Empire. In addition, watermelons, grapes, cucumbers and chrysanthemums also were extremely popular and greatly presented on blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty. Though the decorative style of blue-and-white porcelain in middle and earlier stages of the Ming Dynasty didn't regard the Islamic culture as the subject, the Islamic decorative style presented for this reason has already been obvious.

V. DEVELOPED ASTRONOMY AND MATHEMATICAL LEVEL IN THE ISLAMIC REGION

Islamic countries have been valuing astronomy and mathematics all the time. Due to demands in navigation and agricultural development, the astronomy has been relatively developed. Furthermore, there is a close relation between mathematics and astronomy, thus mathematics in Islamic countries similarly has reached an extremely high level. Arabic countries also have founded a unique geometrical decorative system, showing unique comprehension and hobbies to abstract thinking, such as mathematics. There are profound geometrical features from ornamentation to modeling of blue-and-white porcelain. For example, the water column in the period of Xuande applied geometrical symmetry principle skillfully, showing beauty and magnificence. In terms of graphs, roundness, hexagonal, eight-pointed stars and transformed patterns were mainly applied. The decorative method divided some symmetrical region to be decorated on the blue-and-white porcelain. Then, girdle or stripe edging was applied to do segmentation, so as to generate harmonious and opposite aesthetic feelings. In addition, the decorative style of blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty also embodied unique calligraphy arts of Islam. The common one meant to use verses in Quran to act as decoration on the blue-and-white porcelain. The representative works unearthed in the period involved in blue-and-white horizontal-legged bowls, which used Arabic as the decorative element.

VI. THE SPECIAL COBALT PIGMENT IN THE ISLAMIC REGION

When later generations evaluate unique artistic achievements acquired by blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty, it must mention the special cobalt pigment—Suniboqing, which differs from color development features of cobalt pigment generated by China, resulting in the bright Islamic cultural features during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty.

Suniboqing is also called as "Sumaliqing". It is a kind of cobalt pigment introduced by the ancient Persia (the current Iran). About the utilization of Suniboqing during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty, it had the relevant record in Kui Tian Wai Cheng during the reign of Emperor Wanli in the Ming Dynasty at the earliest. The introduction of Sumaliqing in China has a direct relation with the extensive foreign exchange during the period of

Xuande in the Ming Dynasty. First of all, color development of Sumaliqing was extremely bright and dignified, so that blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Yongle and Xuande scattered uniquely exotic styles. Furthermore, Sumaliqing wasn't originated in China, but picture effect made by different unique pigments conformed to the Chinese traditional aesthetic idea. Thus it has been widely applied.

VII. CONCLUSION

For blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty when had extremely frequent foreign exchange, it has had profound shadows of Islamic culture no matter in modeling, decoration or utilization of cobalt pigment. During the most powerful period in the Ming Dynasty, blue-and-white porcelain in the period of Yongle and Xuande in the mutual integration and exchange with Islamic civilization absorbed the essence of Islamic culture in the tolerant spirit of inclusiveness, so that the ceramic skills in China have reached a new height. The reason for acquiring such a brilliant achievement for blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty should be attributed to profound cultural deposits accumulated by China for several thousand of years. On the other hand, central and western Asian countries represented by Islamic countries introduced abundant cultural elements to China. They also injected fresh blood to Chinese cultural artistic development. Thus it can be said that the prosperity and development of blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande in the Ming Dynasty are the successful model for Chinese porcelain technology to integrate and absorb foreign civilization and also the brilliant model to exchange western and eastern civilization. The blue-and-white porcelain during the period of Yongle and Xuande also provides a new perspective for us to analyze typical features of the Islamic culture and huge influences on the cultural and artistic history in the world.

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