

A Brief Analysis of the Genealogy of the Patterns of Women and Infants on the Export Porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Haiying Liu, Leyi Jiang, Meilu Pan, Huan Xie

Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China

Abstract: The content of export porcelain in the Qing Dynasty is rich and diverse, and the pattern of women and infants is one of them. The pattern of women and infants integrates Chinese and Western cultures and is decorated with various elements. The design of the content is derived from traditional stories or paintings. It not only pays attention to the composition method but also has an aesthetic color combination. It not only preserves traditional culture but also makes changes to cater to the market, becoming a significant part of the export porcelain trade. The patterns of women and infants on the export porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Ming and Qing dynasties depict the images of female relatives of the ancient Chinese aristocratic class, and special design styles have been formed according to the needs of the European market. As a carrier of Chinese and Western cultures, it reflects the spirit of inheritance and innovation of Chinese craftsmen against the backdrop of overseas trade.

Keywords: Pattern of Women and Infants; Export Porcelain from Jingdezhen; Ceramic Decoration.

1. The Development of Export Porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

A large quantity of porcelain from Jingdezhen was exported overseas mainly after the 16th century. This period witnessed the prosperous development of the economy in the Ming Dynasty and marked the peak of blue-and-white porcelain firing. The large-scale overseas sales of porcelain from the Ming and Qing dynasties occurred when the sea ban policy was completely lifted. The opportunity of export porcelain trade came to the folk kilns in Jingdezhen, providing Jingdezhen with huge room for development. In the Qing Dynasty, influenced by the trading background of the Maritime Silk Road, not only were porcelains exported in large numbers and widely favored by Europeans, but also the cultures of the East and the West were exchanged and integrated. For example, in the copper-bodied painted enamel plate with the pattern of foreign people enjoying themselves in a landscape scene from the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, two foreigners are depicted. This shows that the patterns of figure stories began to emerge and become popular at that time. Moreover, stories from books were also depicted, such as stories from the Three Kingdoms, The Western Chamber, and The Story of Worshipping the Moon. However, due to the simplicity of the story content, the creation of operas and novels in the Ming Dynasty was more popular instead, mainly because of their rich plots and various types. For instance, the Four Great Classical Novels of China were all works created after the middle period of the Ming Dynasty. Later, with the introduction of the banana plant from Southeast Asia, after the Southern Song Dynasty of the Southern Dynasties, the banana became a plant symbolizing the image of scholars and literati and appeared in large numbers in paintings. In addition, due to the introduction of Buddhism, the banana was understood and accepted by people for its meanings of "emptiness" and "impermanence", which contributed to this situation.

The 17th century was a very colorful and splendid era. At

that time, Europe was in a transitional stage, inheriting the Renaissance and paving the way for the 19th century. The Renaissance involved the revival movements in multiple fields such as culture, art, science, and politics. During the Ming and Qing dynasties in China at this time, it was in the late stage of feudal society, and of course, it was also the peak period of Chinese ceramic manufacturing. During this period, the Baroque art style, which originated in Italy and was renowned for its enthusiasm, exuberance, and ornate decoration, became popular in Europe. The decorative patterns of "women, infants and children" on the export porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Ming and Qing dynasties demonstrated how Chinese potters innovated on the basis of following the old systems of previous dynasties and catered to the overseas market, thus forming a unique style.

2. The Types of Patterns on the Export Porcelain from Jingdezhen

(1) Chinese Traditional Styles

China, as a major regional power, has had a profound cultural influence on East Asia and Southeast Asia. Whatever is popular in China will be immediately emulated by other countries. Therefore, the types of export porcelain in this region are almost the same as those sold in the China's mainland. From the opening of the new sea routes until the lifting of the sea ban in 1684, the export of ceramics was illegal, and both production and sales carried great risks. As a result, the export porcelain in Chinese styles was the most mainstream, and there were very few custom-made products for different markets. Chinese-style porcelain mainly consisted of daily necessities such as plates and bowls. The decorative patterns were mostly dragons, deer, cranes, intertwined flowers and plants, figures, and landscapes. In addition, there were also landscape patterns that usually depicted natural scenes such as mountains, streams, bridges, pavilions, and towers. Sometimes, figure stories were integrated into these patterns. Such patterns were classic themes in the decoration of Chinese porcelain, especially very popular during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

(2) The Style of Chinese-Western Integration

Some porcelain shapes were imitated from European silverware or other Western utensils, but they were decorated with traditional Chinese patterns, reflecting the collision between Chinese and Western cultures. The Meissen porcelain factory in Germany was the first place in Europe to successfully imitate Chinese hard porcelain. Meissen porcelain not only learned Chinese porcelain-making techniques but also borrowed patterns from Chinese porcelain in terms of decorative styles, such as blue-and-white patterns, figure stories, landscape paintings, as well as flower-and-bird and dragon-and-phoenix totems. These all reflected the profound influence of Chinese art on the European porcelain manufacturing industry. The "Chinese Style" series of porcelain produced by the Sèvres porcelain factory in France in the 18th century combined the Rococo style with Chinese patterns, creating exquisite works that had both European characteristics and retained the charm of the East. These porcelains were not only the crystallization of technology but also a model of the collision and integration of Eastern and Western art.

(3) European Styles

In order to cater to the European market, Chinese porcelain craftsmen began to accept custom orders from European customers and produce porcelains with European family emblems, coats of arms, or European landscapes, which were usually called "commissioned porcelain". This type of porcelain was rich in variety and had distinct personalities, but the quantity was not large. In addition, Chinese porcelain became an important element in the still-life paintings of the Dutch Golden Age. Its unique shapes and patterns enriched the expressive power of European paintings and promoted the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western art.

3. The Development History of the Patterns of Women and Infants on Export Porcelain

Since the ceramics in Jingdezhen reached their peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially in the development of export porcelain. And the images of women and infants, as one of the important elements of ceramic decoration in this period, were also widely applied and developed in export porcelain.

In the Ming Dynasty, the porcelain in Jingdezhen was mainly blue-and-white porcelain, and the firing process reached its peak. During this period, the patterns painted on blue-and-white porcelain were the images of ladies and children at play. These patterns not only reflected the talents of women and their ability to educate children but also represented the whole society's expectations and emphasis on women at that time. For example, on the large blue-and-white porcelain jars in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, there were common patterns of ladies in the garden, depicting the personal talent cultivation of court women and the scenes of educating children, which further reflected the status of women. In addition, the export porcelain of the Ming Dynasty also paid attention to the needs of Europeans and was specially customized. The emergence of Kraak porcelain was sufficient proof of this. These porcelains were mostly daily bowls, plates, and other daily necessities. They were sold all over the world through the Silk Road and became an important medium for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries.

In the Qing Dynasty, the ceramic craftsmanship in Jingdezhen became more exquisite. The application of decorative techniques such as famille rose and cloisonné enamel made the porcelain more gorgeous. Of course, the patterns of women, infants, and children in this period were still in use, and they were innovated on the basis of the previous ones. It was precisely because the craftsmanship levels in the three reigns of Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty were extremely high that the patterns of women and infants became more and more refined and diverse. In this period, the export porcelain market became more comprehensive and globalized, being sold not only to Europe but also to places like Japan. The ancient Imari blue-and-white porcelain exported to Japan during the Tianqi period of the Ming Dynasty had a simple but distinctive style. The emergence of these export porcelains promoted the cultural exchanges and integration between China and foreign countries and also demonstrated the brilliant achievements of Jingdezhen porcelain during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

In order to cater to the European market, Chinese porcelain artisans began to accept customized orders from European customers, producing porcelain with European family badges, heraldry or European scenery, often called "order fired porcelain", such porcelain varieties are rich, distinctive, but the number is not large.

4. Interpretation of Elements of Images of Women and Infants

4.1. Implication and Source of Elements of Women and Babies Picture

Influenced by the political atmosphere, the porcelain ware of the early Ming Dynasty basically followed the old system of the previous generation, including the pattern full of regularity and strong sense of order, in order to express the majesty of the imperial power. The porcelain patterns of Xuande period were more abundant than those of the previous dynasties, and the figure patterns appeared more frequently. Such as baby play picture, national song and dance picture, garden maid picture and so on, the rich style, showing the middle of the Ming Dynasty aesthetic style open, people's needs more diverse. The people of the Qing Dynasty attach the most importance to ethnic origin, and admire the Han Chinese culture. The women of the Han nationality in the Qing Dynasty and the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions are light and delicate, and the women with a certain pathological beauty are deeply favored by the officials.

The background picture of the female theme in Jingdezhen in Ming Dynasty is to serve the courtyard, and it is not difficult to understand that the scene of the baby-playing picture is in line with the social status of ancient women and the role of the family. In order to reflect the traditional code of ethics and morals, women are advised that the infants and children in the images are mostly male, reflecting the traditional Chinese concept of "male children in the family can carry on the family line". Chinese Confucianism promotes the social division of labor of "men in charge of the outside, women in charge of the inside" as the moral standard of a good wife and mother, and "caring for husband and teaching children" has become the first mission of Chinese women. Couples who cannot give birth to a male son are regarded as unfilial, and women who cannot carry on the family line violate the feminine code. The figure image in the painting is derived from the painting baby play, and combined

with the lady picture. Using printmaking as the medium, the reproduction of ceramic decoration. Both the real character archetype and the image of the ideal ideal woman. The baby play pictures on porcelain are rich and diverse, all with rich Chinese cultural connotations, common forms: Cuju, chasing ducks, spinning tops, fishing, playing birds, climbing trees and breaking flowers. These forms show the children's various games and activities are lively and lively. However, the emergence of maternal and infant pictures is the product of the aesthetic and market demand of The Times. The picture of women and children absorbed the elements of beautiful women, baby drama and ancient history. For example, the appearance of ladies in the Song Dynasty. The theme of women's and children's play appeared in the baby play map of Song Dynasty and flourished at that time. For example, Xiao Ting Baby Play in Song Dynasty is a typical courtyard painting. "Buddha Playing with Baby" by Song Dynasty painter Su Hanchen. More "Lotus baby play" Boston Museum of Art collection. It depicts the scenes of women in noble families taking care of their children and spending the summer in the courtyard. It is precisely because of the popularity of these baby play pictures that the porcelain of the Song Dynasty is painted with these baby play patterns. Ming and Qing dynasties, they will enrich the baby play picture, join the ladies. It was also this change that made porcelain in the Ming and Qing dynasties sold for export. These patterns are used to decorate bottles, cans, bowls and plates. Such as the Qing Dynasty Kangxi colorful female baby play picture plate (Figure 1) inside the woman and baby patterns are diverse, most of them are decorated in the plate. Such as (Figure 2) Qing Kangxi colorful girl baby picture lantern, although it is a lantern style, but the bottle body is decorated with colorful, the mouth and the shin are painted with bright bright animal pattern, and the color is red and green properly matched. The abdomen depicts the garden girl baby play picture, the picture is complete, the longitudinal gully, the lake rock, the bamboo shade, do the pot game. In the picture, the woman's body is elegant, the face is beautiful, the eyebrows are curved, the powder is lightly painted, the hair is high, the clothes are dressed in silks and satins, the bag is worn, the smiling eyes are full, and the boy is laughing and laughing. The composition of this painting is rigorous, and the portrayal of the characters is realistic and vivid, all of which highlight the excellent five-color firing skills.



Figure 1. Qing Dynasty Kangxi colorful girl baby play picture lantern



Figure 2. Qing Dynasty Kangxi colorful girl baby play

4.2. In order to Cater to The Market in China, The Connotation and Style of the Patterns of Women and Babies are Changed

As early as 1562, the Portuguese Archbishop of Buraca said: "Traders in Portugal made some special requests for the shape, glaze, decoration, etc., of Chinese porcelain. Some Europeans sent China designs for vessels, such as the Dutch scholar T. Falk's book "Dutch East India Company and Porcelain" : "In order to ensure that the purchased porcelain can meet the tastes of the European aristocracy, it has a special" model ". At the same time, merchants and sailors often made special porcelain for their relatives and friends, most of which had a specified pattern and content." Among them, there is a special "template", which means that customers provide design samples such as patterns, copper prints, sketches, watercolors or plates painted with patterns." Ever since Thirteen Banks established themselves in Guangzhou. European influences became more evident in styling and decorative patterns. Thirteen Lines provided Chinese middlemen with models of pottery, silver, tin, material or wood to be delivered to the porcelain craftsmen in Jingdezhen, as well as a large number of drawings specifying the dimensions, quantities and decoration requirements "to conform to European habits of life and artistic aesthetics. Therefore, not only the shape design of China's export porcelain began to westernize, but also the pattern, pattern and painting of decorative design began to be obviously westernized.

During the reign of Kangxi in Qing Dynasty, western patterns and watercolors began to become important decorations on China's exported porcelain. Among the series of design patterns and decorative patterns provided by Dutch merchants for Guangzhou painters, there is a decorative painting on blue and white porcelain, which is based on the civil unrest in Rotterdam, Netherlands. This event has received wide sympathy and support from all walks of life, and Dutch artist Smertleu created a relief medal to celebrate the justice of the citizens. This kind of commemorative medallion was later brought to China by Dutch merchants, who asked Jingdezhen porcelain decoration painters to paint the relief patterns on the commemorative medallion on the porcelain. The artist designed the pattern in a prominent position in the center of the porcelain plate, and the plate is decorated with traditional Chinese brocade patterns,

including four Chinese flowers and grass patterns in the open interior, which are depicted by blue and white glaze. Similar decorative design is also produced in Jingdezhen in the early 18th century, "blue and white French women image open decorative lid jar" (Figure 3). The lid of the jar is decorated with Chinese peony flowers and leaves, and the four open light depictions combine traditional Chinese patterns with images of European women. The images of European women are derived from engravings of French clothing designed by the Bohnert brothers between 1685 and 1700, which have a decorative effect of "patterns like clouds".

The decorative design method of the Blue and White Bactus Plate is in the same vein as the previous two (Figure 4), and the image of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, in the center of the plate is copied from the Dutch copperplate. This mixed decorative design of Chinese and western patterns is significantly different from the separate depiction of the Ming Dynasty, marking the beginning of the westernization of China's export porcelain decorative design style.



Figure 3. "Blue and White French women's Images Open decorative lid jar"



Figure 4. "Blue and White Bactu Plate"

The middle and late 18th century was the heyday of Chinese porcelain export to Europe and the United States. London, England, was the main auction market for Chinese porcelain. After 1774, business was very prosperous, and 52 businessmen operating Chinese porcelain were called "porcelain people". These "porcelain people" set merchants, artists in one, as western painting decoration disseminators, recipients, including enamel artist Lis and painter O'Neill and so on. According to the needs of the market and customers, they designed their own shapes and patterns, and constantly changed the patterns, and commissioned officials and merchants of the East India Company to take them to Guangzhou or Jingdezhen for decoration. Mr. Liu Chen notes

in 'TORya': 'Foreign porcelain types also vary, and many imports have occurred since the Kang-Qian period. Da Di is customized by Guangdong Customs supervision, exquisite "[1], which can confirm this point. All the above samples ordered porcelain decoration design, indicating the westernization of China's export porcelain decoration since the 18th century:

From the mixed decorative design of Chinese and Western patterns, gradually transition to a faithful copy of the original European decorative design, with realistic patterns as the decorative expression technique, glaze decoration from simple under-glaze blue and white to multi-color glaze development, and as far as possible to restore the color of European decorative design. As the American scholar Cobler said in his book *China Trade Porcelain*, "the porcelain specially ordered by the buyer has developed the connection between the East and the West, and even the designs provided by the Westerners often subconsciously show the influence of Chinese style." This has made clear the economic and cultural exchanges between China and the West, and promoted and expanded the interactive exchanges of art and design between China and the West.

4.3. Reasons for the Popularity of Mother-and-Child Motifs in Overseas Markets

Chinese porcelain featuring the "Picture of Women and Babies with Vase Flowers" shows that, considering the symbolic meaning of the exterior pattern design and the consumption psychology of the overseas customers, during the 13th to 19th centuries when Chinese porcelain, which was as precious as gold, was highly favored by European nobles, the elements of "vase within a vase" and "the motif of a woman holding a vase" on the vase deliberately magnified the portrayal of porcelain. Not only were the vase flowers on the table placed in porcelain containers, but also the huge painted porcelain jars in the background were often placed on either side of the woman. This technique of "painting porcelain on porcelain" further catered to the eagerness of European people to possess Chinese porcelain. The distinctive female figure, referred to by Dutch merchants as "Long Eliza"—a variation of the Dutch term "langelizen" [2], meaning "slender Elizabeth"—evolved into a unique European designation for Chinese women who were slender, beautiful, delicate and willowy, and exuded an exotic charm. By the 19th century, "LongEliza" had become a synonym for Chinese women.

Evidently, the delicate frailty associated with Oriental femininity stands in stark contrast to the European veneration of voluptuous beauty—a corporeal ideal embodying robust health and reproductive vitality.

Among Qing dynasty porcelain artifacts housed in European museums, figural motifs not only constitute a significant proportion but were also notably prevalent during the period. Focusing predominantly on female subjects, these works demonstrate the significant scholarly attention that female-centered themes have garnered. The Dresden State Art Collections, whose holdings predominantly comprise 17th to 18th-century court collections, currently preserve 10,093 extant artifacts, with Chinese ceramics accounting for over 8,400 items. Qing dynasty porcelain accounts for over half of these, with particular prevalence of 'women and children' motifs demonstrating remarkable thematic diversity. These decorative paintings are rendered with exquisite detail, vivid realism, and playful charm, capturing domestic interactions

spanning from court ladies to commoner women engaged in childcare. Infused with distinctive Sinicized aesthetics, such scenes piqued European fascination with their culturally encoded painterly syntax. Ming dynasty Jingdezhen porcelain predominantly features two typologies of female iconography: the first depicting courtly women's quotidian existence, and the second constituting evolved variants of the initial paradigm. Both Ming and Qing dynasties developed divergent production paradigms—imperial kilns versus private kilns—strategically catered to domestic market demands through specialized aesthetic codification. Export-oriented production predominantly adopted imperial kiln-style porcelains, characterized by lush compositions with dynamic vitality, exquisitely detailed execution, and technical virtuosity that epitomized East-West synthesis in aesthetic harmony. These hybrid creations thus became prized possessions among European aristocratic patrons, whose collecting practices profoundly shaped transcultural artistic dialogues [3].

Amidst the flourishing maritime trade networks of the era, Chinese export porcelain from the late Ming to early Qing dynasties graced European interiors as coveted novelties. With escalating European consumption, the Oriental feminine subject emerged as a predominant motif, undergoing artistic diversification through synthesis with the domestically prevalent 'children at play' motifs, ultimately crystallizing into the 'women and children' iconographic tradition. This phenomenon not only signifies historical recognition of feminine cultural agency but, more profoundly, mirrors transcultural aspirations for domestic felicity—where patriarchal constraints on female creativity paradoxically coexisted with matrilineal values celebrating reproductive wisdom across civilizational boundaries.

5. The Significance of the Motif of Women and Infants on Export Porcelain

During the 17th century when the Dutch East India Company dominated maritime trade (1602-1682), records show it imported over 12 million Chinese porcelain pieces. Between 1644-1682 in the early Qing Dynasty, nearly 8 million pieces were transported by the company. As European enthusiasm for Chinese export porcelain grew, decorative themes diversified. Alongside the popularity of female figures, “women and children” motifs gradually increased. European museum collections of Qing export porcelain reveal prevalent figurative patterns, particularly narrative scenes from folk kilns that flourished in overseas markets. “Women and children” themed porcelain mainly appeared on blue-and-white and famille-rose plates and bowls, with some jars and vases.

These porcelain decorations shared cross-cultural maternal

themes- the universal expression of maternal love transcending Eastern and Western cultures. From Chinese stories like Mencius' Mother Three Moves and Yue Fei's Mother's Tattoo to Western Madonna imagery, mothers were portrayed as educators and social pillars. This shared perspective resonated with Western consumers. Under Confucian “male-dominated society” ideals and feudal concepts like virtue through feminine ignorance, Chinese women primarily appeared in domestic scenes on porcelain. Meanwhile, 17th-18th century European women used household management as social empowerment. Jingdezhen export porcelain's mother-child motifs both reflected European gender dynamics and showcased Chinese women's domestic lives, embodying East-West aesthetic integration. [4]

6. Conclusion

Under the thriving maritime trade during China's late Ming to early Qing periods, export porcelain emerged as a fashionable novelty in European markets. Fueled by massive European consumption, themes featuring Eastern women became particularly prominent and diversified. This artistic trend merged with domestic child-themed motifs to create the “women and children” decorative style. Such porcelain not only demonstrated era-specific appreciation for feminine virtues but also revealed cultural convergence - despite differences, both Eastern and Western societies projected their ideals of domestic bliss and harmonious aspirations onto these artworks.

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