

# Influences Between Chinese Ming and Qing Dynasty Porcelain and European Rococo Style

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**Abstract.** The porcelain of the Ming and Qing dynasties had an extensive and profound mutual influence on the European Rococo art style. The content of this research paper includes the origin of the Rococo style and the influence of the Rococo style on Chinese porcelain from the introduction of the Kangxi Dynasty to the prosperous Qianlong period. The Rococo art style extensively utilizes decorative elements and techniques of Chinese porcelain, reflecting the importance of Chinese porcelain influences on the Rococo art style. This study fills the gap in research on the historical process and artistic techniques of the mutual influence between Chinese Ming and Qing dynasty porcelain and European Rococo style by building on more information about the connections of trade between China and Europe in ceramics and the collection of Chinese style ceramics and Rococo style ceramics by European and Ming and Qing Chinese royalties back in the 18th century. Elucidating the deep influence and development of different cultural exchanges provides a new perspective and value for studying the mutual inspiration of Chinese and Western art.

## 1 Introduction

Starting from the 4th century, Chinese and Western cultures have developed together through mutual exchanges and influences, forming today's multicultural landscape. Chinese ceramics have always attracted and influenced Western artistic styles with their exquisite craftsmanship, unique shapes, and profound cultural heritage. From the earliest time when Chinese ceramics were introduced to Europe on the "Silk Road" until the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Chinese ceramics were collected by European nobles and royal families. They were not only used in daily life but also became a symbol of wealth and status.

The ceramics of the Ming (1368 to 1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties occupied an important development period in the entire history of Chinese ceramics. Ceramics of the Ming and Qing Dynasties were developed and innovated around Jingdezhen official kilns and private kilns, and their craftsmanship reached a very high and exquisite level with the advancement of kilning technique and an increase in the percentage of Chinese Kaolin clay used in the porcelain which further helps achieve the ceramics industry in Jingdezhen. The production techniques, including glaze colour, patterns, and shapes, were also improved on top of the foundation of using red, yellow, green, blue, and purple adding white and pink to

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the colour pallet and inventing one of the most influential porcelains in the world ‘Blue and White porcelain’ [1]. A large number of pastel porcelains, blue and white porcelain, and underglaze red porcelain were fired in the Qing Dynasty, which is still the most popular today. These porcelains show that people's aesthetic and ideological pursuits at that time had reached a certain height. Influenced by the fresh and elegant ideological aesthetics and unique modelling techniques of Chinese ceramics in the Ming and Qing dynasties, European aesthetics took the first step towards simplifying complexity.

The Rococo art style, which is comparable to the ceramics of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, originated in France in the 18th century. The emergence of the Rococo style in Europe broke the Baroque style characterized by strong drama and exaggeration advocated by European aristocratic courts. Different from the traditional palace style, Rococo art changed the red tape in the palace and created a luxurious and solemn overall style, adding a fresh and refined side to the palace design. At the same time, after the high development of the French upper class, the Rococo style was integrated into exotic customs. Inspired by foreign cultures, the Rococo style gradually matured and became a trend admired and admired by the public. Relevant content provided by existing literature research includes that after Chinese porcelain with natural humanity as the main element entered the European market, it had a strong collision with the Rococo style with material luxury as the main element and influenced the Rococo style [2]. Rethinking and interpretation of art after cultural exchange between China and the West [3]. However, there is still a lack of research on the mutual influence between the two sides and more manifestations of the Rococo style in Ming and Qing ceramics. This article uses the literature research method, field investigation method, and interdisciplinary research method including the history of ceramics and the visual arts as the research methods. On this basis, this paper explores the significance of Sino-Western art and cultural exchanges for the development of cross-cultural art and analyses the factual contact between Chinese porcelain and Rococo style from the perspective of material exchange. As well as the influence of the Rococo style introduced into the Qing Dynasty court on its ceramic products.

## **2 Chinese porcelain's encounter with the Rococo Style**

Since the 5th century, Chinese ceramics have gradually opened up the trade route of Chinese ceramics around the world through the Silk Road. However, it was not until the early 16th century, with the arrival of the Portuguese, that Chinese ceramics began to be introduced to Europe [4]. Approximately beginning in 1514 the porcelain trade between Europe and China officially began [5]. Hundreds and millions of Chinese porcelain were traded over to European countries, and until now a variety of collections of Chinese porcelain are collected in museums around Europe. Shangchuan Island is where China and Portugal's first trade began, under Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's support by opening the trade route between China and Portugal. Followed by the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Sweden, and other European countries also began to open the trade route with China. From the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th century, Sino-European relations reached its first peak. In the middle of the 17th century, it reached its second peak. From the end of the 17th century to the 18th century, porcelain exported from China to Europe was produced in Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, and other regions are dominated by blue and white porcelain, but the number of colored porcelain has increased significantly for the collections of European royal families [5, 6].

Kraak porcelain is the same as the well-known Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain. In 1602, the overseas blue and white porcelain exported from China was intercepted by a Portuguese ship named "Kraak" of the Dutch East India Company in the Malacca Strait. Therefore, the word "Kraak" was then used by the Europeans to name this similar type of

porcelain. The characteristics of the Kraak porcelain are mainly porcelains that are wide-edged and a majority of blue and white color. Furthermore, bowls, plates, pots, and saucers are the main shapes created. The other identical decorative panelled porcelain that was produced along the coastal provinces such as Guangdong and Fujian is mostly called "Shantou". Exporters painted classic and popular Chinese elements from the Ming Dynasty on the ceramics, such as landscapes, figures, flowers, fruits, and other patterns [5]. The Netherlands replaced Portugal as the largest exporter of Chinese porcelain and held an auction of Chinese porcelain, inviting royal families from various European countries, including the King of France Henry IV, and King of England James I, to participate. The Netherlands purchased over 3 million pieces of porcelain from China and exported them to royal families in various European countries. Many of the princes and nobles were said to be suffering from "porcelain addiction" and were unable to extricate themselves from Chinese porcelain. In the early 18th century, August II Fryderyk Moncny, a fanatical lover of Chinese porcelain, established the Meissen Porcelain Factory to produce high-quality porcelain for himself. August II Fryderyk Moncny collected 35,798 pieces of porcelain before his death and incredibly, in 1717, August II Fryderyk Moncny proposed to the King of Prussia in exchange for 600 top Saxon Guards cavalry for a batch of fine Chinese blue and white porcelain [7].

### **3 Characteristics of Rococo Style and ceramic art of Ming and Qing Dynasties**

European Rococo style is mainly reflected in its home decoration such as the walls and items of furniture. It is widely used by the royal family in European countries. For instance, to show his love for Chinese ceramics, the Sun King Louis XIV placed many Chinese ceramics in the Palace of Versailles. At the same time, Madame de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV, was also an admirer of Chinese ceramics. She often supplied Chinese ceramics in imported stores and opened porcelain factories in Europe to imitate the most famous ceramic styles of Qianlong powder porcelain in China's Ming and Qing dynasties.

The pink porcelain is called "Pompadour Pink", which is very similar to Qianlong's pink porcelain in shape and pattern, but the overall craftsmanship is still incomparable as the Chinese ceramics involves all the essentials over thousands of years, it is challenging for Europeans to replica in a short period and the Europeans at that time were still attracted by the European art styles. Although the color used in the porcelain is called Pompadour pink, it is different from the previous European court style. In addition to using pink in a large area, green is also added as a complementary color. This is very similar to the Qianlong pastel porcelain that used pink, green, red, yellow, and blue as each other's complementary colors [8].

At the same time, various pattern elements in Pompadour pink porcelain are very close to Chinese ceramics, such as records of people's daily lives, Chinese-style fences, Chinese-style clothing shapes, and the overall shape of the ceramics. As shown in (Figure 1), although the vase collected by Madame de Pompadour has an obvious Chinese element in the middle of the ceramics, the use of Chinese characters as the image of the ceramics is greatly inspired and influenced by the tradition of Chinese ceramics using humans as an important pattern on ceramics (Figure 2). Although the use of Chinese style is not as obvious, it can be seen from the cyan blue used in the upper right corner of the vase. The colour cyan blue does not often appear in popular European styles, but it was widely used in Qianlong's collection of Qianlong pastel porcelain that used pink, green, red, yellow, and blue as each other's complementary colours. This again shows the cultural and art style influence between the Europeans and the Ming-Qing Dynasty Chinese [8].



**Fig. 1.** Pot-Pourri Vase [9].



**Fig. 2.** Potpourri vase (pot-pourri à vaisseau) [10].

Nature is not often used as inspiration and elements in the Rococo style, but a large number of floral elements appear in the Rococo collections collected by Madame de Pompadour and other European upper-class people. For example, the Chinese-style plates produced by the Meissen Porcelain Factory in 1720 added depictions of Qing Dynasty figures, ceramic works, and bright colours to the classic Rococo style (Figure 3) [11]. This once again proves through the Silk Road European Rococo was largely influenced by the Chinese ceramic elements.

Meanwhile, the Rococo style was equally important to the Ming and Qing Dynasties Chinese ceramics. The ceramic products in the Ming and Qing Dynasties gradually received inspiration and influence from the European Rococo style after the exchange of culture between the West and China. The vases, covered boxes, plates, and other ceramics were collected by August II Fryderyk Moncny in the palace. Some double vases, double round vases, lanternweres, and other utensils during the Qianlong period embody the characteristics of the Rococo style, such as complex decoration, different left and right sides, extensive use of gold ornaments, showing a magnificence and novelty that is different from the ceramics of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The full compositional forms of the Kangxi period gradually began to change after receiving the influence of European culture. Instead, decorative elements that gradually became thinner, more refined, and cumbersome appeared in the ceramic crafts of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Although the two parties have not undergone

large-scale changes due to cultural exchanges, each other's achievements have raised art to a new level [8].



**Fig. 3.** A Chinese-style plate from the Meissen Porcelain Factory in 1720 [11].

## 4 The Influence of Rococo Style on the ceramic style of the Qing Dynasty

China exported a large number of ceramic handicrafts overseas as a ceramic trading port during the Qianlong period. Among them, the two most exported items included Guangcai porcelain mixed with rich Western colours and styles; one originated in the Kangxi period and gradually developed to cater to the Yongzheng period. To meet Western preferences, Guangcai porcelain was first produced in Guangzhou using low-temperature glazed porcelain that was the embryo of white glazed porcelain from Jingdezhen. Most of the inspiration for Guangcai porcelain exported overseas came from the Rococo art style introduced during the Kangxi period. Combines Chinese ceramic culture itself with Western oil painting techniques and decorative styles to cater to overseas markets. The floral theme is a very important part of Guangcai porcelain, and it also combines the most characteristic sinuous lines and brilliant use of colours in Rococo art [12]. For example, the Guang Cai ceramics in the image below have both the patterns of traditional Chinese windows and paper cutting, as well as the floral theme widely used in European oil painting.

Collaborating the symbolism and traditions of both Chinese and European can assist in promotion of the Chinese culture in Europe after the trade route and through the integration of Chinese and European cultures, the European market can more quickly accept Chinese Guang Cai ceramics. Over the Ming and Qing Dynasties Rococo art style had a profound impact on Chinese ceramics. It not only enriched Chinese ceramic culture but also promoted China's economic and trade development during the Ming and Qing Dynasties through overseas distribution.

## 5 Conclusion

The main influence of Chinese porcelain on Rococo art comes from the representative elements of traditional Chinese ceramic culture. It contains classic themes of Chinese porcelain such as flowers, nature, humanity, and tradition. These are all important components that make up Chinese porcelain. European countries that moved from Baroque art to Rococo art style added and enriched Rococo art. The lack of this part is that the artistic style became more natural and concise, minus the splendid and red tapered Baroque palace style patterns. The main influence of the Rococo art style on Chinese ceramics during the

Ming and Qing Dynasties is reflected in the changes in ceramic shapes and decorations. The Rococo style was introduced into the Ming and Qing Dynasties and the post-Qianlong period of China, with bold and diverse porcelain shapes, using a large number of decorative styles and asymmetrical ceramic shapes. It breaks the previous ceramic art style of Chinese ceramics which was mainly symmetrical, concise and generous. Through the exchange of Chinese and Western art, the development of art progresses due to continuous mutual learning, influence and reference. The fusion and collision of different cultural characteristics also create new artistic styles. Only continuous innovation can lead to the progress of art development, and the exchange of Chinese and Western art and culture is one of the ways, and it is also a concept that has been adhered to since ancient times. It is the innovation of both regions that cooperated and started to accept new forms of art from regions far apart with completely different themes and cultural backgrounds. This linking of cultures created new cultural expressions for the different regions through the process of artistic communication. Additionally, it may have a positive influence on relations with other countries. For example, the new involvement of elements from China or Europe, the incorporation of cultural stories and backgrounds from different regions, and the use of artistic techniques to create artworks.

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