

# Study on the Relationship between Chinese Blue-and-White Porcelain and Portuguese Azulejos

Yang Liu, Dongliang Lyu

*Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*

**ABSTRACT.** *Chinese blue-and-white porcelain reached the peak of development during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Meantime, blue-and-white porcelain was introduced to Portugal, where it affected Portuguese azulejos. This article tries to outline the features of Portuguese azulejos via its historical origins and cultural values and compare it with Chinese blue-and-white porcelain.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese blue-and-white porcelain; Portuguese Azulejos; cultural exchange*

## 1. Overview of the development of blue-and-white porcelain in China

### (1) Before Yuan Dynasty

In recent years, archaeologists confirmed that the Gongxian kiln is the origin of the blue-and-white porcelain in the Tang Dynasty. The blue-and-white porcelain in this period was mainly exported, the craftsmanship and techniques of production were not mature.

After that, blue-and-white porcelain went to the path of decline. Blue-and-white porcelain relics unearthed in the Song Dynasty were extremely rare, there was almost no inheritance relationship with blue-and-white porcelain in the Tang Dynasty.

### (2) Blue-and-white porcelain in the Yuan Dynasty

According to archaeological data, mature blue-and-white porcelain appeared in the Yuan dynasty. Yuan blue-and-white porcelain were mainly thick and large. Its porcelain industry was prosperous and became an important stage in the history of ceramic development in China.

### (3) Blue-and-white porcelain in the Ming Dynasty

During the Ming Dynasty, the development entered a period of prosperity. In the early stage, the color was rich and dignified, the glaze layer was crystal-rich, the patterns were diversified, and they bear strong Islamic style. This period can be seen as the golden age of blue-and-white porcelain development.

Between 1465 and 1487, color was soft, completely escaped the exotic atmosphere in style and adopted traditional Chinese theme in the Chenghua period.

Most of the porcelain kilns in Jingdezhen were almost discontinued due to social turmoils during the days of Tianqi and Chongzhen. Therefore, there were few fine porcelains, but the kiln was stimulated by a large number of export orders, and the style of blue-and-white porcelain was blooming.

## **2. The process of blue-and-white porcelain being introduced into Portugal**

The large export of blue-and-white porcelain started in the Ming Dynasty. In 1511, Portugal occupied Malacca and soon began trading with China.

According to Portuguese data, the emergence of a large number of Chinese porcelain began in 1499. Soon, porcelain began to become one of Portuguese daily necessities. By the end of the 16th century, porcelain had entered every household in Portugal and was affordable for the middle class.

## **3. Portuguese Azulejos and the influence of the introduction of Chinese blue and white porcelain on it**

Azulejo is a Portuguese word which describes a square ceramic plaque with decorated glaze on one of its surfaces.

In the 16th century, the ceramic industry in Europe was relatively backward. Blue-and-white porcelain started to be favored by European society once its import had begun. The complicated patterns of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain have obvious Islamic influences in the Yuan dynasty and the first half of Ming dynasty. The azulejos used in Portugal in the first half of the 16th century were produced in Spain. The motives of Portuguese azulejos could have similar patterns to those of Ming Dynasty but they came from Spain and they have been always related with Islamic culture, the same that was influential during the reign of the Chinese Emperor Zhengde. We can say, therefore, that in regards to Islamic symbolism, this situation of early Portuguese azulejos art was similar to that of China.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese had taken the lead in starting trade in Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. This historical fact was recorded in the Chinese and foreign literatures, and, more importantly, remains of cultural relics have been found on the ground, underground, and on the seabed. Chronologically, first there was armorial porcelain, followed by large-scale export of Kraak porcelain to Portugal, and then Chinese blue-and-white porcelain elements became clearly visible on tiles in Lisbon. According to studies conducted by Portuguese art historian Maria Miranda, there are three sources of the Portuguese blue-and-white azulejo iconography: one was introduced by the Arabs; one was imported from Spain; and another one was from the Netherlands. Clearly the direct influence of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain has not been sufficiently considered. Chinese blue-and-white porcelain matured at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. After the development and reform in the early Ming Dynasty, it became the mainstream of Chinese porcelain after Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty. It quickly spread throughout China and it started to be exported in large quantities. From the 16th to the first half of the 17th century, almost all of the exported porcelain was Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. If Portuguese blue-and-white azulejos were not related to the large quantity of imported Chinese blue-and-white porcelain during this period, it is difficult to explain how blue-and-white azulejos were not so popular. After Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was exported to Portugal, blue-and-white azulejos began to become popular in Portuguese society, which clearly shows that Portuguese blue-and-white azulejos had a definite connection with Chinese

blue-and-white porcelain. In addition, the armorial porcelain and Kraak porcelain in this period was almost entirely blue-and-white porcelain; the former due to the customization of the Portuguese; the mass production of the latter was a result of Portuguese demand and was named after the Portuguese vessel, which is enough to show that these two new varieties of blue-and-white porcelain had a direct relationship with Portugal. Third, in the 17th century, Delft in the Netherlands successfully imitated and produced blue-and-white pottery. It was also the result of participation in the large-scale blue-and-white porcelain trade in the Netherlands, not to mention that the Portuguese began to produce blue-and-white pottery on a large scale in the early 17th century. Therefore, blue-and-white azulejos had long dominated Portugal in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, which in terms of time was closely related to the export of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in the 16th century. Of course, in-depth research in this area has yet to be carried out.

Before the end of the 17th century, Portuguese azulejos were generally polychrome, the lines were diagonal but mainly in the chequered or “*enxaquetado*“ patterns that were combined with patterned tiles, covering the interior of the entire building: this period clearly showed many influences rather than simply the Islamic, also appreciated Mongol, Indian and Chinese. Since late 16th century, patterned azulejos with floral motives began to appear, gradually covering the entire walls of a building in the beginning of 17th century. Along with the prevalence of Baroque and Rococo art, a variety of rich characters began to appear on the surface of azulejos. This kind of creative technique is similar to the Chinese blue-and-white porcelain production method, but the Portuguese painters incorporated the elements of light and shade and optical illusion of the western painting into the tiles of their country, which made the azulejos more rigorous, precise and true, thus producing a completely different temperament and charm. The Chinese blue-and-white porcelain is ink painting style is elegant, in contrast, The Portuguese blue-and-white tile is oil painting style on a faience canvas.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Through the research, the following conclusions are drawn: First, the Chinese blue-and-white porcelain plays an important role in the history of European art development. The blue-and-white porcelain crossed the sea and entered the life of the Portuguese, it has also profoundly affected the expression of Portuguese art--Azulejo, which is an important fusion point of the cultural exchange between China and Portugal. The blue-and-white porcelain moved from the Chinese mainland to the outside world, from the emergence of civilization to social fashion, indicating the beginning of globalization. Second, the link between Portuguese blue-and-white azulejos and Chinese blue-and-white porcelain style can be divided into three stages, first, the inspiration is clearly visible; second, the style is a mixture of Chinese and Portuguese decorative elements; the last, have more Portuguese native style. Third, azulejo is an art form developed independently in Portugal. It is a very important part of Portuguese culture and art, it also enriches the Portuguese culture and art expressions. We cannot over-exaggerate the influence of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain on Portuguese azulejos, but at the same time we must also appreciate the special role played by Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in the process of development and evolution of Portuguese azulejos.

### **References**

- [1] Rosie Mitchell (2013). Portuguese art: Portuguese Azulejos .
  
- [2] Maria Antonia Pinto de Matos(1999). The Portuguese Trade, *Oriental Art*, vol.45, no.1, p.22.
  
- [3] Maria Miranda(1997). *Portuguese art history*.