

# Research on the Influence of Maritime Trade Culture on Japanese Ceramic Culture—Take the Tang and Song Dynasties as an Example

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**Abstract:** *In the long history of Tang and Song Dynasties, the trade between China and Japan was particularly close, and the overseas trade of ceramics became an important bridge for cultural exchange. This paper aims to deeply explore the mutual influence and integration between Chinese and Japanese ceramic cultures under the background of maritime trade in this period. This study not only has important historical significance, but also provides valuable inspiration for contemporary international cultural and trade cooperation. Especially under the background of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" initiative, it is of far-reaching practical significance and reference value to discuss the exchange of ceramic culture between China and Japan in the Tang and Song Dynasties for how to effectively carry forward Chinese traditional culture in modern culture and economic exchanges. Through a careful analysis of the economic and cultural elements in Chinese and Japanese overseas cultures and the far-reaching influence brought by trade exchanges, this paper tries to provide a new perspective and thinking for contemporary cultural and economic exchanges.*

**Keywords:** *Ceramics, China Trade, Cultural Exchanges, Tang and Song Dynasties*

## 1. Introduction

China is an ancient civilization with active trade and diplomacy since ancient times. As early as the third century A.D., Chinese and Japanese cultures began to communicate for the first time, and the history of this exchange is as long as two thousand years. This exchange not only promoted the export of China culture, but also profoundly influenced the formation of Japanese island culture. Especially in the Tang and Song Dynasties, the exchanges between China and Japan reached an unprecedented level. As the main foreign trade ports at that time, Mingzhou and Quanzhou carried a large number of cultural goods and trade activities, among which ceramics, as the main cultural products at that time, not only sold well in Northeast Asian countries such as Korea and Japan, but also became a bridge connecting cultural exchanges between China and Japan. Corresponding traders' gangs came into being, which played a decisive role in the economic development and cultural export of the country.

## 2. The social and cultural exchanges between China and Japan.

In 12000 BC, due to the rising sea level, the road and bridge connecting the Japanese archipelago and the mainland were submerged by seawater, and Japan and the mainland were separated, which has since become a geographical relationship separated only by water. People who master ocean currents and monsoons make use of natural conditions and open up sea lanes. Through this channel, the nationalities on the mainland drift to the Japanese archipelago, and at the same time, the mainland culture is also transmitted to Japan.

### 2.1 Official exchanges between China and Japan

During the Warring States, Qin and Han dynasties in China, Japan was in the Yayoi period. With the expansion of Chinese culture and political power, it gradually spread to surrounding areas. China entered the Han Dynasty with great national strength, and the residents of Kitakyushu in Japan gradually developed friendly relations with Han. According to the records in the Book of Later Han, in the second year of the Zhongyuan reign of Emperor Guangwu, the Wa Nu Kingdom sent envoys to the Eastern Han Dynasty. Emperor Guangwu bestowed a five character golden seal engraved with the

words "King of Han Wei Nu", which recorded the exact year when China and Japan officially established official relations. At this time, Japan absorbed Chinese culture and entered the initial stage of development. This official communication continued until the beginning of the Jin Dynasty. After that, there was no record of the Japanese nation in Chinese historical records for a long time. It was only 140 years later, in the ninth year of the reign of Emperor An Yixi of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, that there was a record of exchanges between the Chinese Mainland and the Japanese islands again.

The period from the Western Jin Dynasty to the Southern and Northern Dynasties in China was roughly the age of birds flying over ancient graves in Japan. At that time, the culture of Chinese Mainland was introduced into the Japanese islands in various forms, and the main mode of transmission was by naturalized people who migrated from China to Japan. The Flying Bird Era was the stage of the decline of slavery and the emergence of feudalism in Japan. China's powerful feudal centralization system also deeply attracted the increasingly prominent social contradictions of Japanese rulers. Resumed official communication with the Chinese government that had been interrupted since the fifth century; In the Tang Dynasty of China, the national strength was strong and the culture reached its peak, ushering in a peaceful and prosperous era where nations came to court. During this period, China and Japan had frequent exchanges, and cultural and economic exchanges reached an unprecedented stage.

## ***2.2 Non-governmental exchanges between China and Japan***

During the period from the late Tang Dynasty to the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, China and Japan went to a negative situation in diplomacy, but they had the opposite situation in folk economy and trade. Folk commerce began to prevail and became an important part of cultural exchanges between the two countries. With the close official contacts between China and China in the Tang Dynasty, people-to-people contacts became hot, and the number of private business groups going to Japan from Mingzhou Port also increased. Japanese businessmen Zhang Zhixin, Li Da and Li Linde traveled between China and for more than 30 times.

During the Northern Song Dynasty in China, the cultural exchange and trade between China and Japan mainly depended on private merchant ships. According to statistics, during the Northern Song Dynasty, which lasted for more than 160 years, there were as many as 70 exchanges between China and China. The main trade products imported from to Japan were brocade, twisted silk, spices, ceramics, medicinal materials and stationery. The Japanese exports are mercury, cloth, fans, swords and so on. During the Southern Song Dynasty, at the end of heian period, the samurai class rose. A relatively open trade policy has emerged, and merchant shipping between the two countries has become increasingly frequent. It can be seen that in the economic and cultural exchanges between the Song Dynasty and Japan for two hundred years, the official exchanges no longer existed, but mainly relied on the frequent exchanges between Japanese monks and Song merchants to Japan. At this time, Japan has entered the period of tokugawa era, a martial artist, and adopted an active policy out of great interests in Song trade and stable political power.

## ***2.3 Cultural exchanges between China and Japan***

The Tang Dynasty in China, during the reigns of Emperor Zhongzong, Emperor Ruizong, and Emperor Xuanzong, had a strong national strength and a flourishing culture, resulting in a peaceful and prosperous era where all nations came to court. At that time, when Japanese Buddhist monks returned to Japan, they not only carried Buddhist scriptures, but also brought back a large number of classic calligraphy, inscriptions, and poetry collections. In the history of cultural exchanges between China and Japan in the Tang Dynasty, not only did Japanese monks inquire about studying in the Tang Dynasty, but Chinese monks also fearlessly traveled to Japan to preach and give lectures. The deeds of the eminent monk Jianzhen's eastward journey to Japan are widely known. He brought with him authentic works of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, as well as several collections of Tang Dynasty poetry and cultural classics. He introduced Buddhism, architecture, sculpture, calligraphy, painting, and many other Buddhist arts and medical knowledge to Japan, making significant contributions to the cultural development of Japan during the Nara period.

During the Song Dynasty, the compass was widely used in China's navigation to determine heading. Xu Jing mentioned in Volume 3, 4, "Half Ocean Jiao" of the "Xuanhe Fengshi Goryeo Tujing" that "you cannot go to the middle of the ocean. Look ahead at the stars and move forward. If it is dim, use a compass float to guide the north and south." Xu Jing accompanied the Mingzhou ship at that time,

indicating that Chinese merchants not only introduced shipbuilding technology to Japan, but also brought navigation technology mainly using the compass to Japan. At the same time, there were frequent exchanges between Chinese and Japanese monks. They not only came to the Song Dynasty to study Buddhism, but also brought Chinese culture back to Japan, which can be said to have presented a prosperous situation in cultural exchange. Due to the development of Zen Buddhism in Jiangsu and Zhejiang during the Southern Song Dynasty, renowned monks such as Rongxi and his disciple Ming all migrated from Japan to the Song Dynasty. At this time, there were also many monks who migrated from the Song Dynasty to Japan, including famous figures such as Lanxi Daolong and Daxiu Zhengnian. It was their efforts that officially introduced the Zen culture from mainland China to Japan, earning the respect and trust of the Kamakura samurai and promoting the formation of the Kamakura samurai culture<sup>[1]</sup>.

### **3. Maritime Trade with Japan in Tang and Song Dynasties**

After the mid-Tang Dynasty, the vigorous development of culture promoted the development of economy and trade at the same time. The change of national political situation and foreign trade policy made the economic center move southward, and the shipbuilding technology and navigation level improved. Due to the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty, the exchanges between neighboring countries and affiliated countries were essential, and maritime trade played an important role at this time. By the Song Dynasty, the foreign trade center was completely transferred to the southeast sea. At this time, Quanzhou and Mingzhou (now Ningbo, Zhejiang Province) followed the historical torrent, seized the historical opportunity, and developed from an obscure port to an important national trade and economic port.

#### **3.1 Tradition: *Quanzhou as the original center of maritime trade***

The Quanzhou mentioned in this article during the Tang and Song dynasties covers seven counties including Jinjiang, Nan'an, Hui'an, Tong'an (including Xiamen City), Anxi, Yongchun, and Dehua. In ancient times, the administrative ownership of Quanzhou underwent several changes. In the second year of Jingyun, Wurongzhou was renamed Quanzhou. In the sixth year of the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang Dynasty, its capital was relocated from Fengzhou in Nan'an to present-day Quanzhou City. Since then, Quanzhou, as the political, economic, and cultural center, has been firmly located in the southeastern part of Fujian Province. The waterway here is deep and winding, with three bays and 12 ports. Coupled with the warm subtropical climate, Quanzhou Port is ice free all year round and navigable throughout the year. By the mid Tang Dynasty, Quanzhou had become one of the four famous ports in southern China, and the domestic and international situation provided favorable conditions for its maritime trade. Internationally, the Tang government had close relations with Silla, and the maritime organization of Silla merchant Zhang Baogao frequently conducted transactions with ports along the southeast coast of China and Japan, building a huge commercial network. In the maritime exchanges between China, Japan, and Silla, Silla maritime exchanges between China, Japan, and Silla, Silla maritime merchants played an important direct or intermediary role, greatly promoting friendly economic, political, and cultural exchanges among East Asian countries. On the domestic front, in February of the eighth year of Emperor Wenzong's reign, the court issued a decree to adopt lenient policies towards the treatment of foreign merchants and ships by officials in Fujian, Lingnan, and other regions, including Quanzhou, to encourage overseas trade. This open policy has attracted a large number of overseas merchants to gather at Quanzhou Port, promoting the vigorous development of overseas trade<sup>[2]</sup>.

#### **3.2 Development: *Maritime Prosperity with Mingzhou as a New Trade Domain***

During the Tang and Song dynasties, Mingzhou underwent a magnificent transformation from a remote area to an economically prosperous place. In the 26th year of the Kaiyuan reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, after careful consideration and planning, Mingzhou was officially established, marking a new chapter in the region's history. The re-division of administrative regions this time separates the Yongjiang River Basin and Zhoushan Islands in the eastern part of the Ningshao Plain from Yuezhou, and gives it a new name - Mingzhou, after the Siming Mountain within its territory<sup>[3]</sup>.

In the Song Dynasty, with the obstruction of the Northwest Silk Road, the governments of the Song Dynasty paid more attention to the development of maritime trade. As an important maritime trade port, Mingzhou's status has been further improved. The government of Song Dynasty actively encouraged

maritime trade for the purposes of fiscal revenue, political diplomacy and luxury goods demand, so Mingzhou became a bustling place where merchants gathered. Especially during the confrontation between Song and Jin Dynasties, Mingzhou became the only channel for official exchanges in Song Dynasty, and its importance was self-evident. When summing up the development of Mingzhou, Song people praised it as a hub of sea transportation, although it was located in a corner. The south connects Fujian and Guangxi, the east communicates with Japanese people, and the north trades with Koguryo. There are an endless stream of merchant ships and rich materials, making it an important trade center in the southeast. This evaluation fully demonstrated the important position of Mingzhou in maritime transportation and trade in the Tang and Song Dynasties, and also proved that maritime trade played a great role in promoting the rise and development of Mingzhou.

#### **4. Influence of maritime trade culture in Tang and Song dynasty on Japanese ceramic culture**

The development of Japanese ceramics can't be separated from China. China's ceramics have influenced Japan through trade with Japan, while China's ceramic culture is based on China culture and ceramics. Japan's early study of China ceramics can't be separated from China culture, and China culture has had a far-reaching impact on Japan.

##### ***4.1 The Influence of China Calligraphy Art on Japanese Porcelain Art***

As early as Japan's ancient grave era, Chinese characters first appeared on pottery. In the Edo era, calligraphy art was widely used as an important decorative element of ceramics. From the ceramic handicrafts of this period, it is not difficult to find that Japanese craftsmen are committed to displaying the charm of calligraphy art on porcelain, so as to express their profound understanding and unique views on China's calligraphy art. For example, the blue-and-white square round-mouth tea pot created by Qingmu Mumi is engraved with Bai Juyi's Pipa Travel, with glaze color as ink, smooth brushwork and exquisite skills, which fully shows the producer's unique views and profound accomplishments on China's calligraphy art. In addition, China's seal art had a far-reaching influence after it was introduced into Japan. Since the Nara era, Japan has used seals as practical seals, and in the era, seals were widely used in ceramic art. It can be used as a symbol of ceramics, indicating the kiln genus and author of ceramics; It can also be used as a decorative element to form a unique pattern by stamping different numbers of seals; At the same time, it can also be used as the signature of porcelain painters, which, like calligraphy, adds a unique artistic flavor to the works. On the basis of absorbing and drawing lessons from China's calligraphy art, Japan combined its essence with ceramic art, forming a unique artistic style. The formation of this style not only reflects the in-depth cultural exchanges between China and Japan, but also shows that Japan has certain ability to inherit and develop traditional culture .

##### ***4.2 The Influence of China's Art Techniques on Japanese Porcelain Art***

The introduction of China's painting art has brought a brand-new painting style and trend to Japan. Japanese ceramic decoration is deeply influenced by China's painting art. From Japanese ceramic works, it is not difficult to find that it uses China's traditional line drawing method, and combines painting techniques such as painting, rubbing and dyeing. These techniques enable ceramic works to delicately present the painting style characteristics of different periods in ancient China. Specifically, the roundness and fullness of the paintings in the Tang Dynasty and the thinness and elegance of the paintings in the Song Dynasty are more or less reflected in Japanese ceramic works. For example, on the blue-and-white porcelain plates in the early days of Imari, we can see carefully painted landscapes, which not only show the artistic conception of Wang Wei's farewell poems, but also contain the leisure and detachment of the seven sages in the bamboo forest. These works deeply reflect the description of China's ancient poems by Japanese ceramics, as well as a thorough understanding of the poet's feelings and thoughts, thus showing a strong oriental aesthetic feeling. It can be said that China's artistic techniques have a far-reaching influence on Japanese porcelain art, which not only enriches the expression techniques of Japanese ceramic art, but also injects profound cultural connotations into it.

##### ***4.3 The Influence of China Ceramic Culture on Japanese Porcelain Art***

The Tang Dynasty in China was a glorious era of political stability and economic prosperity, and its national aesthetic preferences tended to be luxurious, individualistic, and colorful. During this period, the emergence of Tang Sancai undoubtedly had a huge impact on Japanese culture. The Japanese ruling

class highly praised the beautiful design and elegant style of Tang Sancai, and began to learn its production techniques. The Nara court actively introduced the production technology of Tang Sancai and successfully produced pottery in Japan that resembled Tang Sancai in shape, glaze color, and pattern, which later became known as "Nara Sancai". However, there are significant differences in the use of Tang Sancai between China and Japan. In China, Tang Sancai is mainly used as burial objects, while in Japan, Nara Sancai is given a more special status as a special vessel exclusively used by the imperial family and temples for court activities and religious worship sites. This difference reflects the conceptual differences in ceramic culture and the uniqueness of national culture between China and Japan. On the basis of absorbing Chinese ceramic culture and combining it with its own national characteristics, Japan selectively absorbs and digests it, creating ceramic art with its own national characteristics. These unique ceramic works not only showcase Japan's unique insights into ceramic art, but also reflect the richness and diversity of cultural exchanges between China and Japan. The online photos are shown in Figures 1 and 2<sup>[4]</sup>.



*Figure 1: Trio-colored glazed pottery of the Tang Dynasty*



*Figure 2: Nara Sancai*

## **5. Reflection on the influence of maritime trade culture in Tang and Song Dynasties on Japanese ceramic culture**

### ***5.1 The reasons why China's culture and aesthetics in the Tang and Song Dynasties became the world trend and influenced other countries.***

The primary reason why China's culture and aesthetics in the Tang and Song Dynasties can become the world trend and deeply influence other countries lies in its profound cultural self-confidence. During this period, China contributed rich and colorful cultural heritage to the world with its unique cultural background and artistic aesthetics. Even in modern times, after the decline of the Qing government and the cultural transformation after the founding of New China, our nation is still exploring its own cultural roots, from total westernization to dialectical treatment, and finally moving towards the road of China characteristics of integration and innovation. However, at present, we are facing a strong impact from foreign cultures and aesthetic trends. The extensive influence of these international brands such as Hermes, Balenciaga and Chanel in China market makes us wonder: How did they become the leaders of cultural trends? Among them, in addition to their own brand charm and market strategy, it is more important that they successfully grasp the aesthetic needs and consumer psychology of modern people. In contrast, many lost handcraft techniques in China have not received

enough attention and inheritance. This is not only because the talents who master these skills are scarce, but also because we have not done enough to publicize and carry forward these cultures. This has led to a vicious circle: the national awareness is low, and the craftsman's willingness to inherit is weakened, further aggravating the loss of skills. An important reason why the culture of the Tang Dynasty can spread to this day and influence other nationalities lies in its open and inclusive cultural attitude. The Tang Dynasty was willing and good at spreading its own culture, exporting advanced technology to other countries, and sharing cultural achievements with other countries in the form of cultural exchange rather than cultural aggression. This cultural gene of great power and beauty and beauty is exactly what we should learn and learn from today. Therefore, we should re-examine and cherish our own cultural heritage, strengthen the inheritance and protection of our opponents' craftsmanship, and improve the cultural self-confidence and cultural consciousness of the people. At the same time, we should also learn from the spirit of openness and tolerance in the Tang Dynasty, and exchange and learn from each other with a more open mind and a more inclusive mind, so as to jointly promote the prosperity and development of human culture.

### ***5.2 Strengthen cultural self-confidence and explore a unique path suitable for the development of national culture.***

The core of cultural self-confidence lies in cultural identity, which not only strengthens the national cohesion, but also shapes the national self-identity. In today's information-rich and multicultural society, how to strengthen cultural identity has become the primary task to promote the development of our country's culture. The treasure of China culture lies in the diversity of its national culture and national aesthetics. These colorful cultural elements, such as the unique expression of Miao and Li costumes, and the design concept of Xizang costumes pursuing perfection, all contain profound national beliefs and cultural connotations. As artists, we should deeply explore and summarize these precious local cultural resources, and provide a steady stream of power for their development. Art media workers should pay more attention to China's precious local culture and build more stages for craftsmen to show their talents. They don't lack the ability to be elegant, but need to be seen and recognized by more people. We should illuminate these bright stars with our heart and let them shine under the starry sky of Chinese culture. By strengthening cultural self-confidence, we can not only better inherit and develop our excellent culture, but also contribute China wisdom and Chinese strength to the prosperity and development of world culture in cultural exchange and mutual learning. Let's work hand in hand to explore a unique path suitable for the development of our own culture and jointly write a new chapter in Chinese culture.

### ***5.3 Facing the future, how to strengthen cultural communication?***

Ons of proximity, cultural communication, and cost-saving, there have been many forms of exchanges between China and Japan in the fields of politics, economy, culture. This is also true in the field of ceramic education. However, due to the industrial attributes of ceramics, such exchanges have been mostly covered in studies of modern industrial education, the development of the ceramic industry. What Japan has done in this regard is worth learning from. For example, Japan has incorporated Chinese characters into packaging bag design, which not only attracts people's attention but also encourages them to further understand and appreciate the charm of Chinese culture. Similarly, we can consider integrating traditional Chinese elements into all aspects of modern life, such as clothing, household items, etc., so that people can feel the profoundness of Chinese culture in their daily lives. Secondly, we should closely integrate traditional festivals with Chinese traditional culture and complement each other. By encouraging people to wear traditional Chinese costumes and participate in traditional activities during traditional festivals, we aim to enhance the participation and interest awareness of the entire population. This not only allows more people to personally experience and feel the charm of traditional culture, but also enhances national pride and cultural confidence. Furthermore, building a brand image that belongs to Chinese culture is crucial. Although Chinese handicrafts are unique and exquisite, they are often limited by production methods and dissemination channels. Today, with the highly developed Internet, we can make full use of its convenience, break the restrictions brought by the production form, and let more people know and buy these precious handicrafts. At the same time, we also need to innovate in production methods to solve the problem of supply and demand, which requires more outstanding workers to participate and jointly promote the inheritance and development of handicrafts<sup>[5]</sup>.

In exploring the influence of Chinese culture and aesthetics on the world during the Tang and Song

dynasties, as well as how to strengthen cultural confidence and enhance cultural dissemination, it is not difficult to find that the power of culture is infinite. From the glory of Tang and Song culture to the modern re-understanding and inheritance of traditional culture, every step demonstrates the profound heritage and unique charm of Chinese culture. Facing the future, strengthening cultural dissemination is not only a respect and inheritance of traditional culture, but also an important way to promote Chinese culture to the world. By drawing on successful experiences from other countries and combining traditional elements with modern life, we can enable more people to experience the unique charm of Chinese culture. At the same time, creating a brand image that belongs to Chinese culture, promoting the inheritance and innovation of handicrafts, is also the key to enhancing national cultural confidence and strengthening national cohesion. Looking ahead to the future, we have reason to believe that Chinese culture will shine even brighter and become an indispensable part of the world's cultural treasure trove. Let us join hands and make unremitting efforts for the inheritance and development of Chinese culture.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the historical background of Sino-Japanese overseas trade in Tang and Song Dynasties, this paper deeply discusses the far-reaching influence of trade exchanges on the development of the two countries during this period. At the same time, combined with the background of the current "One Belt, One Road" initiative, this paper further analyzes how China can complete cultural communication and exchange with the help of material cultural products, especially ceramics, in international trade and cultural exchanges, thus providing new enlightenment and reference for modern cultural and economic exchanges.

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