

Export or Exported? Primary and Secondary Transfer in Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth-Century Chinese Porcelain

Epilogue by Stacey Pierson

In 1640 delegates from a Portuguese embassy gave two Chinese jars to Queen Kristina of Sweden (1626-1689). The jars are Wanli-period (1572-1620) blue and white porcelain decorated with the so-called “hundred deer” design (fig. 15.1). They have an interesting biography because they were made in Jingdezhen in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, were acquired by Portuguese merchants (presumably) shortly afterwards, then transported to Europe and presented as a diplomatic gift to Sweden—all within approximately 50 years.¹ As objects the jars represent the complexity associated with the lives of exported things yet they also challenge their somewhat simplistic classification today as “Chinese export porcelain.”

The study of export porcelain is dominated by such reductive classifications of objects and in terms of critical appraisal this area is light-years behind the study of domestic Chinese ceramics. This is partly related to the relative youth and connoisseurship bias of the field of export ceramic scholarship but also with the assumptions that accompany the othering of this material. The primary assumption is that export porcelain was not made for Chinese consumption, therefore it cannot be assessed with reference to China or Chinese culture. In fact, this is a problem with the study of many traded objects which are subjected to one-dimensional evaluations grounded in their interpretation as data rather than as “things,” that is, objects that have lives.

Assumptions

The standard assumptions which plague the study of traded objects in general and Chinese export wares in particular are worth considering and include the following: A. Objects move once and are only affected by a single move; B. Objects remain in one category (in this case “export”) forever; C. “Export” is the right word to describe the movement and the identity of all transferred objects; and D. Objects are exported only at or around the time of manufacture. If we return to the Queen Kristina jars, one can see why these assumptions are problematic. The critical issue is that the jars moved several times, including after Kristina’s death, when they entered the Swedish royal collection and then subsequently one of the national museums in Sweden. The jars also assumed different identities with each move: first, “Wanli blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen”; second, “exported Chinese jars”; third, “Portuguese trade-official objects”; fourth, “diplomatic gifts”; then “Swedish royal objects,” etc., which references their status as objects in the museum today. These various identities were in turn associated with different classifications for

¹ Teresa Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer: China and Japan and their Trade with Western Europe and the New World, 1500-1644* (London: Paul Holberton, 2016), 149.

the jars. In terms of simple movement, the jars were also exported several times—from China, to presumably Portugal or a Portuguese outpost in Asia and then to Sweden. A final issue with these vessels is that their designs are of a type that was used on domestic Chinese objects so these jars also challenge assumptions about design specificity in so-called “export porcelain.” It is common to assert that certain designs were “only” used on export porcelains, for example.

The Kristina jars are an extreme case but they and numerous other examples similar to them demonstrate that there are serious problems with the assumptions that underpin export ceramic studies, not least the fact that objects made at any time rarely move just once or stay in one place. Most objects are moved several times in their life cycles, both physically as well as categorically, as noted by James Clifford in his Art/Culture System diagram in which objects are shown to change identities and therefore categorisation with changes in location, such as when an object of tourist art becomes an ethnographic object if put on display in an anthropological museum.² Here, he is concerned primarily with the concept of authenticity, yet the way that objects are shown to change their locations and therefore transformed conceptually is applicable to our study of export porcelain. An object made at Jingdezhen might be suitable for both the domestic and export markets, for example. It might also then be exported or even exchanged as a gift or as currency. It can be a domestic dining vessel, then an exported one, become a gift, and later a museum object or a collected work of art. A famous example of this would be the so-called “dragoon jars” in Dresden (**fig. 15.2**). These large blue and white jars from Jingdezhen were part of a large set that were exchanged for a regiment of soldiers by Augustus the Strong in 1717.³ They were clearly exported from China at one stage but their subsequent movements cannot really be described as “export”—at one point they became part of an European collection but were then exchanged between courts within Europe, and finally entered the art market and circulated between several museums. With each move, these jars could be classified differently—even as currency in this case—thus their object identities are not fixed and are therefore fluid.

Object nationalities and movements

These jars also point to another problematic aspect of object identity—that is, nationality. For example, we would and do describe the dragoon jars as “Chinese” because they were made in China. But they then were part of both the Prussian and Saxon royal object holdings or collections. Therefore did their nationality stay the same? And what about in the present day? Are they German? Some of them are in museums in the U.S. but they are still identified as “Chinese dragoon jars.” Beyond sites of manufacture and consumption, find sites for export porcelains have also contributed more recently to this issue of nationality. Numerous shipwrecks with surviving cargoes consisting primarily of Chinese ceramics, such as the VOC’s *Geldermalsen* (1753) or the much earlier Belitung wreck (ca. 826), have been found in the national waters of countries in Southeast Asia and have been claimed by those nations even if the cargo consisted of Chinese material, carried by a Dutch or Arab ship and the country claiming it was not in existence in the eighteenth century.⁴ Should China be making a restitution claim for these ceramics? But perhaps the

² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 223-224.

³ Eva Ströber, “*La Maladie de Porcelaine ...*”: *Ostasiatisches Porzellan aus der Sammlung Augusts des Starken* (Berlin: Edition Leipzig, 2001), 46.

⁴ Christie’s Amsterdam B.V., *The Nanking Cargo: Chinese Export Porcelain and Gold, European Glass and Stoneware, Recovered by Captain Michael Hatcher from a European Merchant Ship Wrecked in the South China Sea* (Amsterdam: Christie’s, 1986); Regina Krahl, John Guy, J. Keith Wilson, et al., *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2010).

issue is not as simple as that. If the cargo consisted of commercial goods, then it belonged to the merchants who may have been Chinese or Arab or Dutch in the case of the *Geldermalsen*. In the case of commercial goods, ownership is complicated as it can be associated with the place of manufacture (a factory in Jingdezhen, for example), the traders, the purchasers or even the ship owners. The ceramics in these shipwrecks are cargo and therefore subject to the rules associated with such goods.

But what about more singular exported objects? Do the same arguments apply for these goods, particularly if an object has been altered at some time in its history? A classic example of this would be the practice of mounting Chinese ceramics. Mounted ceramics, such as the famous Kangxi-period (ca. 1700) ewer in the Getty collection, have been physically and conceptually modified (fig. 15.3). This ewer, for example, is of a shape taken from Tibetan metalwork and was popular in China in the early Qing period (late seventeenth-eighteenth centuries). The ewer was exported and then redecorated with gilt bronze mounts in France, sometime around 1700, turning it into a European-style tankard. After its French redesign, it was no longer the same ceramic that was made in China, possibly for local consumption, so can it still be defined simply as “Chinese” or even “export”?

Finally, as objects are so consistently moved and modified, we should bear in mind that an object may become an export item at any time in its life. A classic example of this, but one which is never mentioned in studies of export porcelain, are the imperial objects from the Yuanmingyuan, the “Summer Palace,” which were dispersed after 1860.⁵ These objects were never intended to be exported, but they were after the sacking and burning of the palace through the mechanism of plunder. Many of these objects continue to move and be reclassified up to the present day, when their identities change again. For example, as a result of evolving attitudes towards plunder and restitution, they are no longer proudly labelled “from the Summer Palace in Peking” in British public collections. Object identities are as much a product of cultural trends as human ones. The Yuanmingyuan case will be discussed further; let us first address the question of nomenclature.

Terminology

The previous examples suggest that there is both a terminological issue concerning the study of export porcelain as well as an interpretative one. What is needed is both a new language and a new critical framework for the analysis of these ceramics. In terms of nomenclature, it is the term “export” that is problematic because it is so limited, as the above examples demonstrate. It is applied to both commercial and singular objects and it is also somewhat subjective, along with its egregious twin, the word “influence.” Indeed, it could be described as a “problem of translation.”⁶ I would suggest, therefore, that instead of defining them as “export wares” in cases where objects were not made specifically for this purpose, we should refer to them as “exported” or “transferred.” “Export” as a verb can also describe movement but it is still limiting as a description when applied to Chinese porcelain. Instead of universally describing object movement as “export,” therefore, we should consider the word “transfer” as a more neutral and consequently more flexible descriptive word. It removes any commercial or trade connotations associated with “export” and makes provision for situating the movement temporally but in nonlinear terms. The initial

⁵ Stacey Pierson, “True Beauty of Form and Chaste Embellishment’: Summer Palace Loot and Chinese Porcelain Collecting in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” chap. in *Collecting and Displaying China’s “Summer Palace” in the West: The Yuanmingyuan in Britain and France*, ed. Louise Tythacott (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 72-86.

⁶ Lydia Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

movement can be called “primary” transfer and subsequent moves, “secondary” transfers. As this description of movement is a nonlinear development in time, it is unrestrictive and accommodates all subsequent movements. Interestingly, this concept of transfer was first utilized with reference to Chinese “export” ceramics in 2004, in a book published on ceramic technology as the twelfth volume in the Needham Science and Civilisation Series.⁷ However, for some reason, it has not been widely adopted in the field, perhaps because the focus of the book was domestic (Chinese) ceramic technology and thus it is not normally read in conjunction with export ceramic scholarship. This highlights another key issue, which is the separate classification of the literature of domestic and export ceramics; this separate classification of objects tends to divide the readership and prevents a comprehensive nomenclature that would apply to the larger field of ceramics as it pertains to Chinese objects.

Nonetheless, “transfer” gives us a new language with which to describe the movement of Chinese ceramics accurately and without bias. For an interpretative framework, however, I would suggest a term that was first posited in another field. In the 1980s the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai published the edited volume *The Social Life of Things*, containing an essay by Igor Kopytoff which provided a new methodology for the interpretation of human-object relations; he used the phrases “the cultural biography of things,” and object biographies.⁸ What anthropologists attempted to do with this new approach was to find a way to characterise both object movement and the impact of this movement on their consumers and the objects themselves, whether this impact was tangible or intangible. This methodology proved to be flexible and robust and is now well-established for the study of object movement. As export ceramics are a classic example of objects that move, I would suggest that this methodology should also be applied to Chinese export porcelain. In order to test this, I will consider some illustrative examples and discuss the ways in which they are currently classified and interpreted. I will then offer a new approach to classification through the framework of “transfer” and “biography.”

Examples and case studies

The first object I examine using this new methodology is a set of cracked jars in Dresden (**fig. 15.4**). They are described as part of a “garniture” and were made in China in the Yongzheng period (1722–36). They appeared in the Dresden palace inventory of 1779 as part of a six-piece set. As Chinese porcelains, it is obvious that they take their shapes from earlier bronzes and their glazes from Song ceramics (twelfth–thirteenth centuries). They are therefore what is usually called in domestic ceramic studies “archaistic” in style or *fanggu* 仿古. They are also clearly representative of what is usually described as “Chinese taste,” that is, of the type widely consumed in China at the time of manufacture.

However, while they were evidently exported they are described by Eva Ströber as “part of a surprisingly large stock of porcelains in the Dresden collection which were produced for the Chinese market.”⁹ Indeed, similar examples are illustrated in an extant Yongzheng-period palace handscroll “Pictures of Ancient Playthings 古玩圖” depicting palace objects now held in the Percival David Collection (**figs. 15.5–15.6**). Considering their style as well as their movement from China, should these be called “export porcelains” or “domestic wares”? A classification as “export wares” might seem to fit these vessels, because of their grouping as a “garniture.” While there are some similarities, such a set is different

⁷ Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood, *Ceramic Technology*, ed. Rose Kerr, vol. 5, part XII in *Science and Civilisation in China* Series, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸ Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–94.

⁹ Eva Ströber, “*La Maladie de Porcelaine ...*,” 106.

from those created for altars in China as the individual vessels include jar forms, are paired and have no function beyond display. Garnitures would have been constructed post-production as manufacturing limitations ensure that they could not have been produced as a set at the time of manufacture.¹⁰ Their assembly as a set for foreign consumption was therefore the first stage in their transformation from domestic to export porcelains. They then left China and entered the Saxon palace holdings within fifty years of manufacture. The fact that they are still today described as “Chinese taste” suggests a contradiction or tension in their reception. The problem seems to be their visuality. They do not look as if they were made for a foreign consumer. “Export” as a category and a description of their movement therefore is not applicable or relevant here. They have been relocated, reconfigured and transported, in several stages, through several mechanisms and are thus better described as “transferred” wares. In terms of taste, they may have been representative of “Chinese taste” at one stage, as individual objects, but subsequently as a group they came to reflect “European taste,” that is, the taste of the subsequent consumer. Taste, as identity, is not fixed in time.

Another example which might make one question this notion of “Chinese taste” is a blue and white dish in the Dresden collection that is painted with a design that came to be called in English, “Master of the Rocks” (fig. 15.7). There is no reign mark on the vessel’s surface but it has been dated to the Shunzhi-early Kangxi periods (ca. 1660s). In spite of being noted in the Dresden palace inventory of 1721, the published catalogue entry for this dish confidently states: “Porcelain with this decoration ... *Was not produced for export*. It was commissioned by scholars who appreciated it as collectors’ items.”¹¹ There is one example in this style that could well be linked to a scholar or someone with scholarly aspirations in the Percival David Collection in London (fig. 15.8). On this example is an inscription, which could be associated with scholar’s taste: “precious as marvellous stone and treasured tripod 奇石寶鼎之珍.” However, many more examples with this design have been found outside of China, in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century contexts, so it seems that they represent both domestic and foreign tastes in Chinese designs. Thus, I would caution against making assumptions about designs when conducting cross-media research on porcelain. Although a design features a scholar or references so-called literati landscape paintings it does not automatically mean that scholars were the main consumers. A few such pieces have relevant inscriptions, suggesting that they may have been special commissions and therefore can be linked directly to “scholars” or their admirers, but most would have been generic, mass-produced products. Indeed, sherds with the “Master of the Rocks” design have been found at a VOC site in South Africa, from seventeenth-early eighteenth-century fills.¹² These dishes and pieces with similar designs were therefore consumed locally and exported at some stage, with some made specifically for export.

As noted previously, some vessels can more clearly be assigned to the “Chinese taste” category. Objects that were removed from the Yuanmingyuan in 1860 and related buildings in 1900 are an example. One vessel in the Victoria & Albert Museum (hereafter, V&A), is also of the type that would have been formed into a garniture, such as the crackled-glaze ones cited above, but it is earlier dating to the Wanli period (with a six-character reign mark) (fig. 15.9). As the museum record notes, it is currently in the V&A but it was formerly in the Summer Palace, or the Yuanmingyuan, before being transported to Europe. It was not made for foreign consumers, therefore, but was exported at a later date, through the mechanism of plunder and subsequently the art market. This vase again is said to be in “Chinese taste” and was obviously consumed locally as it was stored in an imperial palace, but most examples of this type extant today are defined as “export” wares. One reason for this is their slightly inferior quality, which

¹⁰ Josh Yiu, “On the Origin of the Garniture de Cheminée,” *American Ceramic Circle Journal*, v. XV (2009): 11-23.

¹¹ Eva Ströber, “*La Maladie de Porcelaine ...*,” 42.

¹² Carmel Schrire and Jane Klose, *Asian ceramic collections from historical sites at the Cape*, chap. in *Historical Archaeology in South Africa: Material Culture of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape*, ed. Carmel Schrire (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014), fig. 4.5.

however is not untypical of imperial wares of the later Wanli period. Another reason is that many vessels similar to this, also without reign marks, were exported, and fairly soon after manufacture, as this example in the Dresden collection indicates (**fig. 15.10**). This type is therefore better known as export ware, rather than one consumed by the court in China. In the case of the V&A vase (removed from the Yuanmingyuan), it was transferred several times with both primary and secondary transfer events having an impact on the vessel's identity—from “Chinese imperial porcelain” to “plundered object,” “art market object” (the V&A purchased it from the dealer S. M. Frank & Co.) and finally (for now) a museum object in London.

“True” export wares?

All of the above examples are usually defined as being in Chinese taste, thus not intentionally made for export or designed with a particular overseas market in mind. They are the problem pieces that challenge our definitions of “export” wares. But might there be more straightforward examples, that unquestionably should be labelled “export”? One type that comes to mind is what is known as “Bencharong ware” (**fig. 15.11**). This ware requires further study to periodize its production but there is no question of it being in “Chinese taste” or being manufactured for the Chinese market. It was made for the Thai market using unique designs, forms and colour palettes that are not found in domestic ceramics.¹³ Of course these wares are now collected outside Thailand and so they are subject to the impacts of transfer and collecting but they remind us that in spite of the problems identified in the study of “export” porcelain, some examples unquestionably can be assigned to that category. To this, we could add examples of armorial porcelain and other special commissions from overseas made intentionally for export to identifiable markets or consumers.

In some cases, however, it is difficult to assign exported pieces to a specific market, especially if they are of a type of ware that was also used in China. *Kinrande* 金襴手, for example, was widely exported but also used in China. It is normally labelled as a style in the “Japanese taste,” indeed the modern name for it is “Japanese,” but the many examples found in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and shipwrecks in Southeast Asia belie this assumption. Interestingly, quite a few *kinrande* wares were modified after their export from China. One quite famous example has German mounts of the sixteenth century and another was redecorated by Ottoman court jewellers in the seventeenth century (**fig. 15.12**).¹⁴ As evident in the Getty tankard, both mounting and re-decorating Chinese porcelains changes their visual appearance but also their identity (**fig. 15.3**). They become European or Ottoman objects yet their origins are Chinese. With such modifications, we also need to accept that the Chinese origins may not have been significant for the consumers. It might be the material or their method of acquisition that was more important. Nonetheless, these pieces have not just been “exported” but have been transferred, between locations and between categories. Thus, they demonstrate clearly why we need a new language for exported Chinese ceramics and a new interpretative framework.

¹³ Anne Håbu and Dawn F. Rooney, eds., *Royal Porcelain from Siam: Unpacking the Ring Collection* (Oslo: Hermes Publications, 2013).

¹⁴ David J. Roxburgh, ed., *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600-1600* (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2005), fig. 353.

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Fig. 15.1 Pair of jars. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue. Jingdezhen, China. Wanli period (1572-1620), Ming dynasty (1368-1644). H. 76.0 cm, D. ca. 46.0 cm. Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Accession No. CXV-1586 and CXV-1587.



Fig. 15.2 Garniture. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue. Jingdezhen, China. Ca. 1700, Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Porzellansammlung, top: Covered jar: H. 105.6 cm, H. without lid 87.3 cm, D. 51.8 cm, D. footring 38.6 cm; Inv. No. PO 9033; Vase: H. 95.8 cm, D. 43.8 cm, D. footring 31.5 cm; Inv. No. PO 1132; Covered jar: H. 105.8 cm, H. without lid 89.7 cm, D. 50.6 cm, D. footring 35.7 cm; Inv. No. PO 2059; bottom: Vase: H. 95.6 cm, D. 44.4 cm, D. footring 33.2 cm; Inv. No. PO 2061; Covered jar: H. 105.8 cm, H. without lid 88.7 cm, D. 52.2 cm, D. footring 35.6 cm; Inv. No. PO 2060. © Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: Adrian Sauer.



Fig. 15.3 Ewer (*duomu hu* 多穆壺). Porcelain with *famille verte* decoration. China. Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). French gilt bronze mounts about 1700-1710. 45.7 × 35.2 × 13.7 cm (18 × 13 7/8 × 5 3/8 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Object No. 82.DI.3.



Fig. 15.4 Garniture. Porcelain with grey, crackled iron-oxide glaze. China. Yongzheng period (1723-1735), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Porzellansammlung, left: H. 42.1 cm, D. 24.5 cm, D. footring 14.6 cm; Inv. No. PO 6957; centre: H. 41.3 cm, D. 21.8 cm, D. footring 15.2 cm; Inv. No. PO 6954; right: H. 38.8 cm, D. 22.8 cm, D. footring 15.0 cm; Inv. No. PO 6952. © Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: Adrian Sauer.



Fig. 15.5 Section of “Pictures of Ancient Playthings (*Guwan tu* 古玩圖).” Ink and colors on paper. China. Dated 1728, Yongzheng period (1723-1735), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 62.5 cm, L. 20.0 m. (approx.). Percival David Collection, British Museum. © The Trustees of The British Museum.



Fig. 15.6a Vase. Porcelain in blue-grey glaze with crackle. Jingdezhen, China. Qianlong period (1736-1795), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 14.5 cm, W. 8.3 cm. Percival David Collection, The British Museum, Object No. PDF A87. © SOAS.



Fig. 15.6b Bottle. Porcelain in greenish-grey glaze with crackle. Jingdezhen, China. Yongzheng period (1723-1735), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 21.0 cm, D. 12.5 cm, D. base 6.5 cm, D. mouth 3.0 cm. Percival David Collection, The British Museum, Object No. PDF7. © The Trustees of The British Museum.



Fig. 15.7 Dish. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue. China. Ca. 1660s, Shunzhi period (1644-1661) or early Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 7.0 cm, D. 34.0 cm, D. footring 20.0 cm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Porzellansammlung, Inv. No. PO 1357.
© Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: Adrian Sauer.



Fig. 15.8 Bowl. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue. On the base is a six-character inscription in underglaze blue which reads, “precious as marvellous stone and treasured tripod (*qishi baoding zhizhen* 奇石寶鼎之珍)” Jingdezhen, China. Kangxi period (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 5.0 cm, D. 16.1 cm. Percival David Collection, The British Museum, Object No. PDF C621. © SOAS.



Fig. 15.9 Vase. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue and colored enamels. Yuanmingyuan, China. Wanli period (1572-1620), Ming dynasty (1368-1644). H. 57.3 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, Object No. C.463-1920. © Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 15.10 Beaker. Porcelain, decorated in underglaze blue and overglaze enamel colors in *wucai* style. China. Probably Shunzhi period (1644-1661), Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 53.0 cm, D. 24.0 cm, D. footring 14.5 cm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Porzellansammlung, Inv. No. PO 6863. © Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: Adrian Sauer.



Fig. 15.11 Bowl. Bencharong ware, painted in polychrome enamels. China. Ca. 1850, Qing dynasty (1644-1912). H. 15.9 cm with lid, D. 11.1 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, Object No. C.110&A-1957. © Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 15.12 Cup. Porcelain, painted in underglaze blue, enamel and gilding; German silver-gilt mounts. Jingdezhen, China. Jiajing period (1522-1566); mounts, c. 1583. H. 16.7 cm, D. 11.7 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, Object No. M.16-1970. © Victoria and Albert Museum.