

# Cultures of Ceramics in Global History, 1300-1800

An International Conference Hosted by the Department of History,  
University of Warwick, 22-24 April 2010

Robert Burns' oft-cited observation that 'the best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, / Gang aft agley' was never better illustrated than during the third week of April 2010, during which the 'Cultures of Ceramics in Global History, 1300-1800' conference at the University of Warwick became the unlikely victim of a cloud of ash from Eyjafjallajökull, an Icelandic volcano over a thousand kilometres away. The original conference programme had included participants from the United States, Australasia, China, Taiwan and Europe, many of whom experienced major delays, and some of whom were simply unable to board their flights. Among those who were forced to cancel at the last minute was the keynote speaker, Professor Christiaan Jörg of the Universiteit Leiden.

Despite these major difficulties, we were delighted to be able to host a reduced programme of papers and discussions over a single day, Friday 23 April. Eva Ströber (*Keramikmuseum Princessehof*) told the fascinating story of the large dish, a ceramic object that 'the Chinese themselves had no use for,' and its spread across the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Japan. Zhao Bing 趙冰 (*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*) presented new discoveries from recent archaeological research in Tanzania, and argued convincingly against the perceived marginality of East Africa in the early modern world system. Teresa Canepa (*Jorge Welsh*) and Etsuko Miyata 宮田絵津子 (*Universitat Pompeu Fabra*) each sought to cast new light on Chinese porcelain and the Iberian Peninsula. Canepa discussed late-Ming *kraak* porcelain in light of her analysis of shards and shipwreck finds, while Miyata used new archaeological evidence of the distribution of ceramics across the peninsula to challenge conventional histories of the galleon trade. Liu Zhaohui 劉朝暉 (*Fudan University*) used recent archaeological research in Hong Kong and Macao to demonstrate the changes that occurred in Chinese export porcelain between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Cao Jianwen 曹建文 (*Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute*) and Qiu Xinqian 邱新倩 (*West Virginia University*) jointly presented a paper that placed the emergence of blue-and-white export porcelain during the Yuan dynasty in a global context.

One of the explicit goals of the 'Cultures of Ceramics' conference was the creation of a dialogue between disciplines, and one of the ways in which we hoped to achieve this goal was to encourage active participation on the part of the conference audience. During one of the sessions, Anne Gerritsen chaired a discussion that included not only the speakers, but also the many other academics, students and curators who had travelled to Warwick as audience members. This group included Maxine Berg (*University of Warwick*), Jessica Harrison-Hall (*British Museum*), Huang Wei 黃薇 (*Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute*), Michel Lee (*Museum of East Asian Art*), Luisa Mengoni (*Victoria & Albert Museum*), Shelagh Vainker (*Ashmolean Museum*) and Zhan Jia 詹嘉 (*Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute*). Before moving on to a more general discussion, the group was first asked to reflect on issues raised in an extremely thought-provoking paper presented by Stacey Pierson (*School of Oriental & African Studies*), in which the conventional narrative of the appropriation of Chinese ceramics was challenged by Pierson's more conceptual, localised perspectives.

We would like to extend our appreciation to everyone who helped to make the conference a successful and stimulating event.

Dr Anne Gerritsen & Dr Stephen McDowall  
Conference Convenors



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