

Variations on a Theme of *Taoye tu*: Picturing Jingdezhen Porcelain Production

Dr Ellen C. Huang

University of California, Berkeley, US

Since the ascendance of Jingdezhen as the centre of porcelain production in the thirteenth century, Jingdezhen ceramic objects have traversed the globe through various trajectories under varying circumstances. Indeed, Jingdezhen's global impact occurred not simply in the form of porcelain objects but also as forms of textual and visual knowledge. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several attempts to uncover the secrets of porcelain's composition and production had already occurred through Jesuit activity in Ming China, leading to the development of a verifiable economy of knowledge about Jingdezhen in the eighteenth century and burgeoning through the nineteenth.

In order to connect global political-economic transformations with such intellectual changes, this paper focuses on the systemic production of knowledge about Jingdezhen porcelain. It highlights the history of the creation and circulation of a visual genre depicting porcelain production at Jingdezhen, known in historical works as *Taoye tu*. I begin by mapping the spread of visual images as an inter-iconographical and inter-textual process, from the publication of the first visual images of porcelain production in the late-Ming dynasty technology treatise *Tiangong kaiwu* of 1637 to the three Qing-court commissioned porcelain production albums of the early eighteenth century. Then, I trace chronologically their emergence, circulation, and proliferation across different media, locales, and countries, including export paintings and the woodblock prints of the *Records of Jingdezhen Ceramics* 景德鎮陶錄, first printed in 1815. By bringing together seemingly disparate art historical categories, from Qing imperial paintings, to woodblock illustrations, and finally export paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I show the existence of a shared visual network of Jingdezhen porcelain that was global in scope.

The paper makes two interrogations into the literature of Chinese art history and world history. By demonstrating that similar aesthetic modes, reflected in export paintings, woodblock prints, and imperial albums, travelled the world stage at roughly contemporaneous moments but for very different purposes, I argue for the significance of sequentially-viewed porcelain production images to an early modern global subjectivity. Second, I argue that the global nature of porcelain was not simply a result of supply-demand relationships between patrons and makers, but rather an inherent part of Jingdezhen porcelain's (re-)productive technologies, as depicted in and enabled by the rise of porcelain production albums themselves.

© Ellen C. Huang 2010

Cultures of Ceramics in Global History, 1300-1800

University of Warwick, 22-24 April 2010



Global History
& Culture Centre

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/research/globalporcelain/conference>