

The *Chini-Khaneh*: Reception and Appreciation of Chinese Ceramics in Iran, 1300-1800

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The beauty of Chinese ceramics had exerted an indelible impact on the development of decorative arts in the Iranian world since the early Islamic period, and this remained a lingering aspect of Iranian material culture till modern times. Much attention has therefore been paid to the Sino-Iranian relationship reflected in the styles and techniques of Iranian ceramics and other types of artefact produced during the period when the socio-political stability under powerful rule, such as the Mongols (Ilkhanid-Yuan), the Timurids and later the Safavids, facilitated the trans-Eurasian trade, owing to the growth of maritime trading and global commercial networking. Besides the question as to how Iranian craftsmen adopted and adapted Chinese-origin styles, there remain further questions as to how Chinese ceramics were appreciated in Iranian contexts and why such a concept was developed in relation to Iranian material culture.

This paper aims to trace the cultural phenomenon of responding to the fashion for Chinese ceramics in pre-modern Iran, enquiring into how Iranian potters produced quasi-Chinese wares as substitutes of imported Chinese ceramics for the domestic market and eventually added artistic originality to such pieces; how Iranian views to Chinese ceramics as objects of display were by degrees cultivated and culminated in the form of a ceramic gallery, known as the *chini-khaneh*, which became incorporated into Safavid architecture. Examples of the *chini-khaneh* include the Ardabil Shrine, whose collection of Chinese ceramics is renowned for its quality and quantity, and the way to present the idea of 'gifts' in itself is key to understanding of not only aspects of Iranian culture but also antecedents of the modern-day museum.

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