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Analysis of the Chinese Ceramics Section in Joseph Marryat's a History of Pottery and Porcelain

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Abstract: The study of Chinese ceramics in Britain holds a significant position in the academic circle. This article examines the evolution of the Chinese ceramics section across the three editions (1850, 1857, 1868) of Joseph Marryat's *A History of Pottery and Porcelain* and explores its significance. As a systematic study of global ceramics, the book integrated Chinese ceramics into a worldwide framework for the first time, progressively expanding coverage of their history, types, decoration, marks, and collection practices across subsequent editions. The analysis reveals that the second and third editions significantly incorporated research by French sinologists to advance studies and witnessed a rapid increase in knowledge about Chinese ceramics. Despite some limitations due to the time, the book advanced systematic Western understanding of Chinese ceramics by combining collections, literature, archaeological discoveries etc., facilitating the dissemination of Chinese ceramic art and culture and laying an initial scholarly foundation for subsequent studies in the West.

1. Introduction

Ceramics had been forced into subsidiary place among art products by the Chinese. However, this has not been the case in the West. From the moment Chinese porcelain appeared in the Western world, it was widely appreciated for its numerous qualities, such as its hard texture and smooth, white surface. These wares were not only regarded as symbols of status and prestige for royalty and aristocrats but also attracted craftsmen from other countries to create imitations. Moreover, the occidental world first learned of the art of China through pottery and porcelain.[1] In Western academia, British research on Chinese ceramics holds a prominent position not only for its long-standing scholarly traditions but also for a rich body of publications.

The early publications on Chinese ceramics in Britain can be traced back to the mid-19th century, notably to British scholar Joseph Marryat's *Collections Towards a History of Pottery and Porcelain*, published in 1850.[2] This book was the first in Britain to focus on the collection of ceramics worldwide, with Chinese ceramics constituting a significant part. The second and third editions were published in 1857[3] and 1868[4], respectively. The book gained international recognition. In 1866, the second edition was translated into French by Comte d'Armaillé and L. A. Salvetat, with a

preface written by M. Riocreux, the director of the Sèvres porcelain museum in France at that time. He described the book as the most comprehensive French book currently available for enthusiasts to consult.[5]

The section on Chinese ceramics in the book was continuously expanded to cover history, types, marks and decorations. While the book was not a comprehensive and detailed monograph on Chinese ceramics, this section still reflected, to some extent, the state of Chinese ceramic studies within British society and academia at that time. Moreover, it had a notable impact on the Chinese porcelain market for a period, contributing to the spread of Chinese ceramic art and culture in Britain.

To date, academic research has primarily focused on the late 19th century French scholars' works on Chinese ceramics and related studies on British collectors. In comparison, although scholars have taken note of Joseph Marryat's book and conducted some studies from different perspectives—such as Ann Eatwell analyzed the participation of women in the collecting world by examining female collectors mentioned in Marryat's work[6]—there has yet to be an in-depth, specialized study into the discussion of the Chinese pottery and porcelain section in this book. This gap is particularly evident in Chinese academia, where this book has not been mentioned at all. This paper seeks to address this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of the Chinese ceramics section in the three editions, analyzing its content sources and its growth of knowledge about Chinese pottery and porcelain, and assessing the contributions and limitations, hoping to provide the academic community with a more comprehensive understanding of the Chinese ceramics section in the book.

2. Joseph Marryat and the Publications of the Book

Joseph Marryat (1790–1876), born in Grenada, held multiple roles: politician, banker, merchant, and an active ceramic collector in 19th-century England. Ann Eatwell pointed out that as a collector and historian moving in museum and society circles, Marryat was well placed to gauge the extent of the commitment to serious collecting in nineteenth-century England.[6] His influence was not only reflected in his personal collection but also in his academic writing, which helped promote ceramic studies as a public endeavor of both academic value and social significance.

Ceramics, especially in Britain, were already a specialist area of collecting in 19th century.[7] This was driven by various factors. The accumulation of social wealth facilitated by the Industrial Revolution led to the rise of a new middle class who were eager to demonstrate their taste and social status through art collecting. Thereby, ceramics collecting gradually became an important cultural activity. Technological advancements in industry spurred the development of ceramic production, raising the craftsmanship and aesthetic standards of European ceramics to new heights. Exquisite works from European porcelain manufacturers frequently appeared in auction markets, attracting the attention of numerous collectors. At the same time, fine ceramics from Europe and West Asia, highly prized since the Renaissance, along with Chinese and Japanese porcelains that entered Europe after the Age of Exploration, remained popular collection in the market. As the ceramic market became increasingly complex, the demand for knowledge of ceramic history and appreciation grew among collectors.

However, at that time, there were few books on this subject in society, and the few that existed focused more on the technical aspects, such as the book published in 1844 by Alexandre Brongniart,[8] the former director of the Sèvres porcelain factory in France. While collecting ceramics, Joseph Marryat noticed this gap and conceived the idea of creating a book that would be both accessible to general readers and practical for collectors, helping them identify and collect ceramics. During a trip to Europe to visit ceramic collections and porcelain factories, Marryat and

his friend, Sir Charles Price, passed the time by working on the book together. Unexpectedly, the book not only attracted widespread attention but also received high praise from publishers, who even suggested decorating it with woodcuts and color illustrations.[2]v-vi

The first edition received an enthusiastic response from the public, which greatly encouraged Marryat. As the original plan to co-author a history of ceramics with other scholars did not come to fruition, he decided to add more content to the new edition, including studies on Italian Majolica pottery and Eastern ceramics. This revision was assisted by his sister, Mrs. Palisser, and supported by several museum directors, collectors, and scholars who provided materials and images.[3]iii-iv A few years later, the third edition was published that included revisions to the chapters on Spanish, German, and French ceramics, as well as the addition of studies on Persian and Rhode Island pottery. Furthermore, the book was supplemented with more than 50 new woodcut illustrations and an expanded collection of ceramic marks, making it a more comprehensive reference on ceramics.[4]iii-iv

3. Comparison of the Chinese Ceramics Section in the Three Editions

In the first edition, Chinese stoneware and Chinese porcelain were categorized into separate chapters. However, in the subsequent two editions, the author classified all Chinese ceramic types under the chapter of oriental porcelain, discussing them alongside those from Korea, Japan, Persia, and other countries. Based on the content of the three editions, the themes primarily encompass the following four aspects: the dissemination and perception of Chinese porcelain in the West, the history, types, decoration and inscriptions of Chinese ceramics, Chinese pottery and stoneware, as well as the European collection of Chinese porcelain. Although the narrative sequence of these themes varies slightly among the three editions, the overall framework remains largely unchanged. Notably, the later edition significantly expand and refine the content based on the previous edition, making it more comprehensive and detailed. The following section will introduce the major modifications and adjustments in the discussion on Chinese ceramics across the three editions.

As to the dissemination and perception of Chinese porcelain in the West, the latter two editions expanded upon the first edition and traced the history of Chinese porcelain's introduction to the West back to earlier era—the 9th century, covering trade exchanges between China, Egypt and Persia. Additionally, they incorporated more literature, such as the Travels of Ysbranti Ides, ambassador to China from Peter the Great in 1692[4]243, various speculations by Western scholars about the composition of Chinese porcelain[4]244, and so on.

Regarding the history of Chinese ceramics, the first edition only briefly mentioned it in a few sentences and referenced a then-popular topic—the snuff bottle unearthed in Egypt. However, in the second and third editions, the author drew on the perspectives of the French sinologist Stanislas Julien and Chinese scholars, rejecting the claim that this snuff bottle served as evidence of the long history of Chinese porcelain. Moreover, he significantly expanded the discussion on the history of Chinese ceramics, not only reviewing the development of Chinese ceramics from the very ancient times to the Qing dynasty but also adding introductions to important historical kilns in China. Special emphasis was placed on the ceramic craftsmanship of Jingdezhen.

When it comes to Chinese ceramic wares, the content became significantly more extensive. First, in terms of types, more collector's pieces were adopted in the second and third editions, especially in the third edition, not only more types were introduced, such as white porcelain with incised designs, turquoise blue porcelain, and violet porcelain, but also the classification of Chinese enamelled porcelain was adopted. Second, in terms of marks, the second edition greatly expanded the short paragraph in the first edition to cover more reign marks and others with illustrations for better clarity. The third edition further added several types of Qing dynasty marks. Lastly, as to the

decorative motifs on Chinese porcelain, the content of the first and second editions was similar—providing some simple introductions but with limited detail. However, the third edition offered a more detailed exploration of common animal motifs and religious figures found on Chinese porcelain, with some illustrations to help readers better understand the cultural significance of these decorative elements.

In terms of Chinese pottery and stoneware, the first edition did not cover pottery at all. And it considered the Nanjing Pagoda, built in 1277, as a symbol of the excellence and durability of Chinese porcelain craftsmanship and classified it as porcelain. However, in the second and third editions, the Nanjing Pagoda was reassigned to the stoneware category. Additionally, the two editions gave introduction to more items, such as everyday utensils, kiln gods, glazed pottery and so on.

Finally, in terms of porcelain collection, the first edition provided an account of European aristocrats and collectors' interest in Chinese porcelain, mentioning notable collections such as the Japan Palace at Dresden, Germany, famous British collectors like Mr. Beckford and so on. While the second and third editions expanded this section, the overall changes were not significant.

4. Analysis of the Chinese Ceramics Section in the Three Editions

Despite a limited scope, the section still draws from a diverse range of sources to enrich its discussion. Marryat's original intent in writing the book was to serve collectors, so he placed great emphasis on artifacts that he not only referenced numerous private collections but also paid close attention to newly emerging Chinese porcelains in the market beyond the well-known Chinese export porcelain in Western academia. At that time, a large number of Chinese ceramics flowed into Western markets as loots during the Opium Wars, and some were acquired by people who bought in China personally. Although these had not yet become mainstream in Western collections, their presence gradually made Western collectors aware of the vast diversity of Chinese ceramics. Meanwhile, the author placed great importance on the application of archaeological materials, especially incorporating new archaeological discoveries of the time. Archaeology had already begun to gain attraction internationally, and findings such as the snuff bottle unearthed in Egypt and the porcelain seal discovered in Ireland once sparked widespread academic interest. However, these archaeological findings were subsequently exposed as deliberate forgeries. Even so, the emphasis on archaeological artifacts reflects the author's rigorous scholarly approach.

In addition, an important source of reference for the book was a wide range of literature, including researches by various scholars, historical records, travelogues, and trade documents. Notably, much of the newly added content related to Chinese ceramics in the book was primarily from the French academic community. The French sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797–1873), at the request of the director of the Sèvres porcelain factory, translated and excerpted the first seven chapters of the Chinese ceramic classic *Jingdezhen Taolu*, which describe China's porcelain production system, craftsmanship, and related materials. He then compiled and supplemented these excerpts with other Chinese ceramic texts, culminating in his book *Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise*, which was officially published in 1856.[9] In the second and third editions of the book, Marryat extensively incorporated Julien's research, indirectly highlighting the increasing importance that not only France but also Britain placed on the study of Chinese porcelain craftsmanship and history. Shortly afterward, the French scholar Jacquemart attempted to systematically categorize the various decorations on Chinese porcelain to facilitate deeper research.[10] He classified Chinese enameled porcelain into three groups: famille chrysanthémo-paeonienne, famille verte, and famille rose, with the last two remaining in use today. Marryat's introduction to enameled porcelain classifications in the third edition drew heavily from

the work. This exchange of knowledge demonstrates the close academic collaboration between British and French scholars at the time. The combination of Chinese ceramic literature and a systematic classification approach to analyzing Chinese enameled porcelain marked the beginning of a more structured and in-depth study of Chinese ceramics in Western academia.

In terms of content proportion, the topics of the dissemination and perception of Chinese porcelain in the West and the collection of Chinese porcelain in Europe occupied a significant portion of the first edition. However, from the second edition on, the content related to the history of Chinese ceramics, types, decoration and marks, as well as Chinese pottery and stoneware, became more extensive and accounted for a larger proportion. These adjustments and additions reflect the deepening understanding of Chinese ceramics during that period, primarily in three key aspects. First, there was an increasing recognition of the long history and more types of Chinese ceramics in the academic circle even though many older artifacts had not yet been fully identified or studied at the time. Second, there was an improved understanding of the technical craftsmanship involved, such as in the first edition, Marryat adopted Brongniart's classification of ceramics into pottery, stoneware, and porcelain and classified the Nanjing Pagoda as porcelain. However, over time, scholars realized that it did not belong to porcelain but rather to stoneware. And there was also growing knowledge of the craftsmanship of various ceramic types, such as turquoise blue glaze and violet porcelain, which were produced by applying enamel on the pieces in the state of biscuit.[4]270 Third, there was a newfound appreciation and understanding of Chinese porcelain decoration. From the earliest recorded porcelain collections in the 13th century to the widespread collecting trend of the 18th century, Chinese porcelain had long been interpreted according to Western value systems, with little attention given to its decorations or marks.[11] In particular, many motifs on Chinese porcelain were closely related to Chinese religion and traditional culture. Recognizing these elements made it easier to understand the symbolic meanings embedded in Chinese porcelain decorations.

Although the book continued to expand and the understanding of Chinese ceramics gradually deepened, some perspectives on Chinese porcelain remained largely negative, particularly in terms of painting techniques. For example, the painting on Chinese porcelain was considered to be mechanical, and the forms were deemed to be inferior even to the commonest production of the Grecian workmen.[4]277-279 These suggests that, at that time, people still failed to recognize or appreciate the unique characteristics of Chinese craftsmanship and artistic expression.

The section on Chinese ceramics, as part of world ceramics, was not published as an independent monograph, but it still made significant contributions in the academic history of Chinese ceramic studies in Britain. First, the book was pioneering in its comprehensive exploration of Chinese ceramics, marking an important milestone in the history of Western ceramic studies. Its diverse research methods and structural framework provided valuable references for subsequent scholars, advancing the study of Chinese ceramics. From the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, British scholars continued to expand and deepen this research, producing more specialized and comprehensive monographs on Chinese ceramics.

Moreover, although many of the academic research findings referenced in the book were not originally from the author himself but from French scholars, it was Marryat's presentation of these scholarly works that connected British research with the latest developments in the field, ensuring that it did not fall behind the academic discourse and laying the groundwork for future studies. And during this period, numerous exhibitions were held, and many scholars, such as Johnstone and Atkinson, drew upon Marryat's book for scholarly grounding when writing exhibition catalogs.[12] Furthermore, the author attempted to demonstrate the long history of Chinese porcelain through archaeological artifacts such as the snuff bottles excavated in Egypt. Although these artifacts were later proven not to be that ancient, the approach of emphasizing archaeological data was, in itself,

highly scientific, reasonable, and forward-thinking. As more archaeological excavations were carried out in China during the 20th century, archaeological data played an important role in the study of Chinese ceramics. Finally, although the author's initial intention was to cater more to the public's collecting needs, as the research deepened, the discussions on the history, types, decoration, and inscription identification of Chinese ceramics became increasingly rich. This, in turn, objectively promoted further academic exploration of Chinese pottery and porcelain and facilitated the spread of Chinese ceramic art and culture in the West.

Of course, the book also has several shortcomings in its exploration of Chinese ceramics. When Marryat drew upon some of the latest research by French scholars of the time, there was a lack of rigorous discernment. For example, the chinese term qingci in *Jingdezhen Taolu* was mistranslated as "blue porcelain" by the French sinologist Stanislas Julien, leading to some degree of misunderstanding. M. Jacquemart's proposed classification system for porcelain contained inaccuracies and confusion. Moreover, Marryat also misidentified the origins of certain porcelains; for example, he mistakenly attributed a Sheng-shaped Yixing teapot produced in China during the Kangxi period to a Japanese work. These examples reflected the limitations of Western scholarship on Chinese ceramics at the time, which were, to some extent, constrained by several factors—European scholars had limited access to Chinese porcelains, relevant Chinese literature was scarce, and archaeological excavation work had not yet reached the level it is today.

5. Conclusion

With the rise of ceramic collecting and to address the lack of reference materials in the market, British scholar Joseph Marryat expanded and published the book on world ceramics 3 times consecutively. By analyzing the Chinese ceramics sections, this study reveals the rapid growing knowledge about Chinese pottery and porcelain, covering history, craftsmanship, types, decoration, etc. during the mid-to-late 19th century. The findings demonstrate that later editions significantly incorporated contributions from French sinology, such as Stanislas Julien's translation of *Jingdezhen Taolu* and Jacquemart's classification of enamelled porcelains. This process not only reflects the close academic exchange between Britain and France but also marks a shift in Western scholarship on Chinese ceramics from collection-driven interests to more academically rigorous historical and artistic explorations.

By integrating collections, various literature, and emerging archaeological materials, the book established an initial academic paradigm for Chinese ceramic studies, offering methodological references for subsequent scholars. However, constrained by the limitations of its time, the book also has several shortcomings in its exploration of Chinese ceramics. And some perspectives on Chinese porcelain painting remained largely negative, failing to appreciate the unique characteristics of Chinese craftsmanship and artistic expression. Nonetheless, it objectively advanced a structured Western understanding of Chinese ceramics and propelled Chinese ceramic art and culture into broader public discourse. Furthermore, the book illuminated the early dynamics of how Chinese ceramic knowledge became integrated into global scholarly networks.

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