THE EFFECTS OF EDO PERIOD ON JAPANESE AND EUROPEAN PORCELAIN TRADITION

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Abstract

This study examines the path of the porcelain tradition followed along with Edo period and, accordingly, the effect of Japan on porcelain craft in Europe.

Japan porcelains have been more affected from China and Korea, yet Japan porcelains -adapting these two effects to its culture- similarly created a manner that expose its influence on the porcelain techniques and predilections of these two countries. With its population of more than one million people, Edo had been one of the most populated cities on the world in eighteenth century. During the foreign trade ban until 1858, in which small groups of Dutch and Chinese merchants are excepted, foreigners’ entry to Japan, global cultural exchange, foreign travel from Japan and interaction with different religions were banned. Despite this introversion, Japanese culture displayed significant development in both art and craft, and besides, ceramic culture flourished new features different from previous centuries.

Japan witnessed the collapse of Ming dynasty in China, as well. This collapse caused China to lose its place in European market for a long time, as well as conditioning European market to turn to Japan which results in the construction of many workshops producing in accordance with the European preference and also producing different ceramic products. Although large-scale production caused the emergence of tasteless products after a while but thanks to some ceramic masters like Ogata Kenzan who lived at that time, individual workshops sustained their existence and became an important part of contemporary Japanese culture. In spite of destructive aspect of contemporary global cultural apprehension, Japanese ceramists who support and back up their tradition maintain their decisiveness and sensibility on this issue without revising their knowledge, preference and style even after meeting European culture and forms of production by means of trade.

Keywords: Ceramic, Porcelain, Edo Period, Japan, Europe.

Introduction

Japan was restricted to world until mid sixteenth century because of its social manner and geographical position. However after sixteenth century, beginning with colonial system and new trade routes all over the world, Japan positioned as a good production center related to craftsmanship. Especially, with the civil wars and domestic turbulences of China and Korea, which were good on craftsmanship, Japan became domineer of this area’s market in seventeenth century. Initially, Japan was a good imitator on porcelain production and after a while, produced works uncharacteristically proper to market’s demands. Authentic and unique productions started with increased demand of European market, as a consequence of that gave rise to the number of porcelain ateliers and masters. Such that, until nineteenth century, many European producers gained commercial success by replicating styles and patterns of Japanese masters. Objective evaluation is hard on art and design area. But Japanese porcelain got a great success, however after civil war, Chinese producers imitated Japanese porcelain for access to market again. In these centuries, sociological structure of Edo period directly affected works of Japanese masters and initiated creating masterpieces of porcelain works which had idiosyncrasy. In this article, effects of Japanese porcelain on European porcelain producers are investigated and represented with images.

1. Edo Period in Japan (1603-1868)

Edo was the old name of present Tokyo and the small castle town which was established by Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603 as the capital of their dominion. At that time, Emperor Go-Yôzei (Figure 1) was domiciling at the Kyoto which was the legal capital city. However, the country had no wontedly running rules. Japan was ruled by two types of government which are the feudal lords and the council. The feudal lords were called as daimyo and their number was approximately 300. They were ruling the part of the land yet they had oath of loyalty to the Shogunate; the other ruling mechanism was the council which
had given advices to the Shogunate under the control of the emperor. Both of the council and feudal lords were working together. By the 18th century, Edo was one of the largest cities, with over one million population, in the world. During the 265 years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan was not totally open to the world in terms of several angles such as there was a banning until 1858 in all foreign trade activities except for minor Dutch and Chinese traders. At that period, all foreign religions, cultural contacts, foreign books and also travelling abroad by Japanese were forbidden. However, domestic trade, agriculture, craftsmanship, art and production were allowed and they progressed. In that era, Japanese mid-class and aristocracy got rich and art became popular, therefore artistic production increased. Music, poetry, puppet theater (kabuki and bunraku), literature, woodblock prints (ukiyo-e) (Figure 2), pottery and of course architecture were all part of this flowering culture and were uptrended. (Lurie & Chang, 2006: 11-16) In Edo Period, last decades of Tokugawa Shogunate called as Sakoku which means “highly isolated” in Japanese terminology in history. (Diagram 1) (Tashiro & Videen, 1982: 284)
Edo period left off the Japan country with the Emperor Meiji’s restoration era. Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) was accepted as the end of the feudal system and the beginning of the modern Japanese history but unfortunately that era allowed a kind of a cultural degeneracy. During its early stages, frenetic modernization had threatened the centuries of tradition including artwork with the annihilation. In that period, masterpieces of traditional Japanese art taken away by the foreigners and western culture effected Japanese people. Therefore, they would prefer modern art styles and mass productions that brought by western lifestyle to their pure art and craft tradition. (Lurie & Chang, 2006: 11-16)

On the other hand, Edo culture made other areas to succeed. Especially in 1950’s after World War II, young people of Japan preferred to live simple and made it a lifestyle as people of Edo in parallel to economic development and proliferation of mass production. (Tsurumi, 1984: 10)

2. Birth of Japanese Porcelain in Edo Period

Japan ceramic tradition is one of the earliest examples in the world. However, Chinese were certainly the discoverers of the art of making porcelain, and from the place of its origin it eventually became known throughout China and its dependencies such as Korea. Japanese craftsmen learned this art from journeys to China and from Korean masters who were captivated or immigrated by war. Critics about producing the best porcelain at that period divided into two, for some Chinese were the best but the others assert that Japanese surpassed them in excellence of their wares. At the beginning, porcelain produced four important provinces in Japan which were Owari, Hizen, Hirado and Kaga. (Map 1)
Owari province is known as the cradle of porcelain industry in Japan by historians. For instance, the potters made some porcelain pieces with the clays derived from China in 920 A.C. but these were not good quality earthenware. The porcelains of Owari province are also known as Seto wares. Hizen province had become famous with its artistic porcelains and turned out the much famous wares in time. Also porcelains of Hizen are the best known by the Europe because Imari wares of this province had been sold in large quantities via Dutch traders in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As for Hirado province, it was famous for the small porcelain figures. High-quality Kutani porcelains produced in province of Kaga. At the second part of the seventeenth century, porcelain art flourished and those wares were well known for its brilliant gilding on a red background. (Wilson, 1905: 141-147) All these provinces also had various types of porcelain and ceramic products which were called with diverse names (Table 1).
in Japan were not so fine and it took a decade for the kilns to develop proper technical proficiency to produce world famous porcelains. By the way, the oldest pieces which were dated from the first few years of 17th century were thick potted and less refined, the clay had slight orange tinge, the glaze had small pitting, and sand surface was tainted by flying debris in the kiln. Products of the early period were decorated with the blue pigment, which was made from cobalt mineral to imitate Chinese Ming porcelains (Figure 3).

In the middle of the 17th century, an Arita potter named Sakaida Kizaemon learned the technics of decoration with overglaze enamels from a Chinese potter from Nagasaki. This technic kept as a commercial secret in several years by the masters of Kakiemon kilns but after a while it was learned by other potters somehow in all around the area. This kind of porcelains needed two or more firing; the first to make the porcelain ware which when it cooled was painted with designs using various pigments and then fired again. Different colored enamels reacted at different temperatures and another one or two firing were necessary to melt and fuse these colors brightly on the clear body glaze. And also gold dust mixed with the enamels was used for refinements and effect of depth1 (Figure 4).

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1 This style is also called as Kinrande Imari.
In time, the centre of the Japanese porcelain industry had become the area of Arita in Hizen province, now known as Saga Prefecture. Because of the localization nearby to the port of Imari, Arita porcelains also called Imari ware. (Dunn, 1999: 598) Enameling of the porcelain in Arita was done several different styles in 1660’s and 1670’s, but by the 1680’s it was divided into two main styles. One of these called Imari (or Arita) and the other called Kakiemon. Imari wares can be subdivided into many substyles; some of these can be distinguished by the colors of enamels and others by style of drawing or perfection of application. Quality of Imari ware was various. (Impey, 1984: 693) But the Kakiemon wares distinguished from their high quality and it was a refined type of Imari (Figure 5). In this period, Nabeshima porcelains of Hizen produced by Nabeshima Lordship which were known as Nabeshima ware, and was created exclusively for the shogunal family, feudal lords, and the nobility. However, secrets of Nabeshima wares kept strictly and not allowed to be imitated. So these porcelains wouldn’t be seen in other provinces or abroad. (Figure 6) (Willmann, 2011).

One of the renowned wares of that period was Kutani wares that were produced in Kaga province. Some of the old Kutani ware looks so similar to Imari wares of the 17th century. There were so many varieties of old Kutani wares which originated from different kilns. It may be predicted that the bodies of these wares was brought from Arita kilns and then decorated in Kutani. Kutani wares have styles of Chinese porcelain, Persian taste and blue and white porcelains. These of Edo period (Ko-Kutani) decorated with vivid green, purple, blue, yellow, and red tones in strong geometric areas. The colors may be Chinese in origin, applied with Chinese brushes, for the work is very bold and strong. Kutani ware was commonly unknown in the West until shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1867. (Schiffer, 2007: 191-208)
Also hard-paste porcelains of Kiyomizu ware, Shonsui ware and Celadon ware produced in Edo period in Kyoto. Kyoto was the cultural center of Japan and it was an important commercial point throughout seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Kiyomizu factory started in 1751. Several important potters made blue and white porcelain like those made at Arita. Shonshui wares were Chinese blue-white porcelains imported in mid-17th century and decorated with Japanese taste. Celadons also produced at the same period as Shonshui and amenable to original Chinese pieces. (Schiffer, 2007: 215-224)

Seto porcelain was made in the village of Seto in Owari Province. Seto porcelain ware was founded by Kato Tamikhici (1771-1824). After studying porcelain in Arita, he resurrected heirloom kiln for producing porcelain in 1807 and teach the technics to the local potters. Toward the end of the 19th century, Seto potters were influenced by Western demands and export their products in large quantities but beyond all these styles porcelain production in Europe beginning with the imitations of Kakiemon wares in Meissen. (Schiffer, 2007: 271)
3. Rising of the Porcelain in Europe.

China was exporting porcelain to the Middle East since the 9th century and a little amount of this exporting activity was passing to the Europe from that market. The meeting of the Europe and the porcelain had started with the travel of Marco Polo to China. He carried a piece of work while coming back to Venice in 1295 which called as “porcellana” and it still survives in Treasury of St Marks and that piece is the first recording porcelain piece in Europe. Until 16th century, porcelain had imported rarely and pieces which were imported from other countries had been owned by very rich people or located in the inventories of the kingdoms in return of silver and gold. The seaway to the China had been discovered by the Portuguese marine Vasco da Gama along with the passing to Cape of Good Hope. By this way Europeans had a chance of accessing to these top-up luxurious pieces which comes from the Middle East through Turkey, Persia and Syria. This tradeway became a monopol by Portuguese and Dutch marines and the passing through time, Dutch East India Company: V.O.C.2 had domination on this route (Figure 7) (Coutts, 2001: 63-65).

![Figure 7: Plate with monogram of Dutch East Indian Company, Edo Period in blue-white style. 1660-1680. V.O.C. was the main supplier of Eastern goods and gave orders to Japanese potters for European demands. Roger G. Gerry Collection.](image)

Much of the finest and most-elegant Eastern Porcelain of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came from Japan. With the tumbling down of the Ming Dynasty, production of the porcelain in China almost stopped and most of the ateliers were closed because of the war. Europe had turned his face away to the Japan who learned to make good quality porcelains from the Chinese and Koreans. The relationship between Japan and the West and their mutual impacts are very interesting for both of them not only in terms of the art and design technic and exchange of styles. The ongoing relationship had started in Edo and continued in Meiji eras and it made an interaction not only a specific area but also in different applications for Japan art. It procured the occurrence of design and decoration style which includes blue-white color combination that was taken from the China and Japan porcelain colors. (Impey, 1984: 685-697) In that time, the European market had divided Japan Porcelains into three main classes. The first one was the low quality blue-white Chinese imitation porcelains which produced as masses for catching the rapid demand of people. Other two pieces were with delicate asymmetrical Kakiemon decoration and richly coloured Imari porcelain that effected each other. These blue-and-whites were very similar with the Chinese; however Japanese were greyer in paste with matt appeared dance described as linen. These porcelains were the most imitated at Delft in the years 1660-1680 as tin glazed earthenwares (Figure 8). Kakiemon wares came later which have coloured style of decoration developed by Kakiemon family of potters. The motif used were usually birds in blossomed trees, tall grass or lions, bamboos and human figures portrayed in a limited range of colors blue, green, Brown and red, which much of the white body left undecorated.

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2 V.O.C.: Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie trading company founded by the Dutch in 1602 to protect their trade in the Indian Ocean and to assist in their war of independence from Spain. (Britannica)
Also these wares were often moulded than thrown as with the shapes of chrysanthemum leaves or hexagonal vases.

![Figure 8: Left, Large dish, Imari blue-white. Right, Delft blue-white kraakstyle plate. Both were produced in 17th century and inspired by Chinese blue-white porcelain.](image)

Even though imitation of Kakiemon wares, Imari porcelain was most widely distributed wares in Europe. These wares were called by this name, because they were imported through the port of Imari and also made specifically for European market and decorated with rich combination of underglaze and overglaze colours with much gilding. Imari wares remained popular until 19th century in Europe and much imitated by De Grieksche factory in Delft (Coutts, 2001: 72-73) (Figure 9). These kinds of imitations were first attempted at Delft, and tin glazed earthenwares are known as Delft wares regardless of their origin. At that time it was impossible to make real porcelain body for Europeans, but their shapes and decorations could be imitated as same. In Delft, imitations were made in lead glaze earthenware majolica. They used tin oxide as an opacifier to get the opaque white background to imitate blue and white, and also these glazes contained lead. At the beginning, the patterns such wares imitated were the export porcelains of China, of the Wanli period and later; in Europe they were called 'kraak porselein'. By Chinese standards, these are poor quality wares but made for European demand and had been imported to Europe by the Portuguese since the mid-sixteenth century. By the late seventeenth century, Delft ware producers in France, Germany and Holland started to imitate Imari wares that were being imported in such large amounts. At this time, eventhough Chinese porcelains were imitated but the Japanese fashion seems more favorite.

![Figure 9: Left, Japan Kakiemon style porcelain plate, decorated in underglaze blue and overglaze enamels. 1675-1700. V&A Museum Collection. Right, Dutch Delftware Kakiemon patterned plate. 1720-1730, Dr. Günther Grethe Collection, Hamburg.](image)
Before Japan porcelain was started in European markets, efforts to imitate porcelain had concentrated on some methods. The best early attempt was the Medici ‘porcelain’, which was really a form of glass, of about 1580, made with similar ingredients. Also other attempts weren’t successful, though several visitors to China had described the process with different accuracy. Most successful attempt was soft-paste porcelain that made in France in Rouen and St Cloud in 1673. These were the blue and white porcelains (Impey, 1984: 691-693).

Hard paste porcelain (true porcelain) was first made in Meissen near Dresden on January 15, 1708 by Walter von Tschirnhausen and his assistant Johann Böttger but it was a red body much like ancient buccaro ware of Yixing in China. After death of Tschirnhausen in 1709, Böttger continued to find out the white body but it wasn’t came on market until 1713 in Easter Leipzig Fair. Perfection of this body occurred in 1715. Also Böttger was the head of the first porcelain factory in Europe and kept his business secret. But in 1719 alchemists Stölzel and Hunger betrayed this secret and escaped to Vienna to sell it to ‘du Paquier Porcelain Factory’. After a short period, porcelain production started with high quality wares in places as Berlin, Fürstenberg, Höscht, Nymphenburg, Frankenthal, and Ludwigsburg in the territory of Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (Cox, 1944: 642-680).

It is ironical that the first porcelains made in Europe imitate those of Japan, where porcelain had only been made for just a hundred years, and not those of China or Korean where it had been made for hundreds of years because of the changing tastes in Europe. So much so that, after resurrection and renovation of porcelain production in China, they started to imitate Japan porcelain for recapture the European market.

The first Meissen porcelains copied the Kakiemon wares of late seventeenth century in Arita for their best quality wares which do not use underglaze blue (Figure 10). Meissen kept the secret strictly so porcelain wasn’t produced by other European pottery centers many years. Such that the first porcelain was the form of soft paste made first at Chelsea in 1740’s (Figure 11). Hard paste was not made in England until 1768, when William Cookworthy discovered how to make it via the letters sent from China by Pere d’Entrecolles from 1712 to 1722 which describe in detail the manufacture of porcelain (Impey, 1984: 690-691).

Figure 10: Left, Japan Kakiemon style hard-paste porcelain bowl. 1690-1720. V&A Museum Collection. Right, Germany - Meissen Kakiemon style hard-paste porcelain bowl. 1729-1731. V&A Museum Collection.
4. Spreading of Porcelain Factories Throughout to Europe

France has become the capital of fashion and luxurious pieces while the Germany was an almost monopoly in the production of porcelain. This led the production and affected the Meissen style porcelains. Certain porcelain demand was met by French factories in Europe but they were soft-paste porcelains. Factories in France were initially tried to copy Imari and Kakiemon style porcelains just like in Meissen but their quality was lower than the Japan porcelains. Early wares of these were covered in opaque tin-glaze to hide deficiencies. Also some of the imported porcelains from Meissen, Japan or China weren’t sold as plain. These pieces were mounted in extravagant gilt-bronze mounts as actual objects. Most of these gilt-bronze mounts were in the new rococo style of that period which became dominant in France and Europe in the mid-eighteenth century (Figure 12).

Vincennes Porcelain Factory was established for the purpose of imitation of Meissen porcelains. The French King XV. Louis become a shareholder of this factory in 1752 and moved to Sévres in 1756. In 1759, this factory became the personal property of the King. This factory’s porcelain was especially distinguished with its painted decoration and gilding but possibly Sévres’ greatest contribution to European ceramic design was the development of rich ground colors enriched by luxuriant gilding. After a while Sévres became the supplier of dinner and dessert services of Europe, the consequence of this, other European factories started to copy this wares as soft or hard paste porcelains (Figure 13). The success of the Sévres porcelains became possible to locate itself as a luxurious dinner service in Europe and it suggested fortune and good breeding in the international area and also the choice of rich people who wanted to affect their guests. In early 19th century, Sévres started to produce hard-paste porcelains in neo-classical style which was also seen in the England at the same time. Those pieces were out of their road with the new extravagant forms.
Vienna and Meissen porcelain factories were the main production center of the hard-paste porcelain until the mid of the 18th century. The real spread of the porcelain was accrued with the trade of arcansists’ secrets which tells about the secrets of production process of porcelains. They sold their information in return for the high monetary gain or had to sell because of the blackmail.

The tin-glazed soft-paste porcelain production was localized in determined centers in Italy. Since Italy was a centre of taste and fashion, and their wares often showed differences from other European countries but Italian factories also produced a hybrid soft-paste porcelain imitation that blue and white of Meissen style.

Rather the Portuguese came into prominence with the tile production in Europe; Spain was nowhere near in porcelain production. Centers such as Amsterdam were carrying the traces of French style (Coutts, 2001: 105-139).

Figure 13: Left, the first neo-classical style plate that produced at Sévres for Ekaterina II. Soft-paste porcelain, 1778. V&A Museum Collection. Right, the decoration is in Egyptian classical style, groud copied from Sévres porcelain. Hard-paste porcelain, 1800-1810. V&A Museum Collection.

Conclusion

The high-class production which protects the traditional style had continued in Japan until the mid of 19th century just like other porcelain production centers of the Asia. The modernization process of Japan had started with the end of the Edo era and the lead of Meiji Emperor. At that time, Japan went through radical changes in craft production. The impacts of industrialization first had seen in England in 19th century, Arts and Crafts movement which led by John Ruskin and William Morris created a new discourse about craft and design and also underlined the importance of craft in production. Such that, Japan porcelains which were produced by imitating China and Korean porcelains might be claimed as the initial point of the movements such as Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau. In Japan, modernization led up the mass production ceramics and got ahead of the classically produced ones. In that time, Middle East countries such as China, Korea and India were spreading themselves to the Europe with the patterns which sourced by Japan for breaking the monopoly of Japan. A lot of master got unemployed and lots of production with good quality had been interrupted with that reason (Lurie & Chang, 2006: 16-17). After the Edo era, lots of ceramic ateliers had started to close in Japan. The unique master artworks of Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743), Takohashi Mitsuoki (1783-1855) and Zengoro Hozen (1795-1854) and their students succeed to create a different language in ceramic tradition.

While porcelain production had started to decrease in Japan, German Kingdom turned into the center of European porcelain production. However, all porcelain producers in Europe started to emulate Japan porcelains emergent at Edo era or imitate them as so. After the collapsing of the Ming Dynasty, China went through a production crisis and as a result of this Japan style became famous and started to imitate that much in Europe. Also Japan was the best suitable supplier for V.O.C. As can be seen in the Diagram 1, the relationship between Japan and its neighbors created a mutual artistic style and cultural interaction in that area. Although the Japan in Edo era was close to the outside there were intermediaries between Japan and the world who were Japan nobles, riches and high-graded soldiers. Beyond the progress of art, the commercial demands should not been overlooked either. The demands of Europe dominated the Japan porcelain ateliers and also provided the production of unique styled items in Kyoto. The porcelain wares of Kyoto were divided in two primary groups: hard-paste porcelain of Kyomizu ware, Celadon ware, and pieces in Shonsui style, and soft-paste porcelain called Satsuma ware (Schiffer, 2007: 215). These wares looked quite different than Imari or Kakiemon wares that influenced all European. But Kyoto originated porcelains kind of luxury type of Japanese porcelain and couldn’t be seen commonly as other Japanese ware in 17th century Europe, until international exhibition in Paris in 1867. In that time, Japanese were very refined in all art areas and it could be seen on every European porcelain (Figure 14). However, when the porcelain production became popular, especially when nobles and kings started to procure porcelain
factories, that refined items give way to gimmickry ones. Especially with the production of bone-china porcelains in England, the dynamics of European porcelain market had changed. Europe created own style in time and with the growth of the market, Japan porcelains became old style and the interest towards them got decreased.

When the Japan art is evaluated as a whole, it can be seen that it has its own features such as Greek and Egypt arts. What is more, Japan art influenced the European art movements and the philosophy directly or indirectly. It can be seen that European artists exploit from Japan art proffers. All these happened because of the exported porcelains to the Europe which features art and craft (Figure 15).

![Figure 14: Above, an Arita style pattern designed by Chuji Fukugawa and a Meissen plate. Meissen and other European porcelain factories copied Japanese patterns and style. After a while they transformed these patterns into European demands and taste. Below from V&A Museum Collection. Respectively, a Meissen Arita style hard paste porcelain plate, 1740. A plate of Meissen, relief-moulded in Sévres style with scroll-framed cartouches, 1765-1775. A plate of soft-paste porcelain from Sévres, 1784. Porcelain plate of Japan Kutani. 19th century. All of these examples have similar composition, decoration and taste with interactive relation.](image)

![Figure 15: An Art Nouveau Royal Vienna Porcelain Vase that has gilded with floral patterns and mounted, circa 1900.](image)
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