

# The Export Strategy of Chinese Porcelain

## -- Taking the French Market as an Example

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### Abstract

**This article uses the French market as a case study to analyze the overseas export strategies of Chinese porcelain. Chinese porcelain was introduced to Europe via the Silk Road in the 16th century and has since undergone cultural adaptation and artistic integration in various countries. In particular, in France, porcelain has not only served as a symbol of luxury goods but has also contributed to the cultural phenomenon of "Orientalism." This article investigates how Chinese porcelain can transcend the bias of "Orientalism" and reconstruct its brand identity. It is proposed that strategies such as brand development, cultural storytelling, and collaborative brand creation be implemented to secure recognition for Chinese porcelain in the French market. Additionally, the article underscores enhancing the cultural significance and market acceptance of Chinese porcelain through partnerships with prestigious French brands and art institutions.**

### Keywords

**Porcelain; Brand Building; Cultural Communication; The French Market.**

### 1. Introduction

Porcelain was one of the most significant export commodities in ancient China and has been transported to Europe via the Silk Road for centuries. Numerous studies have explored the introduction of Chinese porcelain to Europe.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, a substantial quantity of porcelain wares appeared in Portugal, primarily circulating through auctions and private collections [1]. Portuguese porcelain production was profoundly influenced by Chinese designs. For example, during the late 16th century, many Chinese landscape motifs were integrated into Portuguese porcelain, influencing both its stylistic development and the subsequent construction of China's image in Europe [2].

In the 18th century, Swedish elites, particularly the royal family, regarded Chinese porcelain as a symbol of high social status, using it to demonstrate personal capability and ambition [3]. Following the establishment of the Swedish East India Company in 1731, Sweden became the largest importer of Chinese porcelain, surpassing the Netherlands, Denmark, and the United Kingdom [3].

In the 19th century, French collector Ernest Grandier passionately amassed Chinese porcelain and regularly donated pieces to the Louvre [4]. However, at that time, Chinese ceramics had limited commercial appeal in Paris. Within the realms of art and antiquities, Chinese porcelain and Japanese ceramics were frequently categorized under Asian art for scholarly study, with few publications focusing exclusively on Chinese artifacts [4].

Meanwhile, the porcelain industry began developing a specialized design aesthetic tailored to the European market. For instance, Dutch Delft celadon imitated Chinese blue-and-white

porcelain, French Sevres porcelain incorporated Rococo elements, heraldic porcelain featured family crests to signify lineage and status, and Clark porcelain adapted to European lifestyles and usage preferences. Today, the popularity of porcelain in the global art market has garnered attention from collectors, artists, and investors alike. Overseas collectors predominantly favor imperial and export porcelain from the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties [5]. Given the high artistic and cultural value of porcelain, coupled with demanding manufacturing techniques and intricate production processes, it does not qualify as a mass-market commodity. Additionally, its fragility and difficulty in replication contribute to the generally elevated prices of exported porcelain. Consequently, targeting the European luxury goods market represents an appropriate strategy for Chinese porcelain. Among European markets sharing similar porcelain cultures, France emerges as the optimal region for market expansion. Selecting France for market penetration not only mitigates the risk of cultural discount—where cultural products fail to resonate with international audiences due to differing cultural backgrounds [6]—but also enhances sales channels and rapidly elevates the visibility of Chinese craftsmanship. This approach holds substantial practical significance for porcelain enterprises.

From the early contact in Portugal to the cultural acceptance and artistic influence in Sweden and France, it can be seen that the spread of Chinese porcelain in Europe has undergone diverse interpretations in terms of culture, economy and aesthetics in different countries. Each country has integrated and innovated Chinese porcelain to varying degrees based on its own social demands and cultural background, thereby promoting the influence of Chinese porcelain in the European market. Understanding how these countries integrate Chinese porcelain into their cultures is of great historical and cultural value for a deeper understanding of the spread and acceptance of Chinese porcelain in Europe.

## 2. Literature Review

Bearing the history and culture of China in various periods, porcelain have multiple values which can meet the spiritual needs of human beings [5]. In the process of the spread of porcelain to the outside world, the value of porcelain in history, culture, economy, art, and aesthetics has been deeply rooted in the hearts of Europeans, laying the foundation for the continuous development of overseas porcelain markets [5]. As a significant aspect of Chinese cultural heritage, porcelain embodies the social conditions and production techniques of its time while fostering cultural exchanges and trade prosperity. In recent years, academic research on Chinese porcelain has mainly focused on the following aspects. First of all, it is the research on the art and aesthetics of ancient Chinese porcelain, such as the research on the development history and aesthetic art of Chinese porcelain, the analysis of the schools and types of Chinese porcelain, research of plant patterns on Chinese porcelain and the shapes and styles of ancient Chinese vessels [7, 8]. Secondly, there are studies on Jingdezhen porcelain, such as research on Jingdezhen porcelain and society, and the discussion on how Jingdezhen became the production center of Chinese porcelain and the production techniques of Jingdezhen porcelain [9]. The third aspect is the overseas spread and influence of Chinese porcelain during the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. For instance, the elaborated on the manifestation of European Chinese style in the field of porcelain and the discussion of the connection between the export of Chinese porcelain and the East India Company [10,11]. But in general, research on the export strategies of Chinese porcelain in the past decade has been basically blank. The active expansion of overseas markets for Chinese porcelain is conducive to increasing export earnings, driving technological innovation and green transformation in porcelain production, promoting the protection and international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage skills, and enriching the paths for the construction of contemporary Chinese cultural soft power. The export of Chinese porcelain faces many challenges, such as cultural

discounts, the lack of systematic brand building, high logistics costs, and weak digital communication channels, etc. Therefore, this article will take France as an example to elaborate in detail on how Chinese porcelain should expand its overseas market.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. The Reason Why this Article Choose France

The primary reasons for selecting France as the entry point into the French market are outlined below. First, historical and cultural factors. France boasts a rich history and profound cultural heritage, placing it at the forefront of art and fashion. French consumers exhibit a high level of appreciation and pursuit of art and aesthetics. They value not only the practical utility of products but also the cultural connotations and artistic value embedded within them. Chinese porcelain, with its distinctive cultural charm and exquisite craftsmanship, resonates deeply with these consumers, who can both appreciate and understand its intrinsic value. Second, the phenomenon of “Chinoiserie” in France. Since the 14th century, Chinese treasures such as porcelain and jade have been highly sought after by French collectors. During the 17th and 18th centuries, increased East-West trade led to a significant influx of Chinese porcelain into France, sparking societal enthusiasm for China and giving rise to the “Chinese Porcelain craze.” At that time, Chinese porcelain was regarded as a luxury item symbolizing exotic allure, wealth, comfort, and sophistication among the French upper class. Today, French consumers' interest in traditional Chinese culture—such as calligraphy, painting, and philosophy—remains strong, providing a favorable foundation for the cultural promotion and brand development of Chinese porcelain in the French market. Third, the spirit of craftsmanship. The production of Chinese porcelain involves meticulous control over temperature, humidity, and materials. Its complex process, high time investment, and significant failure rate preclude simple industrial replication. Consequently, porcelain production is limited, emphasizing its uniqueness. This aligns with the artisanal ethos of prioritizing craftsmanship and the logic of limited-edition sales prevalent in the French luxury goods industry.

#### 3.2. The Ways to Build Special Chinese Porcelain Brand

Brand building is a very useful marketing strategy. A unique Chinese porcelain brand can be built in three ways: brand identity, brand image, and brand meaning [12]. Kühn and Boshoff mentioned story telling is also a good way to build a brilliant Chinese porcelain brand because it can make emotional connections with consumers [13]. How to build a bridge of communication between two completely different cultures and achieve cross-border exchange and interaction of porcelain is the most important issue that Chinese porcelain should consider when building its brand. In the wave of globalized business, French cultural products shine with their distinctive cultural allure. Fundamentally, the secret to their success lies in marketing a cultural interpretation. French luxury brands are masters at meticulously packaging their products, imbuing them with profound cultural connotations and transforming them into cultural symbols with group symbolic significance, thus fulfilling people's deep-seated spiritual needs. As Patrick Thomas, the former CEO of Hermès, once said: “What we sell is not leather goods, but the French way of interpreting the world.” This concept unveils the core mystery of the luxury goods market, namely, endowing products with meanings beyond the material itself through the dissemination of cultural values. This is precisely what Chinese porcelain brands lack and need to promote.

For Chinese porcelain, entering the French market presents a formidable challenge. The core difficulty lies in how to break through the cultural filter of “Orientalism” and establish an independent interpretation system. For a long time, in the cultural context dominated by the West, “Orientalism” has become a fixed framework, simply categorizing Oriental elements like

Chinese porcelain as mysterious, ancient, and exotic. Although this kind of label has a certain allure, it severely restricts the comprehensive display of the cultural connotations of Chinese porcelain, preventing it from being presented to French consumers in a true, multi-dimensional, and diverse image. To change this situation, Chinese porcelain brands must initiate a “cultural decoding - re-coding” revolution. First of all, breaking through the simple filter of Orientalist culture is the primary task. In the process of brand building and interpretation, it is necessary to abandon some words with broad and vague indicative meanings or with a tendency towards Eurocentrism, such as “Chinese style”. These words often carry the stereotypical imagination of the East by the West and are of no help in demonstrating the true cultural value of Chinese porcelain. For instance, the patterns on Chinese porcelain cannot merely be regarded as elements of “mysterious Orientalism”. Porcelain companies need to give these patterns new interpretations through in-depth cultural research and innovative narrative methods, enabling French consumers to understand the traditional Chinese cultural stories, philosophical thoughts and artistic aesthetics contained therein. This not only requires an in-depth exploration and sorting out of Chinese porcelain culture, but also needs to be expressed in a way that conforms to French cultural cognition, so that French consumers can resonate. Meanwhile, this “cultural decoding - re-coding” revolution does not aim to abandon the original cultural value and connotation of Chinese porcelain, but rather to carry out creative transformation on the basis of retaining its essence. The initiative in cultural interpretation can be seized through the brand-new creation of the concept of porcelain, rather than passively catering to the French luxury market.

The key for Chinese porcelain to penetrate the French market does not lie in conforming to European aesthetic preferences. Instead, it lies in elevating Eastern aesthetics to a new value benchmark. Porcelain, a product replete with profound cultural connotations, should refrain from blindly chasing the integration with the latest fashion trends. Over-accommodating fashion trends might cause Chinese porcelain to forfeit its distinctive cultural allure. Conversely, it should be firmly grounded in tradition and classics. Only some of the products need to be modernized and refined, artfully integrating the essence of Eastern culture into the context of French acceptance. Regarding design, the elaborate craftsmanship and classic elements of traditional Chinese porcelain can be preserved, while incorporating modern French design concepts to create products that not only exude traditional charm but also meet contemporary aesthetic requirements.

A serious problem that Chinese porcelain may encounter in the initial process of brand building is the low brand awareness, and even the problem of insufficient premium due to the low brand awareness. In the context of marketing and brand promotion, it is crucial to emphasize the narration of the cultural stories embedded in Chinese porcelain. At this point, brand collaboration is a very necessary measure to take. Brand collaborations can choose well-known luxury brands from France. In the early stage, a short-term and rapid monetization approach can be adopted. For instance, limited production of exquisite porcelain bottles used to hold perfumes can attract consumers with their appearance first, earn profits, and accumulate funds for further brand building. By leveraging diverse channels such as organizing cultural exhibitions, facilitating cultural exchange activities, and utilizing social media platforms, the cultural significance of Chinese porcelain can be effectively communicated to French consumers. Furthermore, collaboration between cultural experts, designers, artists, and other stakeholders from both China and France is encouraged to jointly explore the dissemination and innovation of Chinese porcelain culture within the French market. Such collaborations will provide valuable support for the establishment of an independent interpretative framework for Chinese porcelain brands. Then, deeper cooperation can be carried out. For instance, Chinese porcelain brands can choose to jointly curate exhibitions with some well-known French luxury brands. They can display Chinese porcelain in the exhibition hall through set designs and attract

consumers' attention through soft advertisements. Additionally, Chinese porcelain brands may engage in partnerships with high-end hotels, art institutions, and cultural events in France, placing porcelain products within premium cultural consumption contexts to enhance the cultural image and recognition of the brand. Furthermore, long-term IP co-construction can be carried out with these brands. Through these endeavors, Chinese porcelain brands can cultivate a distinctive cultural identity in the French market, transcending the constraints of the "Orientalism" cultural lens, and enabling French consumers to genuinely appreciate the profound cultural connotations inherent in Chinese porcelain. This approach will not only secure a successful presence and development of Chinese porcelain in the French market but also contribute new momentum to cultural exchanges between China and France, as well as global cultural diversity.

### 3.3. From the Perspective of Consumers

Moeran argued that consumer-led orientation theory can be used to analysis consumers' behaviors. This theories can be divided into two parts, neoclassical economics and totemic logic [14]. Neoclassical economics can help producer in cultural industries to grasp consumers' need mentally and physiologically. Totemic logic can help porcelain firms to construct suitable and attractive brand to expand their market in Europe. In the contemporary consumer market environment, consumer purchasing behavior extends beyond merely acquiring products; it increasingly revolves around the pursuit of emotional experiences and cultural identification. As Wright highlighted, consumers are progressively emphasizing the affective satisfaction derived from the purchasing process, with brands serving as the primary vessels that encapsulate and convey this sentiment [15]. For Chinese porcelain brands aiming to achieve effective creation and breakthrough, it is imperative to transcend the confines of traditional brand-building paradigms. These conventional approaches typically rely on overt brand symbols such as logos and slogans, disseminating brand information through a model of passive consumer acceptance. In today's highly competitive market characterized by diverse consumer demands, such methods have increasingly demonstrated their limitations. The viewpoint of Libby Wadle, the CEO of J.Crew Group, is worth learning from: "It's also very important not to get so blinded by doing exactly what the customer thinks they want. You also need to inspire and delight them." This indicates that enterprises should not merely be confined to meeting the superficial demands raised by consumers. Instead, they should deeply explore the latent emotional needs of consumers, stimulate their interest and resonance through innovative means, and thereby create brand experiences that surprise and delight consumers. Brand co-creation, as an emerging and effective strategy, provides new ideas and opportunities for the development of Chinese porcelain brands. For instance, enterprises can design unique experience activities, allowing consumers to personally participate in the process of opening a porcelain kiln and become the first people to have direct contact with porcelain. Such a sense of ceremony can enable consumers to generate a strong emotional resonance at the moment of purchase and build a unique sensory impression of the product. This sensory stimulation and commemorative significance not only enhance consumers' perception of the emotional value of the product, but also strengthen the uniqueness and unforgettable nature of the purchasing behavior in consumers' minds. At the same time, it is also crucial to encourage consumers to participate in the co-creation of brand narratives. Today, with the increasingly developed social media platforms, enterprises can launch topic discussions and activities such as "logo collection" activities and "Me and Blue and White Porcelain" and "The suitable brand ambassador in my mindimage collection". These activities can not only widely attract consumers to participate, stimulate their creativity and imagination, but also enable the brand to better integrate into consumers' lives and emotional worlds. From the perspective of enterprises, this approach can effectively reduce the cost of brand building, as the content created with the participation of consumers is often more authentic and appealing, which can produce better dissemination

effects and thereby increase brand revenue. When consumers are deeply involved in brand co-creation, their sense of identification and belonging to the brand will be greatly enhanced, thereby leading to a higher consumer retention rate and repurchase rate. This is of extremely significant importance for Chinese porcelain brands to establish a foothold and achieve sustainable development in the fierce market competition. It can help brands to innovate on the basis of inheriting traditional culture and win the hearts of more consumers.

## 4. Conclusion

This article examines the historical dissemination of Chinese porcelain in Europe and focuses on strategies for its entry into the French market. Within the distinct historical contexts of countries such as Portugal, Sweden, and France, Chinese porcelain has undergone various cultural adaptations and aesthetic integrations. In particular, France, with its deep artistic and cultural heritage, has emerged as a crucial target for Chinese porcelain brands seeking to penetrate the European market. The article highlights that while Chinese porcelain embodies profound cultural significance and artistic allure, successfully entering the French market hinges on overcoming the cultural lens of "Orientalism" and establishing an independent brand interpretation framework. By enhancing brand development, cultural storytelling, and cross-cultural communication, Chinese porcelain can achieve significant breakthroughs. Finally, the article suggests that through collaborative brand creation, participation in cultural events, and partnerships with high-end hotels and art institutions, porcelain brands can cultivate a distinctive cultural identity in the French market, promote Sino-French cultural exchanges, and ensure sustainable growth.

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