

The Decoration of Porcelains and Related Issues Seen in the Letters of François-Xavier d'Entrecolles

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Abstract

François-Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664-1741) was a French Jesuit sent in the late seventeenth century to the Far East to engage in missionary work and, according to convention, required to report back the results of his observations. Because he stopped for a period of time in Jingdezhen, he was able to send two letters back to Europe dealing with the production of porcelain, vessel decoration, and related techniques. Since the eighteenth century, his letters have been an important source of material for Chinese and Western scholars. The present study examines the different versions of the letters that exist today to gain an understanding of the vessel decoration he saw, first organizing concrete examples that can be compared to them and then ascertaining the authenticity of the related procedures seen in the reports. Furthermore, from the macrocosmic perspective of Sino-Western exchange, his observations serve as a means to reflect on the relationship between the court and local areas in the eighteenth century as well as the response they shared in the face of confrontation with the West.

Keywords: François-Xavier d'Entrecolles, Jingdezhen, blown-red glaze, lady designs

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)