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Religious Objects in the Maritime Trade: A Study on the Dehua Guanyin Porcelain Statue in the Victoria and Albert Museum

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Religious Objects in the Maritime Trade: A Study on the Dehua Guanyin Porcelain Statue in the Victoria and Albert Museum

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ABSTRACT

My thesis focuses on a specific Dehua porcelain Guanyin statue in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A 19-1886), a mother-like Guanyin holding a boy-like child in her arms with Buddhist symbols around them. This statue and its variations flooded into Europe in the eighteenth century, arousing discussions about the iconography of Child-giving Guanyin. Their popularity in Europe has been generally attributed to the resemblance to Madonna and Child. This thesis disagrees with the conventional interpretation, and explores Buddhist images in the context of transcultural objects from the 15th to the 18th century. This approach highlights the interactions between material change, religious representations and transcultural objects. Porcelain Guanyin statues worked as mediators between the deity and worshippers. V&A 19-1886 depicts Guanyin of the South Sea holding a child, which represents compassion and nurturing. Such Buddhist images emerged in the late Ming, when the cult of Guanyin underwent popularization and secularization, and attracted a universal appeal in the transcultural context. Instead of reducing the Child-giving Guanyin porcelain statues to mere visual parallels with Madonna and Child, this analysis underscores the significance of contextual shifts in transforming religious objects across diverse cultural landscapes, and enriches our understanding of the dynamic process.

Keywords: Blanc de Chine, the iconography of Guanyin, maritime trade, material culture, transculturality.

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This is my first time writing an acknowledgement for a thesis, and I hope it will not be the last. This thesis was challenging even from its inception. I was profoundly moved by the rough, fierce texture and cracks at the base of the Dehua porcelain Guanyin statue when I first saw it. As a researcher with the same cultural perspective as the figurine, I found it essential to place it back into the tradition of porcelain deities in Chinese art and analyze its change in terms of geography, placement, material and meanings. However, I devoted more time than I had planned. During this period, my grandfather passed away due to a heart attack. I also owe an email to Prof. Oscar Salemink, who inspired me with his insights into the art world. It is an unpredictable chapter. But that's life.

Thankfully, I have finally completed this thesis. Once again, I want to thank all my family, friends, and teachers who supported me continuously.

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[Figure 1.1] Guanyin with a Child. Dehua ware. 1620-1720, China. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Object number: 19-1886. Height: 38cm.¹

Chapter 1 Introduction

This pure white statue depicts a seated mother-like female figure holding a boy-like child on her knee. The female figure wears a patternless loose robe, an exquisite crown with a sitting figure design, and a necklace resembling some blossoming flower or a shining star. The veil on her robe covers the tiny and somewhat vague contours of a figure on her exquisite crown. The sitting gesture with one leg tucked inwards, and the other hanging down suggests a sense of leisure and peace. The lowered eyes and the mild smile on her oval face suggest a sense of femininity. Her right-hand reaches forward as if protecting or sending the child to someone. The child on her lap smiles joyfully. The unique style of his hair is reminiscent of the chubby baby that appears in Chinese New Year paintings. He holds an object seems to be a Chinese brush in the right hand and another object in the left hand. The mother and child are sitting on a base in the shape of a rock pedestal. Two creatures crawl around the rocky throne, looking like legendary Chinese dragons. Between them is a flower

¹ To distinguish this specific object, it is named as V&A 19-1886, and other similar variations that resemble to this are described as “sitting Child-giving Guanyin” in this thesis.

approaching maturity that attracts the two creatures flying around it. Two smaller figures are standing on each side of the base, and they are also dressed in long robes. On the left, the girl-like figure holds a peach and lowers her eyes, showing modesty. The other on the right looks similar to the boy on her lap, but holds two hands to pray, which indicates loyalty or reverence. Two branches stretch behind the central female figure; one of them is filled with a book roll, and the other branch is vacant. It is 38 centimetres high, which is comparatively tall for a porcelain statue. Comparing this item to similar statues, we note that this porcelain statue is not as delicate as other certain other ones, as the viewer can tell by its roughness and stiffness. There are even cracks on the base. However, the statue is fully covered with a creamy white glaze, which makes it look like polished jade. In addition, the minimal colour, white, adds simplicity and elegance to these figures.

Beyond first glance, if we take a closer look to it, our attention is caught by the translucent white porcelain. And it indicates the place of origin of this statue. This creamy glaze on thick clay is specifically produced in a county called Dehua in Fujian province, China. Kilns there were second only to the Jingdezhen kilns in China. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Dehua kilns were actively engaged in intercontinental and intracontinental maritime trades. And other iconographical features tell more about the figures, the “mother” and the “child”. From the other products made in Dehua, we might well assume that the central figure is Guanyin 觀音, a popular Buddhist deity in China. But Guanyin is originally a male deity in India, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who has been domesticated and indigenized in China to become a feminine deity with up to fifty-three different manifestations. Her followers were distributed all over China, and her small or big paintings/statues were also popular. However, the existence of this iconography of a maternal figure holding a child was still vague. It also readily reminds people of the Christian image of Madonna and Child. Since many missionaries were active in Fujian during that time, it is possible that the Christian imagery circulating in the region at the time influenced representations of the Child-giving Guanyin (Guanyin as the bringer of male heirs).²

Furthermore, V&A 19-1886 is not alone. There are at least five other museums that hold such statues with similar iconographies: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the

² Missionaries in Fuan, Fujian province transmitted Christian religious principles to their local converters in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The cult of Virgin Mary after modification share some common concepts with the cult of Guanyin, such as religious virginity, celibacy and motherhood. Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*, (Boston : Harvard University Asia Center, 2010) 313-316.

British Museum, Rijksmuseum, and Asian Civilizations Museum.³ They vary in size, figure assemblage, and decoration.

A few hints already existed while viewing this object, but more questions would be raised afterwards. The initial question is how this specific porcelain Guanyin statue came into existence in Dehua kilns and became a maritime good. This larger question can be divided into several smaller ones, such as what is the history of ceramic Guanyin statues in China? How was the iconography of this porcelain Guanyin statue transformed? Why is there a boy-like child on her lap? Why was this statue of Guanyin produced in a large number and favoured by European buyers at that time?

1.1 Dehua Wares

This porcelain statue is recorded as a production from Dehua, a county in Fujian, China. Its featured glaze and clay made it different from other white wares. Dehua wares have a lovely French name, *blanc de Chine*, meaning white from China, but systematic and detailed research started by a British scholar and collector, P. J. Donnelly. Donnelly's major work, *Blanc de Chine: the Porcelain of Têhua in Fukien*, published in 1969, was established on the basis of collections of Dehua wares in the Western world. It is an influential and fundamental study of Dehua wares. His work gives a starting point for Dehua wares study and is still an excellent guidebook for collectors interested in *blanc de Chine*.⁴ However, his work was mostly based on collections in the Western world. With more excavations started in Dehua County and shipwrecks containing Dehua wares since the 1960s, international collaborations on archaeological research in Dehua County filled more pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the fractural and vague map. It turned out that some of Donnelly's words needed modification. John Ayers's analysis seemed surprising to the academic world in the 1980s, that the flowering of *blanc de Chine* in the seventeenth century, domestically and internationally, occurred before Donnelly's assumption and ended earlier, too. The best of Dehua may come from the late Ming rather than Qing.⁵ Xu Benzhang, a Fujianese scholar has recently contributed a lot to Dehua ware study. He used to operate Dehua Cultural Office and Dehua Museum. He identified 30 ancient kilns during the sixteenth to seventeenth century and the unearthed relics can be found in Donnelly's book. Excavations showed that

³ In the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, they are PO 3813, PO 8553, PO 8550, PO 8551, PO 8554, PO 8561, PO 8562, PO 8612, PO 8613.

⁴ P.J. Donnelly, *Blanc de Chine: the Porcelain of Têhua in Fukien*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

⁵ John Ayers, "Blanc de Chine: Some Reflections," in *Blanc de Chine: Porcelain from Dehua*, Rose, John Ayers, and Chuimei Ho, (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2002),33.

Dehua kilns produced *qingbai* (bluish-white) wares in the Song and Yuan dynasties and the beginning of *blanc de Chine* can be dated to the Qudougong 屈鬥宮 kiln in Dehua in the fourteenth century.⁶

Since the 1980s, many scholars have done many researches about the age, shape, glaze, colours, technique, and art forms of Dehua wares. Rose Kerr and Luisa Mengoni write about export ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and *blanc de Chine* wares are part of it. It insightfully focused on the enamels of Asian porcelain collected in Europe.⁷ Christiaan Jörg and Jan van Campen focus on *blanc de Chine* in the Rijksmuseum, illuminating a Dutch perspective on the Chinese ceramics exported by V.O.C..⁸ Besides, shipwreck excavations told us more about the export business. Shipwrecks, such as Hatcher, Vung Tau, Binh Thuan, Dongguwan, Camau, Griffin, Geldermalsen, Nossa Senhora dos Milagros, Oosterland, Bennebroek, where *blanc de Chine* pieces were unearthed, show that they spread across Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, South America.⁹ Teresa Canepa argues that the British East India Company and the Spanish were also participants in the business. The Spanish started acquiring *Blanc de Chine* in the late 1630s. The E.I.C. records show that the trade to England consisted mostly of *Blanc de Chine* figures and animal models in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Some Dehua figures and animal models were transported to the Spanish colonies, for example, Mexico City.¹⁰ Chinese scholars make use of the local chronicles and new archaeological findings and help to construct the continuous tradition of Dehua kilns, not only focusing on *blanc de Chine*, but also ceramics from then on.¹¹ These studies focus on the general production and export of *blanc de Chine*,

⁶ Chuimei Ho, "Blanc de Chine in Archaeological Perspective: A Tribute to Donnelly," in *Blanc de Chine : Porcelain from Dehua*, Rose, John G. Ayers, and Chuimei Ho, (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2002),38-41.

⁷ Rose Kerr, Luisa E. Mengoni, and Mg. Wilson. *Chinese Export Ceramics*, (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 88-90.

⁸ Christiaan Jörg and Jan van Campen, *Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam : the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, (London: Philip Wilson, 1997).

⁹ Wan Jun 万钧, "Quanqiuhua shiye xia Mingqing Dehua baiqi de shengchan yu maoyi yanjiu,"全球化视野下明清德化白瓷的生产与贸易研究 [The Research on Production and Trade of White Porcelain of Dehua Kiln in Ming and Qing Dynasties from the Perspective of Globalization], *Gugong xuekan* 故宫学刊 21, (2021):305-322.

¹⁰ Teresa Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer: China and Japan and Their Trade with Western Europe and the New World, 1500-1644*, (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016), 167, 223,239.

¹¹ Huang Jing 黄静, "Shixi Mingqing Dehua baiqi waixiao de qixing yuanyin yu yingxiang," 试析明清德化白瓷外销的器形、原因与影响 [The Shapes, Reasons and Influences of the Exportation of Ming and Qing Dynasties Dehua Kiln Porcelain], *Bowuyuan* 博物院 1 (2020):51-59.Xu Benzhang 徐本章, Su Guangyao 苏光耀 and Ye Wenchen 叶文程, "luetan Dehuayao de gu waixiao ciqu" 略谈德化窑的古外销瓷器[Briefly discuss the ancient export porcelain of Dehua Kilns], *kaogu* 2,(1979):149-154+203-204.Yang Zhuoxuan 杨卓轩, "Luelun Fujian Dehua guci----yi difangzhi ziliao wei zhongxin de kaocha," 略论福建德化古瓷——以地方志资料为中心的考察 [A brief discussion on the ancient porcelain of Dehua in Fujian Province -- an investigation centered on local records], *zhongguo difangzhi* 中国地方志 6, (2019):82-90+127.

building a solid foundation, but received insufficient attention before. A detailed and in-depth perspective is needed to examine the entangled process of how maritime trades influenced the iconography and material change of porcelain Guanyin statues.

1.2 The Maternal Deity: Debate Over The Iconography of Child-giving Guanyin

Guanyin (觀音 Bodhisattva of Compassion) has been a popular deity in China for a long time. Guanyin is originally a male deity in India as the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In the *Universal Gateway Chapter* (*guanshiyin pusa pu men pin* 觀世音菩薩普門品), Guanyin is portrayed as a unique deity with various forms. In the Ming Dynasty, Guanyin had thirty-three, even fifty-three, manifestations. Child-giving Guanyin 送子觀音 is an influential form, but it's not one of the thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin.¹² Its existence became an interesting topic to the scholars.

Chün-fang Yü writes a groundbreaking and comprehensive book about the transformation of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara from male to female in China. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was domesticated and constructed as a female universal saviour with Chinese names, origins and iconographies in China. Yü agrees that the Child-giving Guanyin is a continuous part of Guanyin's localisation, and its iconography was influenced by the Virgin Mary brought by the missionaries around the sixteenth century.¹³ Lauren Arnold puts the time forward. He argues that the Child-giving Guanyin only came to be depicted as the goddess with a boy-child after the Franciscan missionaries introduced the Madonna of Humility in the fourteenth century. Though Christianity had been gradually starved of attraction by the fifteenth century, the images of Madonna and Child were conflated into images of the Child-giving Guanyin by the early fifteenth century. Besides records of missionaries and the image on a Christian gravestone, he lists a stone carving penned by a poet, Qin Guan 秦觀, and identifies it as a fifteenth-century work.¹⁴ However, Yao Chongxin disagrees with him on the influence of early missionaries and points out that the stone carving penned by Qin Guan is supposed to be a later illustration with an inscription of his poem. Yao finds more ancient

¹² Chün-fang Yü, "Feminine Images of Kuan-yin in Post-T'ang China." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18, no.1 (1990): 61-89.

¹³ Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 258-259.

¹⁴ Arnold Lauren, "Folk Goddess or Madonna? Early Missionary Encounters with the Image of Guanyin," in *Encounters and Dialogues: Changing Perspectives on Chinese-Western Exchanges from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Xiaoxin Wu, (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica & The Ricci Institute of Chinese-Western Cultural History, 2005), 227-238.

illustrations of Child-giving Guanyin and argues that the iconography of Guanyin accompanied by a child exists about 500 years earlier than the images brought by the missionaries in the sixteenth century. He then concludes that the iconography of Child-giving Guanyin is barely influenced by the Virgin Mary and the Child but probably impacted the porcelain statues of the Virgin Mary and the Child produced in Dehua.¹⁵

Scholars focusing on Christianity in China also notice the blurred boundaries between the Guanyin and the Virgin Mary. Gang Song argues that Marian images were presented and reproduced as the model of womanly virtues with Confucian moral norms by Jesuit missionaries, and the Chinese also gave multilayer interpretations to the images.¹⁶ Chen Hui-hung argues that religious images and visual materials attracted Chinese people at the beginning of the mission in China, but the recipients generated new meanings, and even iconographies emerged with Guanyin during the transcultural process.¹⁷

However, these studies focus more on religious literature and ritual images. Some scholars focus on the maritime trades in late imperial China and are aware that material interactions between China and the other regions have influenced the iconography of Child-giving Guanyin. Jan Chapman argues that rhinoceros horn figures could have been used as models for porcelain figures by Dehua potters. And many artisans were working on Christian figures,¹⁸ so that Donnelly argues that some Dehua potters made both Catholic and Buddhist statues so that they looked similar.¹⁹ However, these studies take the Guanyin statue as purely aesthetic objects, and missing the Buddhist context resulted in a less comprehensive analysis of this topic. Craig Clunas talks about the resemblance between Child-giving Guanyin and the Virgin and Child.²⁰ Not only porcelain statues, the possible resemblance also appeared in the ivory statues. Derek Gillman argues that Sangley (immigrant Chinese in Manila) artisans make ivory Child-giving statues by replacing accessories of the statues of Maria.²¹ It should

¹⁵ Yao Chongxin 姚崇新, *Guanyin yu shenseng: zhonggu zongjiao yishu yu xiyu shilun* 观音与神僧: 中古宗教艺术与西域史论 [Guanyin and the Divine Monk: Medieval religious art and the history of the Western Regions], (Beijing: shangwu yinshu guan, 2019), 315-346.

¹⁶ Song Gang, "The Many Faces of Our Lady: Chinese Encounters with the Virgin Mary between 7th and 17th Centuries," *Monumenta Serica* 66, no.2 (2018): 303-356.

¹⁷ Chen Hui-hung 陳惠宏, "yesuhui chuanjiaoshi limadou shidai de shijue wuxiang ji chuanbo wangluo," 耶穌會傳教士利瑪竇時代的視覺物像及傳播網絡 [Visual Objects and Personal Interactions: Their Contexts as Described by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552~1610)], *xin shixue* 新史學 21, no.3 (2010): 55-123.

¹⁸ Jan Chapman, *The art of rhinoceros horn carving in China*, (London: Christie's Books, 1999), 250-253.

¹⁹ Donnelly, *Blanc de Chine*, 144-146.

²⁰ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Carving*, (London: Sun Tree Publishing Ltd in association with the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1996), 20.

²¹ Derek Gillman, "Ming and Qing Ivories: Figure Carving," in *Chinese Ivories from Shang to the Qing* (London: British Museum Publications, 1984), 35-41.

be noted that the model he discusses is a standing Child-giving Guanyin, which is also common among the Dehua Guanyin statues but quite different from the V&A 19-1886.

Research focusing on materials and objects bring new perspectives on the art history of export objects. However, they lack discussions about religious meanings. Back to Chün-fang Yü's work, she suggests that "each major form of the feminine Guanyin was originally grounded in one specific location, connected with one life story, and depicted with one type of iconography."²² If we take the Dehua Child-giving porcelain Guanyin statues not only as a regional export trade object but also as a local iconography of Child-giving Guanyin, then the religious context, social influence and trading interactions should all be taken into consideration to examine how V&A 19-1886 transformed and became the majority model of porcelain Guanyin statues in maritime trades.

1.3 Transcultural Objects

As mentioned above, this statue is not alone in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It has more companions there as well as other European museums. The academic world is aware that the early modern was neither static nor stable but full of interactions and communications. Different regions and countries of the early modern world connected across geographical, political, and cultural boundaries. Within that early modern connected world, material culture played a key role. Asian export objects were activated, transformed, appropriated, adapted, and themselves developed new trajectories and alignment with the places they have 'travelled'. The dominant classic way of distinguishing artworks into a specific genre, region or school, but hard to reach the diversity and abundance of multiple cultures. Hybridity is a common word to describe material interactions, but it indicates "pure" cultures blended into a hybrid one. The concept of transculturality is more appropriate to a study regarding objects that are constantly renegotiated, changed, reproduced, and accepted both change from within the culture as well as outside. Monica Juneja describes transculturation as "denoting a process of transformation that unfolds through extended contacts and relationships between cultures,"²³ and the process contains "selective appropriation, mediation, translation, re-historicizing and rereading of signs, alternatively through non-communication, rejection or resistance or through a succession/coexistence of

²² Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 448.

²³ Monica Juneja, and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Fahim Amir, Eva Egermann et al. (Vienna: Sternberg Press, 2013), 24.

any of these.”²⁴ Material appropriation between China and Europe created the “EurAsian layers,” which escapes from the binary division of “European” or “Asian”.²⁵ It looks at the Sino-European objects with a transcultural lens, highlighting the complexity and negotiating cultural differences through the channels of material culture.²⁶

Porcelain used to be studied separately in the sites of production and consumption. Anne Gerritsen connected the Chinese production kilns in Jingdezhen with destinations in Asia, Europe and Africa. Global demands are of great significance for ceramic developments as early in the thirteenth century.²⁷ Maritime trades in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries were more intense than in the early period. Porcelain traded vast quantities and accumulated layers of meanings as it moved through time and space. Porcelain worked as a “material vehicle for the assimilation and transmission.”²⁸ Since porcelain is at the intersection of everyday life, consumption, and aesthetics, it is the combination of an object, a commodity and an art collection. Not only patterns and images but also materials and techniques have been changed according to stimuli from the outside world. More studies go beyond social life and take technology, texture, exhibiting, and other aspects related to materiality into account. In connection to the consumers in the empire and far beyond, manufacturers in Jingdezhen had the flexibility to produce different quality of blue and white porcelains for various markets in the sixteenth century, because they had different raw materials, craftsmen and kilns.²⁹ Kristel Smentek describes eighteenth-century French-mounted porcelain as “more dynamic engagements with imports from distant lands.” Despite European artistic responses to Chinese porcelain being fantastical and trivialising but they undeniably appealed to materiality. European dynamic engagement in the porcelain, such as mounting and gilding, shows how they related to the ancient and materially splendid, distant empire.³⁰ Anna Grasskamp focuses on the mounted Chinese porcelain in Europe. Precious metal mounts

²⁴ Ibid, 25.

²⁵ Anna Grasskamp, “EurAsian Layers: Netherlandish Surfaces and Early Modern Chinese Artefacts.” *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 63, no. 4 (2015): 362–399.

²⁶ Anna Grasskamp, and Monica Juneja, *EurAsian Matters : China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800*, (Switzerland : Springer, 2018), 11-12.

²⁷ Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and the Early Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 39-60. Anne Gerritsen, “Porcelain and the Material Culture of the Mongol-Yuan Court”. *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16, no.3(2012): 241–273.

²⁸ Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art : Cultures of Porcelain in World History*. Berkeley, (CA: University of California Press, 2010), 5.

²⁹ Anne Gerritsen, *The City of Blue and White*, 195–215.

³⁰ Kristel Smentek, "Global Circulations, Local Transformations: Objects and Cultural Encounter in the Eighteenth Century," *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, (Los Angeles, California: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 43-57.

became “by-work” (*parerga*) with the object, so that foreign objects are symbolically framed and fixed, aesthetically mediated into the European collection.³¹ Eva Ströber writes about the cultural biography of a ceramic crayfish ewer circulated in China, Indonesia, Japan and Europe. Digging further with the stories, she argues that the Japanese domesticated it in the tea ceremony and Indonesians used to eat it to consume the magic powers. Chinese ceramics in Indonesia was a sign of power and wealth.³² The vessel became a devotional object in the local ritual and acquired extra enchantment in the migration. However, studies regarding religious objects in the EurAsian ceramic are relatively vacant, especially Guanyin figures, which were favoured and exported to other European, Asian and New World markets. Previous studies take Dehua Guanyin statues as purely aesthetic objects, but their acceptance and reproduction in the transcultural process may not be separated from their Buddhist context in China. So it is necessary to take the history of Dehua and Dehua wares with the evolution of the iconography of seated Guanyin into consideration.

1.4 The Research Question and Method

Research question: How was the iconography of V&A 19-1886 transformed and favoured by overseas customers in the realm of porcelain statues?

It can be segmented into several sub-questions: What is the history of the ceramic Guanyin statue in China? How was the iconography of this porcelain Guanyin statue transformed between early Ming and late Ming? Why is there a boy-like child on her lap? Why was this statue of Guanyin produced in a large number and favoured by European buyers? Why were there fewer Guanyin statues after the eighteenth century?

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two traces the history of ceramic Guanyin figures in China, showing the changes in functions, manifestations and aesthetics. From tombs to home altars, the manifestation of Guanyin of the South Sea became popular among the coastal regions in China. The development of porcelain Guanyin statues show that V&A 19-1886, as one of the Dehua porcelain Guanyin statues, inherited traditions of ceramic Buddhist figures. Its

³¹ Anna Grasskamp, *Objects in Frames: Displaying Foreign Collectibles in Early Modern China and Europe*. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2019), 50.

³² Eva Ströber, “A Global Crayfish: The Transcultural Travels of a Chinese Ming Dynasty Ceramic Ewer”, in *EurAsian Matters : China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800*, Anna Grasskamp and Monica Juneja (Switzerland : Springer, 2018), 213.

whiteness is in accordance with Chan aesthetics, and its porcelain divine figures catered to both of scholars and non-elite people.

Chapter three compares several Dehua porcelain Guanyin statues, including those from the Brooklyn Museum, the Phillip Allen Collection, and the Fitzwilliam Museum. The ones from the Brooklyn Museum and the Phillip Allen Collection show the chronological changes of sitting Child-giving Guanyin statues from no-child to accompany a child. The Fitzwilliam Museum Guanyin's intimate image between Guanyin and the child, resemblance to an illustration of *Sancai tuhui* entitled "White-robed Guanyin", were popular among the non-elites. The intimate images were related to the emphasis on male heirs of the cult of Child-giving Guanyin in the middle and late Ming.

Chapter four focuses on V&A 19-1886's journey from Dehua to England and its variations in Europe and Asia. Different from the standing Child-giving Guanyin statues, records of E.I.C. showed that sitting ones were unnoticed and casually named. The successive porcelain statues of mother and son filled the market afterwards. However, the case in Nagasaki, Japan, shows how "Hidden Christians" used Dehua seated Child-giving Guanyin for religious substitutes.

Chapter Two Transformation of Porcelain Guanyin Statues: Function, Manifestation and Aesthetics

Ceramic Buddhist figures are important in Chinese ceramic history and religious sculptures. Archaeological discoveries reveal that the earliest ceramic Guanyin figures were made around the Northern Song Dynasty. Ceramic figures were originally made for tombs since they were believed to be servants to the deceased in the afterlife. It is similar to the excavated ceramic Guanyin figures that initially existed in the tombs as burial objects. Early ceramic Guanyin figures excavated from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces before Ming were made in Jingdezhen and Longquan kilns. The history of porcelain Guanyin statues would help with analysis of the iconography transformation and material change of porcelain figures from the Gao'an Guanyin of the Northern Song Dynasty to the V&A 19-1886 of the Ming Dynasty.

2.1 From Tombs to Altars: A Deity in the Changing Forms in the Song and Yuan Dynasties

Ceramic figures have a long tradition in China. Figural images are believed to have power in the Chinese psyche. For example, the abundant and colourful Tang Dynasty three-colour glazed pottery. Early porcelain Buddhist figurines, including Guanyin statues, were also excavated from the tombs.

Early Guanyin figures were as ornaments on burial pottery. Since the Northern Song Dynasty, more independent figures have been excavated in tombs in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. The excavations of ceramic Guanyin tombs prove that the cult of Guanyin was popular in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces in the Song Dynasty (960-1276). In 1982, a plain white porcelain Guanyin statue was excavated in Gao'an 高安, Jiangxi Province. Although there is no specific date to be verified, it is suggested to be a work of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) according to the burial time of the tombs.³³ Dated Ceramic Guanyin statues from the Northern Song are precious and rare, but it shows that ceramic Guanyin figures were already made in Jingdezhen kilns. The Guanyin sits in a 'royal ease' gesture (*rajalilasana*)³⁴ with one leg (usually right leg) bent and the other rest at the same level. The rocky throne means Guanyin sitting in *potalaka*, the mountain that Bodhisattva

³³ Liu Yuhei 刘裕黑 and XiongLin, 熊琳, "Jiangxi gaoan chutu de songdai." 江西高安出土的宋代瓷塑观音 [Porcelain Guanyin statue of Song Dynasty unearthed in Gao'an], *wenwu* 9, (1987): 25-26.

³⁴ Though both *lalitasana* and *rajalilasana* are 'royal ease' in English, there are few differences that *lalitasana* gesture means one leg hanging down, while *rajalilasana* gesture means two legs at the same level.

Avalokiteśvara dwells mentioned in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra 《華嚴經》. Water-moon Guanyin (*shuiyue guanyin* 水月觀音)³⁵, an indigenous form of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara existed after Buddhism was introduced into China, is characterised by the ‘royal ease’ gesture. The ‘royal ease’ indicates his supremacy, not only over the spiritual world but also over the material and mundane sphere of glory and fame. But later, it became a unique iconography featuring bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Ceramic Guanyin statues from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) have been excavated in a considerable number. Compared to the Northern Song Guanyin from Gao'an 高安, the Guanyin figures of Southern Song have a more feminine appearance. Important objects, for example, a seated Guanyin (dated to 1251) made of *qingbaici* 青白瓷 now collected in the Shanghai Museum, were unearthed in the tomb of Shi Shengzu 史繩祖 and his wife.³⁶ A tender smile spreading on a morbidezza face, which is oval, plump and cute, shows the compassion and kindness of bodhisattva Guanyin. This object was made in the period when bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was feminised and localised in China. Though bodhisattva is generally considered genderless, it was always presented as a male until the late Tang Dynasty. Since the Song Dynasty, the gender of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has undergone a significant transformation, from the original male image to the female.³⁷ Another elegant and impressive one was excavated from Wayao Tower 瓦窯塔, Beijing, in 1964 [Figure 2.1]. Compared to the Northern Song ceramic Guanyin statues, Southern Song ones seem to dress up in the clothing of ordinary people.³⁸ In contrast, the Northern Song ceramic Guanyin wear celestial garments, which cover the shoulders, wrap around the arms and hang down along the sides of the body. The long white robe with large sleeves is a feature of a manifestation of Guanyin, White-robed (*baiyi*) Guanyin 白衣觀音. Chan Buddhism contributed to its popularity in the Song dynasty. White-robed Guanyin has been worshipped in the Upper Tianzhu Monastery (*shangtianzhu si* 上天竺寺) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, since the tenth century. Renowned monks, such as Jueji Yongzhong 絕際永中 and

³⁵ The oldest image of Water-moon Guanyin appeared in the right lower corner of the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara found in the Dunhuang Grottoes, which is dated to 943, now in the collection of the Musée Guimet. *The Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara*, detail of *The Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara*, China, 943, Ink and colour on silk, Paris: Musée Guimet, Object number: mg. 17775.

³⁶

³⁷ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 21.

³⁸ Modern scholars suggest that the configuration in a white robe was modelled on a laywoman's outfit. Yuhang Li, *Becoming Guanyin: Artistic Devotion of Buddhist Women in Late Imperial China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 103

Mu Xi 牧谿 had paintings depicting White-robed Guanyin, and those works inspired the later revival of ink painting in Ming and Qing dynasties.

Since the Song Dynasty, Buddhism became so popular that people rebuilt their smaller rooms into a hall for worshipping Buddha and bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Unlike bronze Buddha statues and wooden statues often worshipped in temples, porcelain ones are smaller and more affordable. They might be adequate for being placed on altars at believers' homes. Longquan Buddhist statues are nicely in the form of integrity and suitable for being placed on the house altars.

Longquan kilns were the second largest kilns producing ceramic Guanyin statues in the Yuan dynasty. The earliest surviving Longquan kiln statues of Guanyin are two relics from the Sinan shipwreck. One is a small Longquan celadon female figure in a seated gesture holding four larger scrolls tied together.³⁹ The other is a smaller celadon statue of Guanyin. Though hands and head crown were missing, another similar one in the Longquan Museum offered some reference which suggests that it may be the Guanyin of the South Sea (Nanhai Guanyin 南海觀音). Contrary to the previous ones, which usually have only one figure, Guanyin. Most Longquan porcelain statues depicting the Guanyin of the South Sea exist as a combination of Guanyin, acolytes, and other background decorations, such as rock, wave, dragon, bottle, etc. All the symbols of the iconography have a scriptural basis other than random patchwork. The acolytes normally include two child-like attendants and a white parrot. The two attendants are Shancai (善才 Sudhana) and Longnü (龍女 Dragon girl). Besides them, its recognizable feature is the white parrot.⁴⁰

There is a Longquan celadon Guanyin belonging to a private collection of Mr. & Mrs Jack Chia [Figure 2.2]⁴¹, which bears some similarities to one in the Philip Allen Collection [Figure 2.3]. It is probably a rudiment of the V&A 19-1886. Both consist of a cross-legged seated Guanyin on a rocky pedestal, two attendants standing on each side and two objects placed behind Guanyin (one is a bottle, and the other may be a parrot or something else). One of the main differences is the iconography of Guanyin. Longquan Guanyin has a bigger

³⁹ The statue is usually considered to be Ma Langfu Guanyin 馬郎婦觀音.

⁴⁰ Shancai was considered derived from the last chapter of the *Flower Garland Sūtra* 《華嚴經》. Longnü cannot be traced with a direct classic sūtra but may be influenced by *jintong yunü* 金童玉女 from Daoism. White parrot's scriptural basis comes from the *Shorter Pure Land Sūtra* 《佛說阿彌陀經》 (Sukhavativyūha Sūtra). Another source is the *Precious Scroll of the Parrot* (*Yingge baojuan* 鸚鵡寶撰), which tells the filial piety story of a parrot, which later becomes a disciple of Avalokiteśvara.

⁴¹ Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and National Museum of Singapore ed., *Chinese Celadons and Other Related Wares in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Arts Orientalis, 1979): 228-229.

crown and round face, while Dehua Guanyin has less headwear and an oval face. The other difference is the colour of the material. Longquan Guanyin is mainly covered with typically thick and greenish glaze but leaves the face, body and hands bare in reddish purple. However, Dehua Guanyin is fully glazed and purely white. They followed different artistic forms of different kilns, but a continuous tradition of ceramic Guanyin figures is perceptible. The combination of Guanyin, her acolytes, and other featured contents would be more suitable for believers of Buddhism in Yuan and Ming. It is probably appropriate for devotion to temples or the altar in the family hall for worshipping. Besides porcelain statues like Figure 2.2, another kind of Longquan Guanyin statue depicting Guanyin of the South Sea usually illustrates Guanyin sitting in a grotto-like niche known as “Guanyin shrine”, like Figure 2.4. Guanyin shrine is a unique artistic form among the Chinese ceramic Buddhist statues and only existed in Longquan kilns. Some Longquan Guanyin statues even placed Buddhism and Daoism in one shrine.⁴²



[Figure 2.1] (left) White-robed Guanyin. Dehua ware. Southern Song, China. Capital Museum, Beijing. Height 29.5 cm.

[Figure 2.2] (right) Guanyin. Longquan ware. Plate 167, 14th-15th century, China. Private collection of Mr. & Mrs. Jack Chia.

⁴² One example is the Longquan Guanyin shrine of the Ming Dynasty, now in the Cincinnati Museum of Art in the United States, which features both Guanyin and Taoist figures. The Guanyin shrine is divided into upper and lower parts. The upper part features the Guanyin of the South Sea, while the lower level showcases the Daoist god, Zhenwu 真武. A pair of attendants are located on both sides of the two statues. Although such combination only exists in Longquan wares, it indicates that the Guanyin cult was assimilated with Daoism and the complexity of Guanyin cult in the Ming Dynasty. Youn Heena, “Cong Longquanyao Qingci suxiang kan Guanyin xinyang,” 从龙泉窑青瓷塑像看观音信仰 [The Cult of Guanyin As Represented in The Longquan Ceramic Figures], *gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宫博物院院刊, no.5(2018): 115-125+162.



[Figure 2.3] (left) Guanyin enthroned. Dehua ware. circa 1650, China. *Phillip Allen Collection*. Illustrated in *Blanc de Chine : Porcelain from Dehua*.

[Figure 2.4] (right) Guanyin shrine. Longquan ware 1450-1550. China. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Object number: C.1158-1917.

As mentioned, key elements, such as the ‘royal ease’ gesture, rocky throne, white robe and feminisation of Avalokiteśvara, already appeared on the ceramic Guanyin figures of Jingdezhen kilns in the Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties. Longquan Guanyin statues accounted for the majority of porcelain Guanyin statues in the Yuan Dynasty in the Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. Dehua Guanyin followed the transition of porcelain Guanyin and has been popular since the Ming Dynasty. But among the various manifestations, the Guanyin of the South Sea gradually became a popular form in the coastal regions in China, which visually resembles the V&A Child-giving Guanyin, except for the child.⁴³

2.2 A New Manifestation: Guanyin of the South Sea

Guanyin of the South Sea has been worshipped in coastal provinces in China such as Fujian, Zhangjiang and Guangdong for a long time. She was believed to have the power of ensuring safe voyage, the success of maritime trades, male heirs, etc.

Guanyin of the South Sea can be traced back to the late Tang Dynasty, but abundant stories emerged until the Song Dynasty. People living in the coastal areas worship. Various

⁴³ Besides Jingdezhen kilns and Longquan kilns, other kilns in southeast China also produced ceramic Guanyin statues. For example, a small Ou kiln 甌窑 celadon statue of Guanyin was unearthed from the White Elephant Pagoda 白象塔 in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, and was considered a work of the Northern Song Dynasty. There were also other kilns, such as Chaozhou kilns in Guangzhou, that made ceramic Buddha statues.

marine products are mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra* 《妙法蓮華經》, such as clams, corals, and pearls. The last verse mentions that if someone encounters monsters or dangers while drifting in the sea, reciting the name of Guanyin can ensure the person not be submerged by the sea. It shows that overseas trades and voyages were quite dangerous to the people at that time, and they would ask Guanyin for help to keep their travel and business safe and sound. The *Yijian Zhi* 《夷堅志》 (Record of the Listener), written by Hong Mai 洪邁(1123-1202), contained a story of a merchant was cured with a miracle by chanting Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's name when he was severely ill on a voyage.⁴⁴ This story from the Southern Song Dynasty indicates that the cult of Guanyin was already popular among the Fujian merchants at that time because they were actively involved in the trades on the oceans and usually risked their lives and wealth on each voyage. Guanyin of the South Sea received worship from fishermen and petty dealers in the coastal area. When the coastal regions severely suffered from bandits invading and harassing during the Ming Dynasty, the Guanyin of the South Sea won more followers.⁴⁵

Guanyin of the South Sea is an indigenous form of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in China. The iconography consists of several recognisable images of V&A 19-1886, such as Shancai, Longnü, white parrot and dragons. Shancai or Sudhana was derived from the last chapter of the Flower Garland Sūtra (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*). Longnü is not from a direct classic but may be influenced by *jintong yunü* 金童玉女 from Daoism. Besides them, its recognisable feature is the white parrot, whose scriptural basis comes from the *Shorter Pure Land Sūtra* (*Sukhavativyuha Sūtra*). Another source is the *Precious Scroll of the Parrot* (*Yingge Baojuan*), which tells the filial piety story of a parrot, which later becomes a disciple of Avalokiteśvara. The Dragon King of the Four Seas is the protector of Buddhism; perhaps it is one of the reasons why the rocky pedestal of the V&A Guanyin has dragons floating on the rocky pedestal.

The royal court and literati's engagement in Buddhism eventually promoted the manifestation of Guanyin of the South Sea at a nationwide level. Offerings from Emperor

⁴⁴ Several Quanzhou were on their way to business. One of the merchants, Yu, is a sincere Buddhist. He worships and chants bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara every day. Once in a voyage, he was seriously sick and left hopelessly in a cave. But he started to chant Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, and then he finally got cured with a miracle. Hong Mai 洪邁, "yijian zhi" 夷堅志 [Record of the Listener], (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 2006), 三志 sanzhi, 己 ji 2:10.1318.

⁴⁵ Chen Yuh-Neu 陳玉女, "Guanyin yu haiyang: mingdai dongnan yanhai de guanyin Xinyang" 觀音與海洋: 明代東南沿海的觀音信仰 [Guanyin and the Sea: Guanyin Worship in the Southeastern Coastal Region of the Ming Dynasty], *renjian fojiao xuebao.yiwen* 人間佛教學報.藝文 2, (2016): 102-133.

Wanli (1563-1620) and Empress Dowager Cisheng (1545-1614) to Buddhist masters and the imperial establishment of Mountain Putuo as the Chinese *potalaka* raised Buddhism status. Since then, Mountain Putuo has become the official monastery of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Empress Dowager Cisheng's engagement was critical. She commissioned many Buddhist paintings and guised herself as Guanyin in the paintings and woodblock prints. Some became critical Buddhist religious paintings in terms of aesthetic and religious value. Empress Dowager Cisheng was even transformed into *Nine-Lotuses Bodhisattva* after the image was circulated and duplicated nationally. Yü argues that Guanyin of the South Sea grew in popularity in the late Ming when the Mountain Putuo in Zhoushan, Zhejiang, was imperially established as the Chinese *Potalaka*, the centre of Guanyin cult by Wanli Emperor in 1605.⁴⁶ However, many Longquan celadon Guanyin statues in Yuan and Ming depicting this iconography suggest that this manifestation may appear earlier than Yü's assumption.⁴⁷ It turns out that Guanyin of the South Sea was popular in southeast China. The porcelain statues produced in Longquan Kilns of the Yuan Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty also prove that the cult of Guanyin of the South Sea was widespread in the coastal provinces of China.

The manifestation of Guanyin of the South Sea has been widely worshipped by the coastal provinces, and people have been making porcelain statues for this manifestation since the Yuan Dynasty. It later became a dominant form of Guanyin after the imperial court officially assigned Mountain Putuo in Zhoushan as China's *potalaka*. The imperial court and scholar-officials' works and paintings quoted or appropriated Buddhist classics and images, promoting the manifestation of Guanyin of the South Sea. The deity Guanyin of the South Sea was highly venerated by the people of coastal regions in China, especially Fujian and Zhangjiang, due to its association with the protection of maritime trades, safe voyages, and warding off sea monsters and dangers. This cult had a wide following during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and its popularity grew even further during the reign of Emperor Wanli and Empress Dowager Cisheng. The engagement of the literati and the royal court in Buddhism played a role in promoting the cult's manifestation in China. The image of Guanyin, which embodied compassion and care for humanity, became an important cultural medium for bridging Confucianism and Buddhism, transcending various sects, doctrines, or social classes. Its universal appeal among the Chinese reflects a significant aspect of China's religious and cultural history.

⁴⁶ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 443-447.

⁴⁷ Youn Heena, "Objects of Popular Devotion: Longquan Ceramic Religious Figures during the Song-Yuan-Ming Period," (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2015), 158-159.

2.3 Whiteness

The material changes from Jingdezhen Guanyin and Longquan Guanyin to Dehua white Guanyin are also a critical part of considering the change of the ceramic figures. There is a continuation between Dehua kilns and Longquan kilns in terms of function, content and iconography of Guanyin, but the material change created the new aesthetics of purely white Dehua figures. The material change is owed to the improvement of porcelain technology and the new aesthetic taste.

In the Ming Dynasty, *blanc de Chine* was successfully made. Its prototype was about 150 years before the mature white ware circa 1650. Chuimei Ho named the ware “White Ware I”, the relics of ancient *blanc de Chine* unearthed in the Qudougong kiln in Dehua. The white ware is “thick porcelain with a translucent paste, rather plain in shape and design, and the whiteness of the glaze has a soft and creamy lustre.”⁴⁸ It is unique texture and colour of glaze and porcelain made it stand out among the other ancient kilns in China. Geological investigations show that the porcelain stone at Dehua has unusual purity. Porcelain clay is particularly low in iron oxide but high in potassium oxide and calcium oxide. The elutriation technology was improved in Ming, so the sericite particles were abundantly aggregated. Increased the potassium oxide content and relatively reduced calcium oxide ratio, made porcelain clay fine and smooth. Dehua wares use around 6% potassium oxide as a flux, which effectively generates a rise in the glass phase material with temperature.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Chuimei Ho, “Blanc de Chine in Archaeological Perspective,” 36.

⁴⁹ Li Jiazhi 李家治, “Zhongguo gutaoci kexue jishu chengjiu.” 中国古陶瓷科学技术研究主要成就 [The Primary Achievements in Scientific and Technological Research on Ancient Chinese Ceramics], *guisuanyan tongbao* 硅酸盐通报 5 (1985):66-74.



[Figure 2.5] Guanyin Bodhisattva. Qingbai ware. 1298 or 1299.. China. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. Object number: 35-5. Dimensions: 51.44 × 30.48 × 19.69 cm

Starting with a short comparison to the previous ceramic statues from Jingdezhen and Longquan kilns, it is obvious that Dehua Guanyin is fully glazed, but the other two are partially glazed. The glaze of Longquan wares is known as green as jasper, giving ceramic figures a lustrous and smooth texture. The thicker, the greener. However, the thick glaze layer makes the details blur. Take Figure 2.2 as an example, in which the rocky pedestal is covered with glaze, while the remainder of the figure, including the face and hands, are biscuit-fired or cold-painted. In Figure 2.4, the whole object is usually glazed except that the Guanyin figure is biscuit-fired. Such partially glazed decoration differentiates Guanyin from the blurry glaze. However, a group with fully glazed Guanyin statues caught Donnelly and other scholars' attention. They are Plate 70a and Plate 70b in Donnelly's book, number 1985,0717.1 in the collection of the British Museum, number 35-5 from the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and so on. They are bigger than ordinary porcelain statues, and depict a new iconography showing characteristics of both Esoteric Buddhism and Exoteric Buddhism. They may date to the Yuan Dynasty.⁵⁰ Youn Heena thinks they were probably commissioned

⁵⁰ They may be compared with a group of somewhat larger figures of Buddhist deities, included among which is a Guanyin in the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City that bears on its base an ink inscription incorporating the date 1298-1299 A.D. John Ayers, *Far Eastern Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (2nd edition), (London: Sotheby Park Bernet Publications, 1980):167.

by the Mongol court.⁵¹ Donnelly thinks they are white precursors of *blanc de Chine*, for the elaborate jewelled beads and string ornaments decoration techniques on the later Dehua Buddhist deities.⁵² Not enough research reveals the connections between Jingdezhen and Dehua kilns, so Donnelly's conclusion would need more arguments.

However, Dehua Guanyin statues demonstrate a unified genre with smooth and white clay in a thick and translucent glaze. Literal thought Dehua wares were incomparable to Jingdezhen wares, but they still appealed to its whiteness. Masterworks of, such as He Chaozong, Lin Chaojing and Zhang Sushan were desired and in demand in Ming and Qing.⁵³ The imperial court was even one of the collectors. According to the records of the Summer Palace in Beijing, 6 pieces of Dehua porcelain Guanyin made by He Chaozong ended up in the imperial court for private worship in Qing. There are 16 in total in the old collection of the Summer Palace in Beijing.⁵⁴

Dehua Guanyin probably has different references for sculpture. It is said that He Chaozong learnt from clay sculpture.⁵⁵ And some Dehua potters learnt from painting scrolls and copperplate engraving books. *Baimiao* painting 白描畫 (plain painting) went through the revitalisation of Chan Buddhism in the late Ming through the promotion of scholars and cultural elites. One of the common topics was Guanyin. *Baimiao* painting refers loosely to the practice of monochromic ink painting, which includes ink painting and gold-ink painting. linear style of monochrome ink, expressing the minimal colour of ink was referred to as *ya* 雅 (elegance), which means reclusion, austerity and simplicity.⁵⁶ *Baimiao* Painting Guanyin was popular as a devotional practice among gentry-woman in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The gentry-woman artist, Xing Cijing 邢慈静 painted white-robed Guanyin for bearing a son to her [Figure 2.6]⁵⁰. In this painting, Guanyin is declined in meticulous detail. She sits on the wave, showing that her mercy is abundant like water from the sea. It is noticeable that

⁵¹ Youn Heena, "Yuandai Jingdezhen yao qingbai ci foxiang yanjiu," 元代景德镇窑青白瓷佛像研究[A Research on the Buddhist Figures in Qingbai Porcelain at the Jingdezhen Kilns During the Yuan Dynasty], *huaxiakaoqiu* 华夏考古, no.4(2018):66-74.

⁵² Donnelly, *Blanc de Chine*, 132,139.

⁵³ Xu Jundong 徐俊东, "yidai zongshi He Chaozong cisu yishu de wenhua jied." 一代宗师何朝宗瓷塑艺术的文化解读 [Cultural interpretation of the porcelain sculpture art of the great master He Chaozong], *Zhongguo taoci* 中国陶瓷 3, (2008):63-65.

⁵⁴ Sun Yue 孙悦. "Gugong bowuyuan cang Dehua yao guanyin ciqi yanjiu," 故宫博物院藏德化窑观音瓷器研究 [The Research about Dehua Kiln Bodhisattva of the Palace Museum], *Gugong xuekan* 故宫学刊 1, (2015):355-365.

⁵⁵ Xu Jundong, "yidai," : 63-65.

⁵⁶ Li, *Becoming Guanyin*, 67.

Guanyin is plainly decorated, but only the crown on her head and flower-like jewelry on the chest. She even had a painting depicting the Guanyin wearing no jewelry. The plain white Dehua Guanyin also won praise as “Exquisite and elegant” (精致古雅).⁵⁷ One Dehua Guanyin statue [Figure 2.7] was excavated in the tower in Songjiang, Shanghai, in total simplicity. This statue also depicts the White-robed Guanyin sitting in the sea. Her hands and legs are all covered by the undecorated loosed robe. Both of the images present Guanyin's purity, otherworldliness, and femininity. Literati usually described Dehua wares as “pure, white and adorable”⁵⁸, which explains its colour and texture appeals them.



[Figure 2.6] (left) Xing Cijing, Thirty-two Manifestations of Kuan-yin (No.18). Ming Dynasty. China. Painting on paper. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Object number: 故畫 001147N000000018. Dimensions: 28.6cmx29.5cm

[Figure 2.7 (right) Guanyin. Dehua ware. Ming Dynasty. China. Shanghai Musuem, Shanghai.

Dehua's plain white aesthetics probably was owing to the scholars and elite keen on aesthetics of elegance, reclusion, austerity and simplicity in the revival of Chan Buddhism. Dehua potters use kaolin clay and white glaze to express a noble and feminine Guanyin, and the white wares also add otherworldliness to the Guanyin statues. There is correspondence between the Guanyin *baimiao* paintings and Dehua white porcelain in terms of aesthetic concept and artistic forms.

⁵⁷ Guo Baicang 郭柏苍著, Hu Fengze 胡枫泽校点, “Min chan lu yi” 《闽产录异》, (yuelu shushe 岳麓书社, 39

⁵⁸ The Chinese is 潔白可愛, I translated as “pure, white and adorable”. Yang Zhuoxuan, “Luelun Fujian Dehua guci,”:82-90+127.

Summary

Early ceramic Guanyin figures were made in Jingdezhen and Longquan kilns, and initially existed in the tombs as burial objects. Besides the feminisation of the Guanyin appearance, more ceramic Guanyin statues were placed in small altars. Despite different iconographies, they strictly followed the rules originated from Buddhist sūtras. After Emperor Wanli Empress Dowager Cisheng bestowed Putuo Mountain in Zhoushan as the *potaloka* of China, Guanyin of the South Sea rose to prominence, becoming the foremost deity in the region. With the revival of Chan Buddhism, the *baimiao* painting of Guanyin revived among the literati class. Dehua's pure white porcelain figures developed a new genre echoing Chan's aesthetics. The popularity of Dehua porcelain Guanyin transcended mere civil markets, with select masterpieces entering the imperial collection. Dehua porcelain Guanyin statues inherited ceramic figures' legacy while creating unique aesthetics and, therefore, received acceptance from the literati and the broader populace.

Chapter Three Devotions and Asking from Non-elites

This chapter compares several porcelain Guanyin statues, including those from the Brooklyn Museum, the Phillip Allen Collection, and the Fitzwilliam Museum. The intimate image of Fitzwilliam Museum Guanyin is especially different from the previous ones. The statue of Guanyin has experienced a change from being single to accompanying a child, and the relationship between Guanyin and the child has changed from relatively distant to familiar. This was due to the secularization of the cult of Guanyin and the popularization of the images. Such changes were not inexplicable imagination but related to women's emphasis on heirs and religious participation.

3.1 The Boy-Like Child On Her Lap

Compared to the other images of Guanyin, the Child-giving Guanyin is unique for the child on her lap. The child shares the visual centre, indicating his preciousness to the worshippers. Moreover, some other images of Child-giving Guanyin from Dehua kilns depict harmonious interactions between Guanyin and the child. Her facial expressions and gestures became more humanised and expressive.

As discussed above, the V&A Child-giving Guanyin was a major image of Child-giving Guanyin flooding into Europe in the seventeenth century. Donnelly noticed a precursor model inscribed Tianqi 天啟 (dated 1629) incised on the base, but without a child on Guanyin's lap. Based on his findings, John Ayers found another similar one from the Phillip Allen Collection.⁵⁹ These two groups of figures have the same composition: the Guanyin of the South Sea sits on a rocky throne with two attendants standing on each side. Behind them, there is a white parrot on the branch. The obvious difference is that V&A Guanyin has an extra boy-like child on her lap, while the Phillip Allen Collection Guanyin and Tianqi Guanyin don not. The Phillip Allen Collection Guanyin closely matches an image on the map of *Blaeu's Nieuw Atlas*, 1655,⁶⁰ a book written by a catholic missionary who left China by 1651. On the margin of one page of the Chinese section was embellished with the seated Guanyin with two children on both sides. The images resemble the Phillip Allen Collection Guanyin. This is the earliest image of Guanyin in Europe, and it also shows that the image of the Guanyin of the South Sea, which is without a child was more impressive when the missionary published the book in the middle of the seventeenth century.

⁵⁹ John Ayers, "Blanc de Chine: Some Reflections, 35-37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

Besides the Phillip Allen Collection Guanyin, there are more similar compositions of Guanyin porcelain statues produced from Dehua. The one in the Brooklyn Museum [Figure 3.1]⁶¹ seems more delicate and refined than the one in the Phillip Allen Collection. It has the missing white parrot on the right branch, representing a stereoscopic and complete version of the Guanyin illustration from *Blaeu's Nieuw Atlas*. More interestingly, the acolytes, Shancai and Longnü, turn from facing the front to each other, making a childlike and lovely bow. It is so exquisite that every wrinkle and hair is clear and vivid. The museum makes the rough assumption that the work was made between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Except for the group of the Guanyin with two acolytes, there are group statues of the Guanyin with one child standing by her. Take the one in the Victoria and Albert Museum (object number: 1123-1875) as an example: Guanyin also sits on a rock pedestal in royal ease, putting her left hand on the knee and the right hand holding a lotus flower. Guanyin only wears a robe without sleeves. The crown is less decorated, and no jewellery on the body. The male-like child, probably shancai, is standing on the right side, and he holds two hands together, turning his head to the deity, showing his admiration and respect for Guanyin. Both ride on the waves, where a lotus flower and leaf flicker.



[Figure 3.1] (left) Bodhisattva Guanyin. Dehua ware. 17th-18th century, China. Brooklyn Museum, New York. Object number: 84.198.22. Dimensions: 24.1 x 12.1 x 8.9 cm.

⁶¹ *Bodhisattva Guanyin*, 17th-18th century. Dehua ware: glazed white porcelain, 9 1/2 x 4 3/4 x 3 1/2 in. (24.1 x 12.1 x 8.9 cm). Brooklyn Museum. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/111965>

[Figure 3.2] (right)Guanyin with a child. Dehua ware. Qing Dynasty, China. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Object number: 1123-1875. Height: 23.5cm.

None of the above statues has a child on her lap. Such sitting Guanyin of the South Sea was limited in the European collections compared to the number of statues with a child. However, the Child-giving Guanyin isn't included in the thirty-two manifestations of Guanyin. It became popular after the Ming Dynasty.⁶² From the Song Dynasty onwards, the flourishing of private Buddhist halls led to the production of smaller Guanyin statues. Most images concerning Child-giving Guanyin were for private worship and sponsorship. According to John Ayers's inspection, this piece of Child-giving Guanyin was probably made as a thank-offering for the birth of a son.⁶³ Followers commissioned statues of Buddhist deities made of porcelain or other materials as offerings, for they were satisfied with their wishes.

Those images of Child-giving Guanyin were less orthodox and more artistic, in which facial expressions, gestures and sceneries of Buddhist deities became more diverse. Regarding Dehua child-giving Guanyin, some of which represented more intimacy between Guanyin and the child. Collected in the Fitzwilliam Museum⁶⁴ in the U.K., this Dehua Child-giving Guanyin illustrates that Guanyin carefully protects the male-like child on her lap with two hands. The child on her lap hugged her with open arms, and she lowered her head to interact with him, just like an ordinary mother. And the child responds with open arms, turning his head to Guanyin. In the *leishu* encyclopaedia, *sancai tuhui* 《三才圖會》, an image titled the *White-robed Guanyin* [Figure 3.3] depicts an image resemblance to the above statue. The way she sits, the bamboo forest behind her, the waves and rocks below her, and the willow bottle on the rocks all indicate that the figure in the picture is white-dressed Guanyin.⁶⁵ Contrary to the child of the V&A 19-1886, who faces the front, the child of the Fitzwilliam Museum [Figure 3.4], turning his head to Guanyin, seems to be talking to her.

⁶² Yao Chongxin's research shows that the child's situation moves from lotus bud to the hand of Guanyin, and in the end, to the lap of Guanyin. The stone sculpture (dated 603 AD) from Shanxi Province Rong County Museum is the earliest image of Child-giving Guanyin. Two children, one stands on the bottle held in Bodhisavatta's left hand, and the other sits in the lotus bud in the right hand. In the later Buddhist rolls of the Tang and Song dynasties, the child stands in the hands of Guanyin, who wears a loose white robe representing the White-robed Guanyin. Yao, *Guanyin yu shenseng*, 315-346.

⁶³ John Ayers, "Blanc de Chine: Some Reflections," 29.

⁶⁴ The Fitzwilliam Museum (2023) "Guanyin and child on rocky base" Web page available at: <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/21661> Accessed: 2023-10-11 08:03:14

⁶⁵ This image and the other two images depicting *Nanhai* Guanyin and Guanyin painted by illustrate the chapter named, *Guanyin*. "Wang, Qi: San cai tu hui. 9" Munich Digitization Center (MDZ), <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/details/bsb00060333>:

She also carefully holds the boy with two hands, unlike the V&A Guanyin, who only slightly puts one hand on the child. Its description explains why most of the images of Guanyin are feminised but ignore the child on her lap, which is supposed to be part of the image of Child-giving Guanyin instead of the White-robed Guanyin. As a reference book, *sancai tuhui*, whose major audience were ordinary people other than scholars and literati compiles abundant illustrations. This image of White-robed Guanyin, which includes a child on her lap, was already popular and associated with this manifestation among the non-elites.

Different forms of Guanyin images existed among the Guanyin statues made in the Dehua kilns. As mentioned above, the V&A 19-1886 is considered later than the Phillip Allen and Brooklyn Museum ones. The Fitzwilliam Museum Guanyin shows that the relationship between Guanyin and the children was quite close. As an emulation of an illustration of the White-robed Guanyin from *sancai tuhui*, it shows that intimate images of Guanyin and the child were already popular among non-elites. In the Ming Dynasty, Buddhist art flourished and benefited from the inclusive atmosphere for artistic creation.



[Figure3.3] (left) An illustration of the White-robed Guanyin, *sancai tuhui* 三才圖會, 106 juan 卷, 9. *Huaiyin caotang* 槐蔭草堂, 1609.

[Figure 3.4] (right) Guanyin and child on a rocky base. Dehua ware. China. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Object number: C.602-1991. Dimensions: 33.5 x 16.6 cm,

3.2 The Cult of Guanyin across Religions and Classes

An image of Guanyin, probably a Dehua porcelain statue, was contributed to a temple of the sectarian religion, *changsheng jiao* (Eternal Life Teaching 長生教) in Zhejiang when

the temple was rebuilt in 1766. The appearance of Guanyin was the Venerable Mother, an elderly woman sitting on a pedestal with flower embossment.⁶⁶ Some sectarian religions recognised Guanyin as the superior one that granted power to their founders or prominent persons. The purpose was often sharing or taking advantage of people's familiarity towards Guanyin. In late imperial China, the cult of Guanyin was so popular that her followers came from different religions and classes.

After undergoing three phases, Buddhism had been more localised and domesticised in mainland China. Ming Buddhism underwent detailed legislation concerning every aspect of Buddhist life in the early Ming (1375-1450), a breakdown with previous orthodox Buddhism in the middle Ming (1450-1525), and a revival in terms of thoughts, scale and connections with the imperial court in the late Ming (1525-1644). Ming Buddhism was characterised by secularization and popularization. Secularization in this thesis refers to more connections between Buddhist institutions & members and others outside the community. An important example is the lay Buddhist movement. Lay Buddhists, mostly consisting of gentrymen and gentrywomen, were privileged in social class and knowledge. Interactions between prominent monks and literati often took the form of scholarly exchanges or debates on philosophical and religious topics. Lay Buddhists were critical to the development and revival of Buddhism in the late Ming. They donated money to temples, printed Buddhist classics, wrote literature related to Buddhist deities, created Buddhist artworks and so on. Popularization refers to the expansion of Buddhism in China. "Three teachings", the ideology of Chinese religions that refer to Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism as a harmonious unity, became dominant in the Ming Dynasty. Despite that it was an important policy for controlling different religions in China, Buddhism became more influential and won public admiration in the whole society.⁶⁷ Buddhism became popular, forming a diffused force in people's lives and an integral part of cosmology.

⁶⁶ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 449.

⁶⁷The secularization of Buddhism in Ming also included the sangha's secularization refers to the close connections among the court, monastics and monks. Monks prayed for the emperors and Empress Dowagers' welfare in the hope of receiving their continual protection and patronage. Renowned monks also contributed to the popularization of Buddhism. Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535–1615) had blended Daoism ideas into Buddhist sermons, aiming at the harmonious of three teachings. Buddhist offered practical service to common people, even though they were not Buddhists. For example Yoga monks, who were ritual specialists, performed funerals or other rituals in people's houses. Buddhist medicines were also given by temples if worshippers needed them. The popularization of Buddhism made common people more familiar with the religion and also made it more influential.

It's worth mentioning that secularization is also a sociological theory that initially describes and explains religious change in the modern period (especially in the Western world). It initially claims the decline in the power of religions, but it is challenged by theories and empirical experience. Secularization theory still can

The cult of Guanyin was at the intersection of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Confucians recognised the doctrines of the cult of Guanyin, which emphasised the internalisation of morality, the enhancement of self-awareness and the development of compassion and love for the benefit of the world. Daoist teachings and beliefs also encompassed aspects of compassion and mercy. Some Daoist temples assimilated Guanyin into their pantheon. Beyond that, such assimilation of Guanyin also existed in the objects. Artisans of Longquan kilns put Guanyin and Zhenwu 真武, one of the highest five deities of Daoism, together in the same celadon shrine. Such kinds of Longquan celadon shrines often consist of two layers. Guanyin is usually on the first floor, depicted as a typical Guanyin of the South Sea, wearing an elaborate robe and crown, accompanied by Shancai and Longnü. While Zhenwu is beneath her, with his characteristic hairstyle and bare feet. In some cases, he is flanked by two attendants.⁶⁸ The sculptural arrangement indicates that Guanyin transcended religious boundaries and was possibly superior to Zhenwu.

Besides Confucianism and Daoism, sectarian religions and Catholicism aligned with her iconography and doctrines to garner familiarity and endearment among the followers. Religious societies have emerged since the late Ming. Since they were distinct from those that the government recognised, they were defined as sectarian religions, diffused religions, or popular secret societies.⁶⁹ They tried to explain that their god was incarnated as Guanyin or Guanyin became incarnated as the founder. There was a sectarian religion named *xidachen jiao* 西大乘教 (Western Great Vehicle Teaching), founded around the 1570s. Their precious scrolls claimed that three prominent nuns of the teaching were three different incarnations of the divine being, the Venerable Mother (laomu 老母). And the Venerable Mother is the

explain why religions differentiate from other aspects of society, but it doesn't simply mean religious declinations. The secularization of Buddhism in the Ming Dynasty does not fit in the theory of secularization of modern Christian religions. During the period of middle Ming was considered as undergoing a decline, but it received a revival in the late Ming. And religious institutions and rituals of Ming Buddhism were accessible to more common people. Additionally, Buddhism was not so dominant as Christianity in the West. Chen Yuh-Neu 陈玉女, *Mingdai fomen neiwai sengsu jiaoshe de changyu* 明代佛門內外僧俗交涉的場域 [The Field of Interaction Between Monastic and Lay Communities Within and Outside the Buddhist Community in the Ming Dynasty], (Taipei: daoxiang chubanshe, 2010), 5-32. Chün-fang, Yü, Denis C. Twitchett, and Frederick W. Mote, "Ming Buddhism", in *The Cambridge History of China*, 8, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 893–952.

⁶⁸ One example of the unique sculptural type of Guanyin shrines appearing with Zhenwu is preserved at the Tokyo National Museum. Guanyin and Zhenwu shrine. Ming dynasty. Longquan ware. Height 36.5 cm. Tokyo National Museum (TG1353). Quoted from Youn Heena, "Objects of Popular Devotion," 255-258.

⁶⁹ Recently, some scholars initiated a contemporary neologism, "Chinese salvationist religions" (jiudu zongjiao 救度宗教), to emphasize their central pursuit of the salvation of the individual and the society and attracted a large number of believers. Palmer, D. A., "Chinese Redemptive Societies and Salvationist Religion: Historical Phenomenon or Sociological Category?" *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore* 172 (2011): 21–72.

Bodhisattva Guanyin, the Bodhisattva Guanyin is the Venerable Mother. In addition, the temple's main hall only had a statue of Guanyin, and the founder, nun Lü, was placed in the rear hall with acolytes, Shancai and Longnü, who are considered to be accompanied by Guanyin.⁷⁰ Sectarian religions appropriated Guanyin's name, feminised iconographies, doctrines and miracle tales.

When Catholicism entered China, leading missionaries tried to convert Chinese people. The Jesuits also tried different ways of advocating Marian images, texts, and devotional activities to Chinese society, trying to match Mary's virginity and other virtues with the Confucian ideal of womanhood.⁷¹

Guanyin transcended Buddhism and Daoism's religious boundaries but was also recognised by Confucians. Emerging sectarian religions and Catholicism assimilated or even obscured the cult of Guanyin to develop their teachings. The cult of Guanyin gained recognition and acceptance outside of the Buddhist community, which also expanded her influence in Chinese society.

Hence, Guanyin was a popular topic in popular literature, paintings and handicrafts in the Ming Dynasty. Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), the famous playwright, quoted a Buddhist gatha in his renowned opera *The Peony Pavilion* 《牡丹亭》, saying that businessmen holding heavy treasures travelling to dangerous areas can be saved if they pray to Guanyin. His works usually contain elements resonating with Buddhist concepts, for he had a close relationship with eminent monks and was familiar with Buddhist classics. Besides, Guanyin frequently appeared in a kind of popular literature, gods and demons novels (*shenmo xiaoshuo* 神魔小說). Guanyin usually acquires one of the highest positions among deities and boundless power. But she also has a secular life with other deities and vivid characters as a human being. Popular literature brought an approachable and amiable Guanyin to people. Vice versa, Guanyin received familiarity and love from non-elites. The iconography of Guanyin was also assimilated into popular images. In another romance drama, the female character was illustrated as Guanyin. In the woodblock of *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*xixiang ji* 西廂記), 1611 edition, Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 was depicted as

⁷⁰ For instance, *Luoism* 羅教(also known as *wuwei* 無為教) used title "*dabei pusa*" 大悲菩薩(Great Compassionate Bodhisattva) and "*gu guanyin*" 古觀音(Ancient Bodhisattva Guanyin) in the treasure scrolls, both of which are names of Bodhisattva Guanyin.

⁷¹ Song Gang, "The Many Faces of Our Lady: Chinese Encounters with the Virgin Mary between 7th and 17th Centuries," *Monumenta Serica* 66, no.2 (2018): 303-356.

sitting with two legs crossed on a raised rock. Her cheek rests on her hand, and her eyes are closed in a meditative state. A giant rock and bamboo further enhance her elevated body at the back. These visual elements allude to the iconography of Guanyin. Certain gestures, for example, the royal-ease pose represented beautiful women and even indicated seduction.⁷²

Dehua also has a strong atmosphere of Buddhism. An important kaolin clay spot is called *guanyin qi* 观音岐 (Guanyin Hill). It was located in the southeastern region of Dehua County. The name *guanyin qi* is derived from an orally transmitted story about Guanyin. Here is the story: Guanyin was touched by a dying potter's family of Dehua, then appeared on the hill of *guanyin qi* and poured holy water on his body. The potter was finally cured. He made a statue of her expressing his gratitude and placed it on the hill where Guanyin stood.⁷³ *Guanyin qi*, also called *baini qi* 白泥岐, means white clay hill in Chinese. The earliest ancient kilns could be dated back to the Song Dynasty and continued through subsequent dynasties. Clay can be used directly to make porcelain after being smashed and grounded. The miracle story has no written reference but is popular among the local villagers. For clay is critical to the porcelain industry, the story tries to connect the features of Dehua wares, especially the translucent glaze and pure white body, with the power of Guanyin. He Chaozong was also believed to have been blessed with a mysterious talent from Guanyin for making vivid and beautiful Guanyin statues.

The cult of Guanyin in Ming became complicated with the domestication and popularization of Buddhism. Its doctrines convinced people across different classes and religions. Popular literature and handicraft work adopted its stories and images, reinforcing Guanyin's influence and giving her personality as a human being.

3.3 Religious Life of Women in the Southeastern Regions

Lay Buddhists and more female followers contributed to the growth and continuity of Buddhism in Ming, though official regulators and gentrymen seriously criticised the social life of women. There were considerable numbers of women engaging in religious activities in real life. Going to temples to offer incense was a favourite pastime for women of position and leisure. Monks and nuns were often invited to read sūtras and precious scrolls (*baojuan*) at the homes of the gentry and merchants. Even the royal family, for example, the Empress

⁷² Li, *Becoming Guanyin*, 7.

⁷³ Chen Jianzhong 陈建中, Chen Lihua 陈丽华 and Chen Lihua 陈丽芳, "Zhongguo Dehua cishi" 中国德化瓷史 [History of Chinese Dehua Porcelain]. (Shanghai: shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2011), 242.

Dowager Ci Sheng, was devoted to Buddhism. She and other royal women were critical to the revival of Buddhism in the late Ming.

One of the reasons for the fact that women actively engaged in religious activities in Ming and Qing for praying for the family was their responsibility. They had practical demands, such as childbirth, the grown-up of children, the health of family members and others related to their family. Among them, male heirs are critical. Pressure on women was particularly severe during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Giving birth to male heirs and bringing them to adulthood were important to the gentrywomen. By teaching loyalty and righteousness to the younger generation, the country indirectly taught people sincerity. The power of authorisation and encouragement of the regime and the maintenance of patriarchal ethics gave mothers the power to teach their sons as fathers, who were considered to be more powerful in the family. A virtuous mother means nurturing children and grandchildren with loyalty and filial piety.⁷⁴

As written in the Lotus Sūtra, Guanyin is believed to have the power of granting the followers heirs. Some miracle tales of Guanyin granting children in the Tang and Song dynasties can be found in the *Yijian Zhi*. However, more scripts and miracle stories were recorded until the Ming Dynasty. The indigenous scripture, *The Dharani Sūtra of the Five Mudras of the Great Compassionate White-robed One* 《白衣觀音大悲五印心陀羅尼經》, was believed to have the power of granting children to the followers and emphasise her protection of pregnant women and assurance of safe childbirths. It was circulated no later than the eleventh century, but Yu found thirty-five copies in the Library of Chinese Buddhist Cultural Artifacts at the Fayuan Monastery 法源寺 in Beijing. Among them, the earliest was from 1428 A.D, and most were written around the early seventeenth century. The followers went to Fayuan Monastery for an heir, and after “receiving” their children from Guanyin, they offered sūtra scripts written by themselves as tribute.⁷⁵ She also found three more sūtra copies referring to the White-robed Guanyin, and it is noteworthy that they are covered with an image of Guanyin and a child on her lap.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jolan Yi 衣若蘭, “Tianxia zhizhi zi furen shi—shixi Mingqing shidai de Muxun zizheng.” [天下之治自婦人始]—試析明清時代的母訓子政 [‘The Governance of the World Begins with Women’—An Analysis of How Mothers Educated Children to Engage in Politics during the Ming and Qing Dynastie], in *Zhongguo chuantong funv yu jiating jiaoyu* 中國傳統婦女與家庭教育 [Chinese traditional women and family education], Taipei: shida shuyuan (2005) : 91-122.

⁷⁵ Chün-fang Yü, “A Sūtra Promoting the White-robed Guanyin as Giver of Sons,” in *Religions of Asia in Practice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018): 350–358.

⁷⁶ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 94-97.

More heirs, especially male heirs, made family lineages in the southeastern region of Fujian larger in Ming. Threats from pirates and migrations from the coast pushed small units of family lineage to live together. Because the developed economy and flat geography are closely connected based on central land and business management.⁷⁷ Male heirs were critical to ensure the survival of family lineages. They brought small statues from temples to their homes, which may not follow strict orthodox regulations. A group of deities are considered to have power of granting their followers children. All of them are female and in charge of childbirth and safe birth. They are usually called *zhusheng niangniang* 註生娘娘.⁷⁸ Nowadays, *zhusheng niangniang*, in company with the main deities in the temples, is still common in the southeastern regions of China and Taiwan. Guanyin is usually represented as a begin lady, sometimes holding a boy on her lap.

Besides the responsibility of women, attending religious activities was the limited leisure they could have. In the families of the upper classes with a strong sense of propriety and legalism, women at home eat fasts, pray to Buddha, and invite nuns to give sermons and teachings. Common women, who have more freedom of movement, are not confined to this and participate in more outdoor religious activities related to the rituals of life and festivals. They took part in going to temples and climbing religious mountains that they would make plans for months in advance. During the trips, they could leave the family and socialise with fellow travellers, usually their female villagers or relatives.

Women's engagement played a key role in the cult of Guanyin in Ming when the rise of Child-giving Guanyin happened. They prayed for the childbirth and health of the heirs, attended various religious rituals, and offered and made numerous gifts for her.

Summary

In summary, listed porcelain statues from the Brooklyn Museum, the Phillip Allen Collection, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum show variations in Guanyin's gestures and compositions. The cult of Guanyin was popularised and secularised, convincing people across different classes and religions. Her image of a boy-like child on her

⁷⁷ Zheng Zhenman, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001.

⁷⁸ many other female deities are also believed to have the power of granting children to the believers, such as Bixia yuanjun 碧霞元君, linshui furen 臨水夫人, Jinhua furen 金花夫人, Mazu 媽祖 and so on. Zheng Suchun 鄭素春, "Taiwan zhusheng niangniang Xinyang zhi yanjiu." 臺灣註生娘娘信仰之研究 [A Study on The Goddess of Child Birth in Taiwan], *furen zongjiao yanjiu* 輔仁宗教研究 26, (Spring 2013):179-223.

lap, a reference to Dehua porcelain Guanyin statues, has been popular among the non-elites since the Ming Dynasty. The active involvement of women held considerable significance within the Guanyin cult.

Chapter Four Travel, Variations and Successions in Eurasia

Many unconsecrated Dehua Guanyin porcelain statues were exported to Europe, the New World and Japan in various routes. In Europe, exported Guanyin figurines were appreciated as ornaments on “porcelain rooms” walls other than placed in the Buddhist halls and worshipped as deities. Novel and highly sellable porcelain figurines spread not only in Europe but also in the New World. Then, the all-white *blanc de Chine* was replaced with colourful glazed porcelain. Mother-son-topic porcelain statues existed in the market. Some religious elements, like willow bottle and white parrot, were replaced by other auspicious ones, meaning wishes for the child.

4.1 Market and Transportation: From Dehua to the Victoria and Albert Museum

The earliest *blanc de Chine* in Europe is a white lion. The earliest porcelain figure in Europe is the *Caishen* 財神 (God of Fortune) statue in the British Museum with the inscription of 1610. According to Donnelly and other scholars, regular export of *blanc de Chine* started around 1650.⁷⁹ More Dehua porcelain figures, including Guanyin statues, were exported after the late seventeenth century. Dehua wares worked as an important part of maritime trades intercontinentally and intracontinentally. Before European traders started business with the Chinese government and merchants, Dehua wares had already been transported around the Asian continent. During the Southern Song Dynasty, the status of Quanzhou Port improved, and the export volume of Dehua kilns products increased greatly. The government of the Yuan Dynasty did not stop the abundant business but encouraged maritime trade. The large-scale production of Dehua porcelain in the Song and Yuan Dynasties far exceeded the local or regional demand.⁸⁰ Relics from shipwrecks and archaeological sites outside China proved the flourishing of Dehua kilns. Several shipwrecks, such as the Sinan shipwreck, Belitung shipwreck, and Houchugang shipwreck, found Dehua wares of the Song and Yuan dynasties. Those export wares reached various parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Excavated wares made of celadon and *qingbai*, include bowls, jars, boxes, cups, ewers and so on.⁸¹ In summary, Dehua took full advantage of the prosperity of

⁷⁹ Donnelly, *Blanc de Chine*, 189.

⁸⁰ Xu Wenpeng, “Export-Oriented Porcelain Economy in Song-Yuan China: Production Strategies, Interactions, and Networks,” (phD diss., University of Illinois, 2021), 83-84.

⁸¹ Sinan shipwreck was excavated in 1975, Houchugang shipwreck was excavated in 1974. Wan Jun, “Quanqiuhua,” 305-322. Meng Yuanzhao 孟原召, “Songyuan shiqi Quanzhou yanhai diqu ciqu de waixiao,” 宋元时期泉州沿海地区瓷器的外销 [Export of porcelain in Quanzhou coastal area in Song and Yuan Dynasties], *bianjiang kaogu* 边疆考古研究, (2006): 137-156.

maritime trade and developed a fairly large-scale porcelain production oriented towards export markets.

However, *blanc de Chine* was famous once they were brought to Europe by European ships. The first group of Europeans to reach China were the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century, and they established successful trade routes connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. By 1650, the Dutch had taken over the Portuguese dominance in the trade. The Dutch East India Company, or the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (in abbreviation V.O.C), was founded in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Then, the British India Company joined the business in 1700. In the following nearly two hundred years, the European traders satisfied a large part of the European and New World's demand for *blanc de Chine*.

During the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, Dehua white porcelain occupied only a small proportion of the overall quantity of East Asian porcelain. Most of the East Asian porcelain was used as tableware, but Dehua figurines and animals were selected for display. The extreme examples are the "porcelain rooms" of royal families, and some prestigious sites now in Europe still show the interior display of that period.⁸² Besides, it was admired by the European market, as shown by the extent to which both its forms and the material were imitated in the early porcelain factories in various European cities, such as Meissen, St Cloud, Vincennes, Chantilly Chelsea, Bow, Bristol, and so on.⁸³

The royal and upper-class families enthusiastically collected these Chinese white wares as tableware and exotic room decorations. By the 1680s, Dutch interiors contained elaborately conceived chinoiserie cabinets full of Asian porcelain, chinoiserie furnishing and mirrors.⁸⁴ The taste of *Blanc de Chine* spread from Holland to England and was credited to Queen Mary II. She was the Stuart princess and married the Dutch stadtholder of Holland, later King William of England (1689-1702). Since she had lived in the Netherlands, she set up her collection on display in England at Hampton Court Palace. Her collection ended up with 750 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in 1694, and it is one of the largest and oldest collections surviving from the seventeenth century. Among the remaining are several

⁸² Besides white Dehua white porcelain, other East Asian porcelain for display includes Chinese coloured over glaze-decorated wares, Japanese *Imari* and *Kakiemon*. Some prestigious sites include the Santos Palace in Lisbon, Rosenberg Castle outside Copenhagen, Kensington Palace in London, Burghley House in England, Oranienburg Palace near Berlin, Porzellansammlung in Dresden. Geoffrey Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and Its Influence on European Wares*, 258-280. Rose Kerr, "The Reception of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in Europe," UNESCO, accessed April 15th, 2024, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/knowledge-bank/reception-chinese-and-japanese-porcelain-europe>

⁸³ John Ayers, "Blanc de Chine: Some Reflections," 22.

⁸⁴ Luísa Vinhais, and Jorge Welsh, *Porcelain People: Figures from the Qing Dynasty*, (London: Jorge Welsh Research & Publishing, 2021), 22.

Dehua figures of Guanyin, a Buddha and a *luohan* (arhat).⁸⁵ In Spain, Dehua porcelain was imported by routes westwards and eastwards via Manila to Mexico and other territories in South America. In the seventeenth century, there was frequent shipping between the European continent and the New World. Demand for porcelain in New Spain was larger than in Spain, and it became profitable trade goods. Settlers in the New World bought Chinese porcelain as conspicuous decorations and tableware. Chinese wares show their wealth, social status and connections with mother countries.⁸⁶ Records of the merchant Lazarus Duvaux show that fondness for *blanc de Chine* had spread to France during the mid-eighteenth century.⁸⁷

In Germany, the known enthusiastic collector Augustus II The Strong (1670–1733) was famous for his sickness for porcelain. He acquired most of his collection from V.O.C., when Holland became the centre of consuming, transporting, and decorating Asian porcelain. He acquired 2500 pieces of Asian porcelain, chiefly in 1720-1720, of which 8000 remain in the collection. Among the collection, there are 323 porcelain figurines from Dehua. His Asian porcelain collection later became the majority of The Royal Dresden Porcelain Collection. In the “porcelain room” of Augustus II The Strong, the Japanese palace, the combination of porcelain, walls, and furniture radiated splendour and elegance. Re-decorated Dehua ware and other Japanese porcelain pieces were against the walls, which were lacquered and decorated with auspicious Asian patterns. Pure white porcelain pieces were usually put in the boxes in the bedrooms. The bed and other furniture were decorated with embroidery.⁸⁸ The porcelain statues engaged in a combination of exotic aesthetics.

In the Chinese context, the sitting Child-giving Guanyin statues, alongside Guanyin’s other various manifestations, are more than representations of the god. No matter whether in the temples or on the altars, they work as the mediator between Guanyin and the worshipper, hearing needs and wishes from worshippers.⁸⁹ In the context of porcelain of maritime trade,

⁸⁵ John Ayers, *Chinese and Japanese Works of Art in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2016), 4,104,154-158.

⁸⁶ Canepa, *Silk, Porcelain and Lacquer*, 310.

⁸⁷ Ho, “Blanc de Chine in Archaeological Perspective,” 41.

⁸⁸ Eva Ströber, “Dehua Porcelain in the Collection of Augustus the Strong in Dresden,” 19-24.

⁸⁹ The tension between iconic practice and iconoclastic rhetoric has been throughout Buddhism’s history. But from the perspective of material religion, the statues advocate for either a representational theory or an agentive theory of the idol. As a ritual object in the temples or on the home altars, Buddhist divine figures usually need *kaiguang* ritual, a series of rituals can open the inner eyes of the statues, to activate the personhood to hear and see the worshippers. However, orthodox discourses deemphasise the material. From this perspective, the *kaiguang* ritual is not needed, but only need worshippers respect statues. D. A. Palmer, Tse Martin M. H. and Chip Colwell, “Guanyin’s Limbo: Icons as Demi-Persons and Dividuating Objects,” *American Anthropologist* 121, no. 4 (2019): 897–910.

the audience of divine statues changed from Buddhist worshippers to Europeans who had little or no knowledge of Buddhism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The owners treated the statues differently, just as merely aesthetic objects representing exoticism and enchantment of material and technology.⁹⁰

4.2 “Sancta Marias” and other “Women with Children”

Since the seventeenth century, porcelain figures similar to the V&A 19-1886 Guanyin came to Europe in large numbers. V&A 19-1886 Guanyin and its variants exist in several European collections. Salable records from the English East India Company of the early eighteenth century captured that the Guanyin statues had various names when they entered the European market. In the records, ‘Sancta Marias’ frequently occurs and is the most popular model among the figurines. Except for ‘Sancta Marias’, other names refer to the female statues, such as ‘women with children’, ‘women each with a child’, ‘white women’, ‘women sitting’, and ‘white and gold images with children’. Except for the Child-giving Guanyin statues, few depict women with children. According to the existing collections, these terms probably all refer to the Child-giving Guanyin statues.

In the sale list of the cargo of *Nassau*, an English East India Company ship that returned from Amoy (Xiamen 廈門) in 1699, there were 70 pieces of ‘women with children’ and 71 pieces of ‘women with smaller children’, while there were also porcelain pieces entitled with ‘Sancta Marias’, they are 39 ‘large Sancta Marias’, 67 ‘small Sancta Marias’, 69 ‘Sancta Marias’. Another vessel, the *Dashwood*, sailed from Amoy to England, containing 177 ‘Sancta Marias’ and 230 ‘white women’. The *Dorrill* from Amoy contained 52 ‘Sancta Marias’ and 32 ‘women each with child’. the *Herne* contained 89 of ‘women sitting’. The *Montague* carried 4 ‘Sancta Marias’, 8 ‘Sancta Marias smaller’, 31 ‘White and gold Sancta Marias’, 16 ‘White and gold Sancta Marias, smaller’, 34 ‘Smaller white Sancta Marias’, 9 ‘women with children’ and 8 ‘women, smaller without children’. Besides, similar names referring to various Guanyin existed in some private trade sale lists, but fewer. Other names on the sale lists possibly refer to Guanyin statues too. For example, ‘women on lion’ probably depicts Simhanāda Avalokiteśara, Guanyin on a lion.

Geoffrey Godden thinks that ‘Sancta Marias’ refers to the standing Child-giving Guanyin statues, which depicts the standing Guanyin with a child in her arms⁹¹, as the Plate

⁹⁰ Smentek, "Global Circulations, Local Transformations," 43-57.

⁹¹ Geoffrey Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and Its Influence on European Wares*, (London: Granada, 1979), 259.

122A in Donnelly's book and 1980,0728.91 from the collection of the British Museum. It is generally a female figure in her lengthy, loose robe to the feet. The robe has a long mantle covering a crown modelled with a sitting figure and cross-like jewellery on her bare chest. Standing on a pedestal, she holds a child in her hands. Geoffrey Godden's conclusion is convincing, for the iconography of Madonna and Child generally depicts Madonna holding Jesus in her arms. Such statue has fewer decorations that relate to exotic contexts. The auctioneers and businessmen picked a European name, adapting the imported unfamiliar female figure to local interest.⁹² Besides, considering the numbers of 'Sancta Marias' on the cargo lists, accounting for almost half of the female figures, it may refer to more variations of standing Guanyin statues, e.g. FE.1-1987 of V&A Museum and PO 8638 of Porzellansammlung, a typical model of the White-robed Guanyin which also flooded into the market in the maritime trade.

Different iconographies of Guanyin came into the market and auction house, but it was only one and its variations were named 'Sancta Marias', which was probably the standing Guanyin. Others on the lists were given less appealing names. But the name 'women with children' and its similar names show that the sitting Child-giving Guanyin statues were probably not the ones called 'Sancta Marias'.

4.3 Re-decorations and Successive Porcelain Objects

In the market of East Asian porcelain, Dehua figurines had to compete with other kinds of porcelain. Though Dehua wares are famous for their pure white colour, they were comparatively cheap compared to other colour-glazed porcelain wares, such as *famille rose* and *famille verte*. They were not only chosen for the colour, but some of them were re-decorated in Europe again for the trending aesthetics.

Cold painting on imported porcelain seems to be a common practice during the Baroque period. White wares served as the canvas for the artisans so that decorators could customise objects according to their clients. Those pieces with cold painting were displayed in large quantities on ornamental display shelves and mantelpieces as part of the interior decoration. In the Dresden collection of Augustus the Strong, many pieces of Dehua porcelain figures still show remains of colours now.⁹³ Besides cold painting, enamelling was also a popular re-decoration applied to the Dehua figures. The object [Figure 4.1], now in the

⁹² Ibid, 261.

⁹³ Eva Ströber, "Dehua Porcelain in the Collection of Augustus the Strong in Dresden," in *Blanc de Chine : Porcelain from Dehua*, Rose, John G. Ayers, and Chuimei Ho, (Chicago: Art Media Resources, 2002), 19-24.

V&A Museum, is an enamelled larger piece of V&A 19-1886. It is 38*17*11 cm, enamelled with the pattern of chrysanthemum's petals, peony, leaves, branches and butterflies. The phoenix in the centre is quite eye-catching. Though it is a Dehua ware, it was glazed with an emulation of *Kakiemon*, a style of Japanese porcelain characterised by the overglaze decoration of red, green, blue, yellow, and purple on a slightly milky white surface. It became so popular in Europe that merchants recycled undesirable porcelain with *Kakiemon* enamelling for a higher price. Different from cold painting, enamelling is finished in the muffin kilns at higher temperatures. They mostly finished in the workshops in Holland and England.⁹⁴



[Figure 4.1] The Bodhisattva Guanyin in her aspect as the 'bringer of sons', 1680-1720 (made), 1745-1750 (decorated). China and England. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Object number: C.58-2004. Dimensions: 38 x17 x11cm.

The production of white porcelains, including white porcelain figurines, gradually declined in Dehua kilns. Dehua kilns turned to blue-and-white porcelains catering to demands

⁹⁴ Rodney Allen Schwartz, "The European Overdecoration of Oriental Porcelain in the Eighteenth Century", (PhD diss., The University of Minnesota, 2006), 42-44.

at that time. Several European plants acquired the technology of hard-paste porcelain, making delicate and vivid figurines more adequate for European customers' tastes.⁹⁵ However, some polychrome porcelain figures with the motif of “mother-child” can be found in the porcelain from China.

For instance, this is a candlestick depicting a Chinese woman holding a child in her arms and sitting on a rocky pedestal [Figure 4.2].⁹⁶ The woman is in a red coat with a small collar, black frog fasteners and an auspicious cloud pattern on a sky-blue skirt. Her hair is tied up in an elaborate style with some headwear in red and gilded ornaments. The boy in the light green robe is looking at the mother. Besides them, there is a tall yellow vase-shaped candle stick on a pink and green garden stool. Except for the religious symbols, this porcelain lady with a child has some basic elements of V&A 19-1886, such as a seated woman, a boy-like child on the left leg and a rocky basement. The resemblance of composition shows the possible inheritance of the topic of the mother and the child. Considering the improvement of modelling techniques, elaborate enamels and gilds and specific functions, the buyers or the possible commissioners were keen on this pattern.



[Figure 4.2] Lady with a Child Candlestick, Porcelain decorated in overglaze famille rose enamels and gold. 1736-1795. China. *Porcelain People: Figures from the Qing Dynasty*. Dimensions: 22.5 x 11 x 8 cm.

[Figure 4.3] Pair of Ladies with Children, Porcelain decorated in overglaze famille rose enamels and gold. 1736-1795. China. *Porcelain People: Figures from the Qing Dynasty*. Dimensions: 18.5 x 12 x 16 cm.

Another similar model is a pair of seated women with children [Figure 4.3]. These two bare-foot women wear light green long robes with orange collar, waistband, and orange

⁹⁵ Chen Jianzhong, “*Zhongguo Dehua cishi*”, 82-90.

⁹⁶ Luísa Vinhais, and Jorge Welsh, *Porcelain People*, 108.

trousers. Their hair is tied in buns with a blue scarf. The boys in their left arms have double side knots and wear red bellybands. They hold an orange lingzhi 靈芝 and a yellow fruit in each hand while looking at the female figures. The female figures are probably depicted as lower-class women because they have bare feet instead of binding feet. Besides, women who need to work often wear a waistband. Indeed, the boy indicates spirituality over the typical female figure, because lingzhi is believed to have magical energy from immortals. Acolytes of gods/goddesses usually hold an auspicious fruit, e.g. a peach. This pair of seated women and children is somehow an opposite edition of the V&A Child-giving Guanyin, in which the female figure is an ordinary person, but the child may represent a deity or be sent by a god. Dehua porcelain Guanyin figures in Europe were re-decorated or re-glazed later for people's And successive objects for the Child-giving Guanyin statues were colourful glazed mother-and-son figurines. Furthermore, for a preference for parental and maternal elements, porcelain explicitly designed for the European market depicting the topic of "Mother and Son" later joined in the European market.

4.4 Other Variations in Japan

The ceramic business between China and Japan has been an active interaction for a long time. Even during the Sea ban period in Ming and chained country (Sakoku) in Japan, private or public ships did not stop. Dehua Guanyin statues were also transported to Japan. in July of 1643 (the sixteenth year of the reign of Chongzhen) , 2700 pieces of Chinese wares were sent from Fuzhou, Fujian to Japan, most of which were Dehua white wares and a big portion were Guanyin porcelain statues.⁹⁷

However, a group of Dehua Guanyin statues once became the substitute for Madonna and Child. Tokyo National Museum has collected several white Dehua porcelain Guanyin from Urakami Village in Nagasaki. Some resemble the V&A 19-1886. They were named 'Mother Mary Avalokitesvara' in Japan. These statues were confiscated during the third crackdown on Christians at Urakami Village in 1856 (the third year of the Ansei era). Tokugawa Shogunate issued a harsh ban on Catholicism in 1612, which was reinforced in the following decades. Due to the fierce persecution, foreign missionaries were expelled, and the left missionaries and local Christians chose to betray their beliefs under harsh punishment. Then, foreign missionaries were driven out, and native Catholics abandoned

⁹⁷ Chen Yi-An 陳怡安, "Mingqing shiqi Dehua baici cisu yanjiu" 明清時期德化白瓷觀音造型與裝飾研究 [Styling and Decoration of White Porcelain Guan-Yin of Dehua in the Ming and Qing Dynasty], (M.A. thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 2011), 12.

their God under torture without choice. During the long period of prosecution, some Catholics proclaimed their renunciation of faith and pretended to convert to Japanese indigenous Buddhism and Shintoism. Still, they continued to believe in Catholicism secretly. Most of these hidden Christians lived in Nagasaki and were called ‘Kakure Kirishitan’ (Hidden Christian). Among their practices, they substitute the Virgin Mary and Child statue with a Buddhist Kannon (Child-giving Guanyin) statue for religious rituals.⁹⁸

Some of the Mother Mary Avalokiteśvara statues secretly bear a cross reminding hidden Christians of Catholicism, but most of them remain appearance. Object C-612 is almost like a copy of the V&A Child-giving Guanyin. It is 37 cm tall, almost the same as V&A 19-1886. They have similar figures in one statue, including the seated Guanyin, two acolytes including Shancai and Longnü, two branches with sacred objects, and even dragons on the rocky throne. The object on the left branch is also missing. Though the child’s head is lost, it is shown that Guanyin is holding a child on her lap. Besides C-612, there are several variations of it. Some variations don’t have Shancai and Longnü. Some of them have a bottle on the left branch. And some of them don’t have branches.⁹⁹ Object C-627 is a sitting Guanyin without a child, similar to the one of the Phillip Allen Collection. Besides them, some of the Mother Mary Avalokiteśvara statues are standing ones without a child, for example, object C-603. Unlike those similar statues in Europe, those transported to Japan are rarely decorated or enamelled. Most of them were individually placed in niches or private altars, for they were substitutes for the images of Madonna and the Child. The statues reserved their function as religious objects.

The relevance of iconography was not only the reason the hidden Christians chose a Buddhist deity statue as the substitute for Madonna, but they also prayed for an alternative to Jesus’ love, in the way of maternal theology.¹⁰⁰ As a harbour city, Nagasaki is an important site for the spread of Chinese Buddhism in Japan. Interactions between Chinese and Japanese temples were also active. In the Ming Dynasty, renowned monks travelled to Nagasaki and

⁹⁸ John Dougill, *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy, and Survival*. (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 272.

⁹⁹ Such variations include C-602, C-605, C-608, C-616, C-617, C-619, C-620, C-621, C-622, C-623, C-624, C-625, C-626, C-627. Information regarding Mother Mary Avalokiteśvara statues comes from the website of National Treasures & Important Cultural Properties of National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, Japan. Image content provided by Tokyo National Museum is derived from TNM’s “Digital Research Archives” site.

¹⁰⁰ “The Japanese tend to seek in their gods and buddhas a warm-hearted mother rather than a stern father. With this fact always in mind I tried not so much to depict God in the father-image that tends to characterize Christianity, but rather to depict the kind-hearted maternal aspect of God revealed to us in the personality of Jesus.” Quoted from Shusaku Endo, *A Life of Jesus*, trans. Richard A. Schuchert, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 1.

preached Chan Buddhism. The Pure Land and Nichiren schools emphasised devotion to Guanyin (Kannon in Japanese).¹⁰¹ The cult of Kannon was rooted in the local life and syncretised with Shinto traditions. Merchants, sailors, and locals would go to temples devoted to Kannon for protection and blessings. Various Dehua Guanyin statues came into Nagasaki, for the Japanese market has a demand for Chinese porcelain.¹⁰² With the spread of Chinese Buddhism, Dehua wares, especially Kannon statues, were in demand. Similarly to the situation in China, Madonna was popular among the Christians in Nagasaki, as evidenced by the surviving deities in the collection. When the fierce ban on Catholicism acted, the hidden Christians' turning to Kannon was not a coincidence but a replacement for maternal theology.



[Figure 4.4] Mother Mary Avalokitesvara. Dehua ware. 17th century. China. Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo. Object number: C-612, height: 19.2cm.

¹⁰¹ Kannon in Japanese. Renowned monks, for example, Yinyuan Longqi (隱元隆琦 1592-1673, Ingen Ryūki in Japanese) travelled from Fujian to Nagasaki to preach Buddhism and became a master of Zen Buddhism there.

¹⁰² Scholars argue that the resemblance between the two iconographies made Dehua Child-giving Guanyin popular among the Christians in Japan as a substitute icon for Madonna and the Child. Quoted from Wang Yiyun 王羿云, "Mingqing shiqi Dehua baici cisu xingsheng de beijing yanjiu," 明清时期德化白瓷瓷塑兴盛的背景研究 [Background research on the prosperity of Dehua white porcelain porcelain in Ming and Qing Dynasties], *bowuguan yanjiu* 博物馆研究 3 (2011): 65-69.

Summary

In summary, Dehua wares boast a rich legacy as a prized export commodity, gaining widespread renown, particularly through European trades. Dehua wares were popular among European royal families, and their collections ended up in several well-known museums. According to early eighteenth-century English East India Company records, the seated Child-giving Guanyin likely did not bear the ‘Sancta Marias’ title among Europeans auctioneers. Europeans’ favour for the pure white Dehua figurines gradually gave way to the colourful glazed mother-and-son figurines. Contrary to the European market, hidden Christians in Nagasaki took the porcelain Child-giving Guanyin statues as substitutes for Madonna and the child, showing their inquiry into maternal theology.

Chapter Five Conclusion

This thesis provides a nuanced examination of the Victoria and Albert Child-giving Guanyin statue (object number: 19-1886) within the broader context of transculturality from the 15th to the 18th century. This model and its slight variations received popularity in the maritime trade, which Donnelly described as “flooded into Europe” and now appear in several renowned European museums’ collections. Obviously, modelled parts, bold lines and stark silhouettes show that many Dehua porcelain Guanyin statues, like V&A 19-1886, rarely represent the high technique of divine deity sculpture. The conventional interpretation owes its popularity to the superficial resemblance between this Child-giving Guanyin and Madonna and the Child. However, this analysis disagrees, but argues that we should see this statue in a broader context of religious representation and transcultural objects from the 15th to the 18th century.

From tombs to small Buddhist niches and temple contributions, porcelain Guanyin statues changed from burial objects to mediators between the deity and worshippers. With the development of technique in Ming, *blanc de Chine* was made, and pure white Dehua Guanyin generated a new genre, echoing the revival of Chan Buddhism aesthetics. V&A 19-1886 depicts Guanyin of the South Sea, a local manifestation of Guanyin popular in southeastern regions of China. The cult of Guanyin underwent secularization and popularization in the Ming dynasty, and Buddhist images represented maternal compassion and protection in a more general sense. Worshippers of Guanyin from different social classes and religions left wishes and demands on the little image of the boy-like child, which has no basis in the orthodox classics.

The intimate image between female deity and child, symbolising compassion and nurturing, has represented a universal appeal. From China to Europe, V&A 19-1886 and variations no longer worked as religious objects but as exotic commodities. White Dehua wares and re-glazing wares were favoured for the Baroque interior decorations. European market seemed to be more interested in the topic of mother and child, since colourful small figurines filled in the export market of Guanyin statues after the middle Qing. But variations of V&A 19-1886 retained more religious significance among the Hidden Christians in Japan.

For Dehua wares, its history as export porcelain has been emphasized for a long time. They have pretty figurines depicting life scenes of Europe, customized tablewares, commissioned armorial porcelain and so on. This analysis does not intend to degrade transcultural interactions between different countries and continents, but tries to highlight the multifaceted influences shaping the artwork. Instead of reducing the Child-giving Guanyin porcelain statues to mere visual parallels with Madonna and Child, this analysis underscores the significance of contextual shifts in transforming religious objects across diverse cultural landscapes. Interpreting the complex interplay between religious imagery, material culture, and transcultural exchange enriches our understanding of the dynamic process.

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