

**By Jerry Xu**

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(Translated from Chinese)

Serendipity connected my parents with porcelain and brought our whole family from our native Shanghai to Jingdezhen. There they devoted their best years to the art of porcelain, and I grew up in an environment where people made and traded porcelain. This daily immersion gave me the chance to appreciate the beauty of porcelain early on. While I have seen enough true masters to know I lack the aptitude of a porcelain connoisseur, these years forged my lifelong passion. When I returned to Shanghai for my university studies, I felt a sudden sense of freedom; but I also felt a little lost. After I graduated, my parents returned to Shanghai, but I left them again, and ventured further. This time, we were separated by the Pacific Ocean and the North American continent.



On the road, faraway



Jerry leading a tour for students through ACM's *Guo Pei: Chinese Art & Couture* exhibition in 2019

For the next twenty years, I lived in America, Asia, and Europe. Amid my career pursuits, time pushed past, without compassion for my fading youth nor compunction for my greying strands. I finally made Singapore my country and home; it's where I find peace. I also produced two children – my contribution to “nation-building”. I volunteered as Mandarin docent for the Asian Civilisations Museum not only to push myself to brush up my rusty Chinese, but also to engage with and hone sensibilities for artefacts, and to better understand how trade and religion facilitated cultural exchanges, dialogues, and harmonisation. Naturally because of my background, I am especially fond of the museum's porcelain collection.

Whenever I walk into the Maritime Trade Gallery, I cannot resist the urge to direct visitors to the rare, large porcelain fish tank from Jingdezhen.

Depicted on the bowl-shaped tank are detailed scenes of traditional porcelain making, from clay-digging to kiln firing. Jingdezhen's mastery in overglaze decoration on porcelain, perfected during the Qing emperor Yongzheng's reign, finds its full expression here, with vividly represented human figures and meticulously rendered objects. Together, they tell the story in enchanting detail, like a long scroll slowly unfolding in front of us.



**Fish tank depicting the making of porcelain.** China, ca 1735. Porcelain. ACM, 2015-00195

Here, I travel back in time, to when Jingdezhen still bore its ancient name of Changnan; where kilns have been firing and chimneys smoking for over a thousand years. I hear a symphony – the whirring of the potter's wheel as clay is jiggered and jollied; the thudding footsteps of workmen treading on bluestone slabs, hauling bamboo racks laden with porcelain biscuits; the commotion and cries amid the heaving and stacking in kilns. I see deft hands sketching lines or splashing paint. I smell the sweet scent of burning pinewood, accompanied by a whiff of heat from firing kilns. I behold a story that began some three hundred years ago – when clay transcended its earthy origins and was transformed, by the magic of fire and the hands of skilled artisans, from a shapeless mass into a timeless, vintage masterpiece full of colours. I am not sure when this exquisite



piece left Jingdezhen, or from which port it set sail and crossed oceans. Neither do I know how it found its way to Europe, and how it braved rough seas and endured tough journeys to ensconce itself here in this building, near the mouth of Singapore River, where Sir Stamford Raffles first landed. Perhaps it is the shared memory of faraway home, memories entrenched in our heart and soul, that made me feel connected to this artefact. Home is not defined by time or space, but by strung memories that shaped poignant stories. As for my home, it's here, now; it's also somewhere afar.

**徐刚**

## 中文义务导览

因为父母与陶瓷结下的半生之缘，我在千年古城景德镇长大。虽没有“观千剑而后识器”的境界，但身边的人都和瓷打交道，日复一日的浸润，让我早早对瓷的神妙精深心有戚戚。大学离家，负笈于父母的故乡和我的出生地上海，突如其来的自由让我有点无所适从。毕业后，父母回到上海，我却走得更远，这次隔了太平洋和北美大陆。



在远方，在路上

接下来的二十余载，隔几年就在美洲亚洲欧洲间转换住处，忙忙碌碌间，年纪虚长，两鬓飞霜。在成为新新（加坡）人，又贡献了两位小公民后，岛国成为让我心安的吾乡。加入亚洲文明博物馆的华语义务导览团队服务访客，不仅“逼”我重习生锈的华语，更放由我与文物隔空神交，由浅入深的体会贸易，宗教带给文明的交流，对话，融合。让我倍感亲切的，还有馆里众多的瓷器收藏。



带中学生们看郭培服装展

每次走进海上贸易厅总忍不住带访客共赏这件稀有的景德镇大瓷鱼缸，缸上描绘了当时中国瓷器的制作工艺，我们顺时针环绕就可以一览制瓷从采集陶土直到开窑烧胚的全过程，清雍正年间的景德镇釉上彩工艺已是炉火纯青，人物器具刻画生动细致入微，仿佛一幅长卷在眼前徐徐展开。站在这里，我就像回到了那烟囱林立，燃

烧着千年不熄窑火的昌南古镇，儿时记忆的断片就像老电影，在面前一帧帧浮现：拉胚时轱辘车的嗡嗡声；挑着满是瓷胚竹架的运陶工在青石板上的脚步声；装胚时的人声鼎沸；此起彼伏。画瓷的一双双巧手，或勾勒，或泼洒。烧窑的松柴香，还夹带着窑火的热度。三百年前的瓷土，亲近了青山绿水的灵气，沾染了无数艺匠的聪慧，浴火而生五彩，烧成



这件古意盎然又超越时间的杰作。我没法知道这文物几时离开景德镇，从哪个港口远渡重洋，如何在欧洲落脚，又兜兜转转，终于来到离莱佛士登陆的新加坡河口不远的这座建筑，但我知道我们都拥有那一段远方家的记忆，似曾相识。家的感觉不在乎时空，只要有记忆相串。家之于我，在此时此地，也在远方。



“制瓷图”大鱼缸。中国，约1735年。瓷器。亚洲文明博物馆藏，2015-00195