

# Issues Related to the Production of Ceramics as Seen in the Letters of Père François Xavier d'Entrecolles

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## Abstract

François Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664 - 1741, a.k.a. Yin Hongxu) was a French Jesuit missionary who arrived in China in 1699 during Kangxi's reign and spent seven years in Jindezhen during his initial mission in Raozhou, Jianxi (1699-1719). In between proselytizing and church building activities, d'Entrecolles found time to visit local porcelain factories and acquired abundant knowledge of porcelain manufacture from his converts. In two letters, the first one written in 1712 and the second in 1722, he gave a minute description of porcelain production process as well as his findings on the preparation of enamels of different colours and a number of shaping techniques. As stated in his first letter, he was transferring the knowledge acquired from personal observation and investigation and revealing the secret of hard-paste porcelain manufacture in hope that the information will be useful for Europe in its attempt to produce ceramics as firm, refined, radiant and faultless as Chinese porcelains.

The arrival in China of d'Entrecolles may be traced to another French Jesuit missionary Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730, a.k.a. Bai Jin) who came to China in 1687 as one of "Mathématiciens du Roy (Royal Mathematicians)." Bouvet became later emperor Kangxi's mathematics and astronomy teacher. He was also credited for the establishment of imperial workshops. Much appreciated and trusted by the emperor, Bouvet served as Kangxi's envoy in 1693 and returned to his home country with instructions from the emperor to obtain more scientists and artists. Among the tens of missionaries who came at that time was d'Entrecolles, whose travel to China can thus be seen as a significant response to the meeting between the Chinese court and the Western world in the frame of the Sino-European exchanges in the eighteenth century.

Based on the porcelain production process and patterns mentioned in d'Entrecolles' letters, this paper studies the emergence of new product types targeting the European market in the first half of eighteenth century, the interaction involved

between the court and Jindezhen and the contemporary exchanges between China and other parts of the world.

**Key words:** François Xavier d'Entrecolles, Jingdezhen