

Constructed Value: The Meanings of Chinese Porcelain in Early America

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Abstract: China has a long-established history of porcelain production. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1991), participation in global trade brought more dynamics in Chinese porcelain manufacturing. In order to serve the growing western market, Chinese potters altered designs to accommodate the Western taste, resulting in a new category of porcelain production: China export porcelain. This paper will examine three groups of objects in the Phillips Museum of Art to illustrate the changing roles of China imported porcelains in Early America, and how Americans endowed the chinawares with new social meanings to establish its national power. The first group includes a famille-verte patchbox with figurative decoration, and an Imari plate with painted motifs of a garden scene. The second group includes a ceramic punch bowl, and the third group includes a set of a famille-rose teacup and saucer, and a blue-and-white small dish painted in typical Canton style. Through visual evidence and comparison with porcelain wares made for Chinese domestic market, and those that were made specifically for export, it can be concluded that the chinawares at the Phillips Museum of Art are specifically made for the western market. Through the analysis of the iconographies of the painted patterns, and the close examination of material and forms, this paper argued that the three groups of chinaware manifest that the changing role of Chinese porcelain. It went from a vehicle for imagination and curiosity in America, to an American's performance of national power in the global trade, and finally turned into cheap commodities in America due to its inferior production, loss of commercial monopoly power and Americans' gradual dominant power over the Chinese porcelain production. This paper argued that global trade assigns an array of values different from the ones generated in the original culture that produced these export products, and accentuates how meanings transfer and transform in cross-cultural contacts.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, porcelain produced in Jingdezhen held high social values in Western markets and homes. The quality, craftsmanship, and allure for Chinese porcelain remained superior to that of any other commodities available, and superior in the minds of many Westerners to the family pewter. More importantly, the fascination for Chinese porcelain manifests Americans' respect and curiosity for Chinese civilization. As French historian, Voltaire noted in 1768, "China once entirely unknown, for a long time thereafter disfigured in our eyes, and finally better known among us than many provinces of Europe, is the most populated, flourishing, and ancient empire in the world [1]." For Westerners, the information about Chinese cultural life remained focused on imported objects. The interest in Chinese culture, plants, architecture, and art prevailed in colonial America before the start of direct trade with Asia. The collections of Chinese porcelain in colonial American society show the fascination of Chinese objects held, due to their novelty and fine qualities. The introduction of chinaware in the early American household allowed the new world to imagine a highly civilized society in the Far East.

In part, Chinese porcelain was a novel and rare commodity for America during the mid-eighteenth century because porcelain came to America through informal channels: the fact that there was no secured source for its acquisition provoked anxiety and curiosity in colonial society. Porcelain wares came to the colonial society either in the personal cargo of a ship's crew or through American

merchants' kinships with European merchants. Paradoxically, the lack of direct trade with Asia stimulated curiosity in America, an urge to possess such exotic objects as porcelain.

2. Vehicle for imagination

The growing market in the west fostered a special porcelain category, called China export porcelain [2]. Jingdezhen- a region in China that was the center of porcelain production- had three different kilns targeting different clients: the state-controlled factories were set up to produce porcelain for the court; The second kiln was set up to produce daily-used items for Chinese villages and cities; The third client of the kilns was the merchant supplying the world outside China, for whom porcelain was one of a range of valuable trading commodities. Consequently, the designs of exported porcelain were not based on Chinese tastes. The process of altering authentic designs generated a new form of design that manifested Chinese potters' intentional distortion of authenticity based on Westerners' interpretation and reception of Chinese aesthetics. In effect, Chinese porcelain became a vehicle for the imagination of an unknown civilization. The demand for Chinese porcelain is based solely on its generic novelty and exoticism, failing to address the original cultural significance.

Evidence of the cultural transformation of Chinese porcelain begins with the standardization of designs made in China solely for the Western market. As examples, the porcelain plate (2014.00.299) [Fig. 1] and a porcelain makeup box (2015.00.1354 A, B) [Fig. 2] made in China during the mid-eighteenth century will be examined. The patch box has a mark of the reign of Qianlong (from 1735 to 1796) on the bottom. Visual evidence confirms this dating. Both pieces fall into the category of "polychrome ware"— accorded a privileged position in Europe since the eighteenth century [3]— and show the influence from the lush and luxurious design of Rococo patterns used in the West. During the 18th century, collectors in the West have separated the polychrome porcelains of the Qing dynasty into special categories: 'famille verte', 'famille rose', 'famille noire', and 'famille jaune', depending on the predominant enamel color [4]. What makes the porcelain during the reign of the emperor Qianlong stand out are the bright colors used on polychrome wares. Early Qing polychrome is decorated in clear, translucent watercolor-like enamels. Following the reign of Qianlong, the use of white generated more opaque and gaudy colors, and expanded the range of colors.



Figure 1. Plate. Mid-Eighteenth century. Porcelain with enamel decoration. 7/8" x 9 1/4" (dia). The Phillips Museum of Art. Franklin and Marshall College.



Figure 2. Ceramic snuff box, Qing dynasty, Qianlong Reign (1736-1795), ceramic and copper alloy, 2 1/4" diameter and 1 1/4" high. The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin and Marshall College.

Both the plate and the patch box have polychrome decorations, with the distinctive colors produced during the mid to the late eighteenth century: brick red, yellow, aubergine, translucent green and light brown, which is a typical five-colored polychrome ware produced during the reign of Qianlong. The use of wine color, which appears on the makeup box and the plate is also an innovation during the reign of the emperor Qianlong. The exterior surface of this circular box is decorated with a famille-verte pattern, having yellow as a dominant color on the body of the box—a painting of two women dressed in Mandarin clothes ornaments the lid. The setting is in an imperial garden, with trees and walls in the background.

Though the form of patch box was exclusively used in the west, visual evidence suggests that the box is not necessarily a product specifically made for the Western market, since the style did not completely turn away from Chinese traditional taste. The depictions of nature and figures are the most popular decorations on porcelain in China for domestic use during the reign of the emperor Qianlong. Figurative decorations for Chinese usually consist of intimate scenes, often representing the delights of Chinese life in the region of the great lakes or an imperial garden. Even with the similar forms and styles of decorations, the patch box is still distinctive compared to the fine domestically used porcelain. The visual distinctions illustrate the importance of the geographic identity of the chinawares in the West rather than the Westerners' engagement with Chinese culture. First, the quality of the painting suggests that it was a mass-produced box. According to one scholar, Guy Raindre, mass-produced paintings on porcelain were usually rendered less carefully and lacked fine detail [5]. This describes well the painting on the makeup box: the land is painted with rough and horizontal lines, nor are the colors carefully applied within the lines. According to Raindre, the great quantities of exported porcelain with figurative decoration during the course of this reign often lack any natural elegance, particularly in the decorations around the borders and rims. As we see in the patch box, the simplified peonies, garden walls, scrolled decorations, imperial women, and trees are elements of stereotypical design, copied out of pattern-books intended for the use of ceramic artists.

The figurative motif on this patch box presents a visual simplification that the Chinese potters intended to attract the westerners, who possessed little to no knowledge about Chinese culture. Figurative motifs on the domestically used porcelain wares usually present popular scenes from famous literature. However, the western perception of such forms of decorations meant that they drifted away from their original meanings. Rather, figurative scenes rapidly became the vehicle for westerners to imagine life in China. The figurative decoration was even categorized into a different style referred to by the French as *nouveau la Chine*. Consequently, the motifs on the patch box, though not necessarily being translated into a western aesthetic, was painted in a simpler, more comprehensible form. In other words, the paintings were transformed from narrative imagery that had anecdotal quality appreciated by Chinese, to only a generalization of Chinese figures dressed in traditional clothes. This design strongly suggests that it was probably copied from a design book. In *Chats on Oriental China*, J.F. Blacker states that this type of figurative decoration derived from Westerners' urge to bring back scenes showing the mandarins dressed in their sumptuous clothes [6]. Therefore, the most important aspect of this particular preference in the west has lost the original anecdotal quality it held in China, since Westerners were not engaged in the actual cultural contexts.

The plate at the Phillips Museum of Art exemplifies a specific category of Chinese porcelain made solely for export. They are also a manifestation of how the capital-driven global trade accentuates the alienation of culture through the processes of visual and material translation. The exported objects, especially the ones that were solely designed for westerners, were a construct of the market: they were produced in China, seemingly presenting the value of the East, but are actually constructed to meet European preconceptions of eastern art. This plate in the Phillips Museum illustrates that exported Chinese porcelain is a visual generalization transformed from an object that has the soul of an ancient culture, to a symbol of geographic identity.

The technique used for producing the plate shows the influence from Western taste, meaning that the productions turned away from traditional Chinese tastes in the simplicity of designs found during the seventeenth century. The plate is a hybrid of Chinese and Japanese production, which resulted from the competitive export market during the mid-eighteenth century. The use of red, orange, bright

green and black on the surface suggests a typical Chinese Imari porcelain. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Chinese Imari style appeared to be one of the most popular mass-produced patterns for export commissioned by East India companies [7].

What makes the plate stand out as typical of porcelain ware made for export are its painted motifs. These consist of a pair of white cranes, a sculptural stone, a Chinese bridge, and plants.

The style and motifs of the plate in the Phillips Museum are distinctive, compared to Chinese porcelain produced for domestic use. When producing for domestic use, Chinese potters selected figurative and natural design motifs with significant meanings. The production for the cultivated Chinese consumer gave significant cultural meanings to decorative elements. These meanings were lost on Western consumers, who were ignorant about Chinese culture, meaning they did not understand the deeper meanings beyond visual pleasure. As Frank writes, "Trade had an impact on taste just as taste formed domestic markets that impacted trade [8]." The scenery painted on the plate in the Phillips Museum, the crowded composition and lush, bright colors turn away from Chinese tastes for simplicity in a natural scene. Together, the motifs of cranes, trees, grass, bridge and stones suggest a garden scene, but there is no harmonious composition like those paintings on Chinese domestic porcelains. Although the decoration altogether that taken as a whole is just a roughly painted garden scene, the motifs themselves were essential. Each individual motif selected one had to effectively convey a sense of exoticism, what was "China".

The motifs that were differentiated from motifs designed for Chinese market manifest the fact that Chinese potters had encountered Western tastes and adapted their work to the Western interpretation of China. The lack of official trade with China prevented the colonial Americans from constructing their own aesthetics and market. Therefore, the significance of a piece of chinaware is its quality as a synecdoche in which the singular expresses the whole. All the motifs selected for the plate had to be recognizable to Americans so that they would be able to value an object as "oriental". Therefore, the selected motifs manifest what was "Chinese" to an American consumer of the eighteenth century, and how did they come to understand "Chinese".

Americans' encounter with Chinese culture creates cultural assimilation and coherent iconographies. This attitude can be examined from the motifs selected in the plate at the Phillips Museum. All the elements on this particular plate have a familiar resemblance with the motifs on the mural in Mount Vernon House created by an American artist. The success of producing an exported porcelain is to manipulate the designs to be both exotic and familiar. Evidence suggests that Westerners imposed significance on certain "exotic" motifs. For example, the blue sculptural stone appears in the plate as the centerpiece of the design, because it was the most recognizable oriental element. In China, the stone itself is a single visual icon of particular importance within early modern Chinese literati culture associated with Daoism. The significance of the stone sculpture can be found in Chinese paintings that depict scholars conversing in the company of large rocks [9]. However, as part of the decoration on the plate, the stone translated into a symbol of a geographic identity. The Western recognition of this particular motif can be found in a Dutch embassy account published in England in 1673, "There is not anything wherein the Chinese showed their Ingenuity more, than in these Rocks or artificial Hills, which are so curiously wrought, that Art seems to exceed Nature [10]." There are also many local imitations of Chinese wares that have this particular motif, which suggests that the rocks soon became a recognizable hallmark of the so-called Chinese style, and by extension, of China itself.

Together the motifs generate an oriental garden scene. Since garden scenery has never been popular in the Chinese domestic market, the ubiquitous appearance of garden scenery in the West presents a more complex social dynamic that exceeded the visual aesthetic. According to Chu, "The Chinese garden was a principle of the borrowed view, repurposed to offer a glimpse from a distance of an exotic architectural or botanic feature [11]". It manifests that the imported porcelain is a visual reduction from an object as a whole, to a symbol of geographic identities, and enabling a physical possession of an unknown civilization. As we can see, the design that westerners desired from China did not provide more information about China that exceeded their imaginary. Rather, Westerners demanding objects to fit their imaginations, Chinese potters altered the design to empty out the original

authenticity of a porcelain ware in the capital-driven global trade. According to Frank, Americans did not have enough knowledge about China to write a detailed description for the porcelain wares, “What is more significant is the porcelain wares’ silence on the subject. There is a gaping hole in the primary documents when it comes to detailed descriptions of the china owned in colonial American households [12].”

Geographic identities were the most important to colonial America, because to possess objects from the Far East presented its power as a colonial society, even without direct trade with Asia. Nonetheless, the possession of Chinese imports did not mean that the colonial society had the ability to be an active patron who could demand certain styles from Chinese potters. Americans had a passive role in global trade, and America had little impact on the porcelain market, so that all the exported styles were altered by Chinese potters based on Europeans’ tastes and perceptions, Americans had a passive role in global trade. Most colonial Americans acquired Asian commodities through smuggling or their kinships with European merchants [13]. The lack of direct trade during the mid-eighteenth century resulted in the chinawares becoming exclusive and luxurious objects.

3. A Manly possession

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the trade in exported Chinese porcelain declined in the European market. British ceramic manufacturing started to develop, and in order to support the domestic development in porcelain production, the British government imposed a higher tax on Chinese imported ceramics [14]. Consequently, Chinese porcelain production turned out to seek opportunities in America. In 1787, America established its independence, and successfully initiated an official trade with China. As an independent nation, America was finally coming to participate in the global market, and no longer negatively perceived Chinese domestic tastes through the European filters. As a young nation that was considered to be less developed than European countries, America was eager to demonstrate its sophistication by adopting European dinner services like commissioning special ordered armorial wares. With direct trade with China, Americans were finally able to actively access the imported porcelain with their own symbols, as the Europeans had done.

This is reflected in American commissions for armorial ware, a form of ceramics decorated with a coat of arms, either that of a family, or an institution or place [15]. The long-established history of the armorial dinner services in Europe usually stands for elite social status. Indeed, armorial wares have been popular on European pottery from the middle Ages. For Americans, certain armorial wares were bearers of patriotism and masculinity. During the 18th century, with the growing appreciation of Chinese porcelain, porcelain wares replaced silverwares as a favored form of armorial wares for elites. American finally had the chance to order customized designs through a formal channel. The armorial services commissioned by Americans illustrate that the American market negatively affected the passive reception of receiving mass-produced designs through the Europeans, to have a formal channel to customize designs that show national pride and independence. From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century, American commissions of the armorial ware was at its peak. The examination of the punch bowl [Fig. 3] at the Phillips Museum exemplifies this specific trend.



Figure 3. Punch Bowl. Enamelled Porcelain. Mid-Eighteenth century.
The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin and Marshall College.

The large armorial punch bowl (2014.00.498) in the Phillips Museum is an example of an armorial dinner service ordered from China. It presents an example of the cultural hybridity that emerged from this new market. First of all, the form of a punch bowl distinguishes itself as a special symbol of the mutual influence of China and the United States. The punch bowl was exclusively used in the West, and the material itself is emblematic of Chinese production. It incorporates an emblem of the Order of the Cincinnati, a fraternity of American and French Revolutionary War. In its center, the bowl pictures the Marquis de Lafayette within a border of 13 interlocking rings with the names of the original 13 colonies. The form of the portrait with thirteen enclosed colonial rings was derived from a print by Amos Doolittle, 1787, with the portrait of Washington in the middle.

Alienated from Chinese aesthetics, the product was endowed with American patriotism through its painted designs. The punch bowl with the eagle emblem exemplifies a popular form of armorial service in America, exclusively used for presenting the power of the United States [16]. The eagle decorations motif was highly demanded after the Revolutionary War of Independence. The eagle on the punch bowl has its wings arched down, looking to the left, is encircled by a green enameled laurel wreath, which is a typical design of the emblem of the Society of Cincinnati. The emblem symbolizes the ideals of the Revolution, representing the values that Washington, Lafayette, and their comrades had fought for during the Revolutionary War [17].

The society of Cincinnati is a perpetual body composed of lineal male descendants of commissioned officers who served in the regular American Army or Navy during the Revolution, 1775-1783. At the end of the eighteenth century, certain members of this patriotic Society had the emblem of the Society reproduced on Chinese porcelain ware for their personal use. The primary design of the emblems decorated on the porcelain in the Phillips Museum of Art is the gold medallion of the Society, depicting Cincinnatus meeting the Senators in the shape of an eagle. The badge of membership was designed by Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant [18], who selected the colors blue and white to symbolize the association between America and France. The image in the center depicts Cincinnatus receiving a sword from the Senators. On the reverse side, a single figure (Cincinnatus) appears with a plow, rising sun on the left and towers on the right. The head of the eagle is encircled by a green enameled laurel wreath.

According to the description provided by the Phillips Museum, the punch bowl in the museum belongs to the George Ross family, but it was commissioned a year after George Ross's death in 1780. One surmises that the bowl was possibly ordered by his son, or came to the Ross family through marriage. Visual evidence of the eagle badge painted on shows that the bowl was not the first order right after the Empress of China in 1786. The quality of the bowl and its painting are not as refined, and the details of the badge are limited. The eagle decoration does not have the refined details of the figures in the center. Instead, we can see a smudge of lines suggesting figure-like forms in the center. Compared to other painted emblems of the Society on other porcelain wares, it is safe to assume that they depict Cincinnatus receiving a sword from the Senators.

In effect, producing armorial wares is a sign of the Asian subservient to capital. One that completely transformed the role of Chinese potters from that of individual designers to craftsmen who were placed with the factory who executed orders. Chinese potters were not at all familiar with the patterns and letters on the engravings that American patrons presented. Consequently, in placing a commission, the "supercargo" or merchant would pass on instructions (often including a book-plate depicting the family's heraldic device) to Chinese decorators -- usually based in Canton --, who would then paint the necessary armorial design onto a series of porcelain forms obtained from the ceramic factories in Jingdezhen. There were reasons enough for the porcelain to be finished at Canton. It was much easier to have a complicated design executed by having the painter, the orderer, and the purchaser in the same place. As described above, Samuel Shaw, a supercargo in Canton, wished to have "something emblematic of the institution of the order of the Cincinnati executed upon a set of porcelain" by having the artist use figures taken from three engravings and from the emblems of the Cincinnati. However, the result was not satisfying for Shaw. According to him, "There were many excellent painters in Canton, but none of them possesses genius for design." Also, according to another American supercargo, "The Chinese are excellent copyists, but possess little or no inventive faculties [19]."

With their specifically commissioned motifs, armorial ware illustrates a form of imported porcelain that became completely alienated from the land of production as it transformed into an American national object. In this case, the porcelain itself has become a sign of China. Consequently, the identity of a Chinese object turned into a vehicle for Americans to perform as a national power, in the global market as well as at the level of the factory.

4. The fall of the celestial empire

Canton export porcelain experienced a decline in the European market at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but there was an increase in exports for America since America was still a rather young nation who just established a connection with China, and was interested in the cheap labor in Canton. However, economically, Chinese imports now had to compete with porcelain being made in England, where the Industrial Revolution was taking place. Great technological inventions led to a lessening value of many of the manufactured products imported from the Far East [20]. What's more, during the reign of Jiaqing (1796-1820), the political rebellions started in China, with the result that the ceramic production in Jingdezhen declined as well [21]. Even for imperial use, porcelain wares had little innovation in terms of the painted decorations and forms [22]. In effect, 19th-century porcelain wares made for the western market marked a transition of taste from the fascination with oriental chinoiseries to the neoclassical style in the Western world. The exports were mostly armorial wares or ceramics decorated with extravagant designs inspired by Rococo and Victorian style. As the westernized designs of the Chinese porcelain wares present the fact that indicate chinoiserie style had lost its popularity, manifesting the beginning of the fall of Chinese porcelain.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chinese porcelain was commonly used in America: even the poorest household had imported from China, meaning that the Chinese imports no longer functioned as a sign of high social status, and their exotic nature was no longer significant for American households. However, with the increase in the consumption of tea, porcelain tea services were still a crucial part in American cultural practice, and China still held the best representation of the greatest scale of porcelain manufacturing. The teacup and saucer (2013.03.14), [Fig. 4, Fig. 5] and the blue-and-white saucer (TC2015.73.86) [Fig. 6] in the Phillips Museum manifest these trends, the material if indicates a gradual decline in the supremacy of Chinese imports. The highly westernized tea set illustrates a transition of the nature of the America-China trade, and the role of Chinese porcelain in America at the beginning of the nineteenth century.



Figure 4. Saucer. Enamel-decorated porcelain. 1800. A: 2 1/4" x 4 1/4" (dia).
The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin and Marshall College.



Figure 5. Cup and Saucer. Enamel-decorated porcelain. 1800. A: 2 1/4" x 4 1/4" (dia).
The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin and Marshall College.



Figure 6. Blue-and-White Saucer. Porcelain. 1825-1900. 6 inches (diameter).
The Phillips Museum of Art, Franklin and Marshall College.

First, the famille-rose tea set in the Phillips museum exemplifies a mass-produced porcelain pattern for American and Americans' changing tastes in porcelain. In effect, the changing tastes present the decline of Americans' fascination with Chinese elements. The identities of Chinese producers were eliminated to only that of cheap labor. After establishing trade with the Far East, Americans no longer possessed a curiosity for Chinese culture; instead, Americans took advantage of Chinese manufacturing to build up its national consumerism. This particular phenomenon probably resulted from the establishment of the official trade with China: China was no longer entirely unknown to Americans, so that its geographic identity was no longer as significant as it was during the eighteenth century. According to Waln, an American merchant who actively participated in the trade with China during the 19th century: "The universal consumption of the principal article of import, increasing with the growth of the country and progress of the trade, has been a prolific source of emolument to our merchants and revenue to the government [23]." Chinese manufacturing became exploitable. Therefore, the oriental elements in this piece were eliminated, presenting the transformed role of Chinese porcelain.

This teacup is a typical mass-produced pink enameled ware specifically made for the western market. The set was ornamented with delicate floral designs. The borders of the teacup and saucer have a Fitzhugh pattern that was mass-produced specifically for the western market. The name 'Fitzhugh' was first applied to a particular type of design with four floral motifs in the center and a mosaic border, used to decorate a service ordered by one Thomas Fitzhugh in 1780. Later on, the 'Fitzhugh' pattern was used in a lot of porcelain wares for the American market [24], suggesting that French and British fashions increasingly replaced the taste for chinoiserie, especially in the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century.

This particular decoration is also popular on the armorial services. The naturalistic rendering of the floral designs is elegant. More importantly, the painted flowers take the forms of western roses, which replaced the Chinese forms of floral designs that were popular in the eighteenth century. For example, flowers that belong to the Chinese designs like peonies, Chinese roses, prunus, lotus and cherry blossoms, no longer appeared on mass-produced dinner services like the tea set in the Phillips Museum.

Last but not least, the quality of the porcelain ware and the painted motifs are refined compared to the other pieces in this mini-exhibition. The varied lines of the painting create a sense of three dimensionalities, and the colors are blended evenly. The scrolls are controlled in a restrained and elegant way. The high quality of this piece presents the fact that Americans had become more knowledgeable about porcelain. The amount of inflow of porcelain wares instructed Americans in the basic knowledge in connoisseurship. Since the fascination of the identities of Chinese products was lessening, the Chinese potters could no longer delude American consumers with bad porcelain wares with "oriental" motifs. In 1815, an American consumer Benjamin Shreve's employer directed him to bring back porcelain of fine quality, "Let the china be smooth, the cups and saucers in particular not thick and clumsy. Let the patterns of the Enamelled Tea Sets, Cups and Saucers and bowls be delicate, of lively patterns and shades. Those of a thick heavy wall will not bring such good prices by a good deal and cost as much [25]."

Most importantly, China no longer held monopoly power over ceramic manufacturing. The development of European manufacturing competed in both price and quality with Chinese imports. Neither the Chinese design nor the manufacturing of fine porcelain was desired in America. Therefore, the tea set in the Phillips Museum, though was made with refined quality, marked a transition in the nature of America-China trade: China became submissive to the US capital and the western taste. The disengagement from Chinese aesthetics forced Chinese manufacturing to be reduced to the labor force only, and completely emptied the Chinese cultural context in manufacturing the porcelain wares for the West. As for Americans, the most important aspect of a piece of Chinese porcelain ware turned from the geographic mystery that could elevate one's social status, into a practical possession of a fine utensil.

The blue-and-white saucer in the Phillips Museum has typical Canton style made specifically for exports. The saucer was decorated with Canton borders. The term Canton pattern refers to plates that have dash and scalloped border bands inside the blue edge. The general Canton motif is a painting of the landscape in Canton, which usually consists of a bridge in the foreground and Cantonese towers in the background. There are variations in the details of Canton blue-and-white wares. This particular style was widely imported to America throughout the mid-nineteenth century, which corresponds to the date for the blue-and-white saucer in the Phillips Museum.

The inferior quality of the plate in the Phillips Museum manifests the socioeconomic reasons behind the fall of Chinese imports in the American market. The rough painting on the saucer and the inferior quality of this mass-produced porcelain indicates the fall of the Chinese porcelain in the global trade after the First Opium War during the mid-nineteenth century. The lines painted on the saucer are smudged and thick. The motif of trees lacks details and harmony. Since the mid-1820s, the quality and innovation of porcelain production in China declined drastically, a casualty of the decaying economy and political chaos [26]. The blue-and-white saucer in the Phillips Museum also exemplifies this circumstance. In the records, most of the imports from China were blue-and-white Canton porcelain wares with the paintings of Canton garden, with variations in shapes, sizes and qualities. Most of the patterns painted on the Canton wares were careless and rough during the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, documents record American consumers' discontent with the inferior paintings during the mid-nineteenth century. John Latimer noted that: "I have got the chinaware of the same pattern as my own. I could not find in the Celestial Empire a Landscape pattern that pleased me [27]." Other examples manifest the mass-produced nature of similar Canton landscape paintings on Chinese export porcelain wares.

Compared to the European made porcelain wares with landscape decorations, the saucer in the Phillips Museum presents the fact that Chinese porcelain manufacturing was no longer competitive in the global market. The development of European porcelain production provided American porcelain with better decorations with more details. A coffee pot (2014.00.119) in the Phillips Museum is decorated with a detailed Chinese landscape. It was made during 1830-1860, which is the same period that the plate was made. The coffee pot was made by using transfer-printing in England. In comparison to this refined ornamentation on the coffee pot, the plate seemed to be a lot more roughly made.

Not only had the quality fallen during the mid-nineteenth century, China, as a country, had lost its dignity after being defeated in the First Opium War. The quality of Chinese porcelain manufacturing could not compete with the rising European potters, and Chinese porcelain was no longer an icon of a highly civilized society after China was humiliated and defeated during the war. The saucer in the Phillips Museum illustrates the end of an era for Chinese export porcelain.

5. Conclusion

The exhibition in the Phillips Museum of Art manifested three different stages of Chinese porcelain wares in America, and it also indicates the growing American power. First, the geographic identity of porcelain ware was the most important aspect for the colonial society since China was considered to be a highly civilized society, and porcelain production held the highest status in the world, and all the European countries were eager to achieve. The objects from the exotic land became the vehicle for

curious Americans to imagine the ancient empire, so that the Chinese imports, though they might be poorly made, were signs of high social status in the colonial society. After America established its independence, Chinese imports became an icon of masculinity and national power. At last, with the decline of the international power of China and with the growing power of the western countries, the Chinese aesthetic was not significant anymore, and the porcelain manufacturing in China had lost its privilege. The problem with global trade is that the objects were never the manifestation of the culture that produced them; instead, the trade further accentuates the gaping hole between different cultures. In this case, the imported objects were endowed with American social ideals and power, vehicles that convey the American attitudes of the orient. The long-established art of Chinese porcelain lost its beauty in the land of America, and became the measurement of American national power.

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