

Porcelain for Everyone: The Chinaware Aesthetic in the Early Modern Era

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In North America, archeological digs at eighteenth-century sites often unearth shards of porcelain, fragments of delicate teacups and saucers, intermingled with the more mundane artifacts of daily life: chicken bones, leather soles, and steel blades. Archeologists see the presence of “chinaware” as a hallmark of social status, as valuable evidence linking households in port cities of the East Coast and trading posts on Western frontier to the cult of gentility that transformed British-American manners and consumption habits in the 1700s. Material culture scholars acknowledge that this porcelain, along with painted earthenware found in digs, tied North Americans to the global trading networks of the early modern era. However, few connect these objects to an unfolding taste culture that has been drawing the Eastern and Western worlds closer together for more than a millennium.¹

This paper offers a way of putting these beautiful blue-and-white shards within the context of globalization, drawing on the scholarship of curators who specialize in the many dimensions of ceramics, including production, distribution, use, and meaning. It first presents a brief history of porcelain’s circulation outside of eastern Asia, looking at early efforts to emulate the stunning artifacts by Islamic and European manufacturers. The paper next considers the difficulties associated with technological transfer, focusing on European efforts to discover the mystery behind porcelain and to create reasonable facsimiles using earthenware technology. Finally, it moves to the nexus of design and culture, examining the emulation of Asian motifs by European manufacturers and considers the significance of the chinaware aesthetic to early modern consumers in North America.

¹ See, for example, Bernard L. Herman, “Multiple Materials, Multiple Meanings: The Fortunes of Thomas Mendenhall,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 19 (spring 1984): 67-86; Lois M. Feister, “Material Culture of the British Soldier at ‘His Majesty’s Fort of Crown Point’ on Lake Champlain, New York, 1759-1783,” *Journal of Field Archeology* 11 (summer 1984): 123-132.

Historian Robert Finlay has outlined the salient features of porcelain's role in world history with reference to the cross-fertilization of Asian and European cultures.² This essay builds on his many insights, while positing another way of examining the world ceramics trade of the early modern era. While Finlay focuses on *porcelain production*, I look at the broad impact of a porcelain look, or *chinaware aesthetic*. The porcelain look--which germinated in China, flourished in parts of the Middle East, and eventually circulated through the West--reflected cross-cultural preferences for colorful, delicate ceramics and stimulated a global demand for them.

Whether in fifteenth-century Persia or eighteenth-century Philadelphia, potteries embraced the chinaware aesthetic using the materials and technologies at hand. Some products were made from porcelain, but most were not. By shifting away from porcelain *per se*, this paper examines the broadest impact of the chinaware look. This angle of vision zooms in on the contours of consumer demand, rather than the diffusion of manufacturing techniques, as the barometer of cross-cultural exchange.

Jewel of the East: Porcelain's Asian Origins and Islamic Adaptations

Scholars generally agree that porcelain originated in China, where craftsman developed the first high-temperature kilns before the dawn of the Christian era in the West. For centuries, Chinese potters used their sophisticated hillside kilns to produce a type of durable, vitrified ceramics known today as stoneware. They also used this firing technology to make the first porcelains in the tenth century. By the fourteenth century, Chinese potters had also adapted methods for ornamenting porcelain in various colors. They increasingly concentrated on porcelain production, making other types of ceramics obsolete.³

A brief technical sidebar clarifies some of these differences. What distinguished stoneware from porcelain was the new product's higher degree of whiteness, hardness, and translucency. These characteristics were achieved by porcelain recipes that included feldspar and kaolin, minerals that melted and fused during high-temperature firings to endow vessels

² Robert Finlay, "The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History," *Journal of World History* 9 (1998): 141-187. This essay builds on the many fine points offered by Finlay's important synthesis, but it diverges from his chronology on several points.

³ This chronology comes from Robert J. Charleston, ed., *World Ceramics: An Illustrated History* (Secaucus, N. J.: Chartwell Books, 1977), Part II: The Far East, pp. 41-68.

with a glassy whiteness. Porcelain first developed in China in part because geology had blessed it with major deposits of the raw materials needed for high-fired ceramics.

During Europe's middle ages, Chinese traders exported vast quantities of ceramics to Japan, Indo-China, the Southeast Asian archipelago, India, the Islamic Middle East, and eastern Africa.⁴ The wide-reaching Chinese trade in ceramics influenced designs in Korea, Annam (North Vietnam), and Siam (Thailand).⁵ Korean potters, for example, emulated the many varieties of Chinese celadon glazes and *T'z'u-chou* stoneware, which achieved porcelain-like whiteness by the application of a slip applied under the glaze. Among the eastern lands, Japan harbored strong aesthetic sensibilities that revered rusticity and imperfection, making crude stoneware vessels particularly appropriate for the humble Zen tea ceremony.⁶ In part because of these lingering traditions, Japanese potters did not undertake porcelain manufacturing until later.⁷

Outside of these regions, the Chinese porcelain aesthetic had an early influence in the Middle East. V&A curator Oliver Watson divides the history of Islamic pottery into three periods, each drawing "new impetus from the latest kind of Chinese imports," while generating innovations of global significance.⁸ These developments are worth reviewing for what they reveal about aesthetic and technological exchange prior to the early modern era. These interactions also established behavioral patterns that reappeared in Europe.

During the ninth century, the arrival of East Asian porcelains inspired Islamic potters to produce similar luxuries for Muslim consumers whose tastes were growing more cosmopolitan. Without good sources of kaolin or knowledge about high-temperature kilns, resourceful Islamic craftsmen created imitation porcelain from earthenware. They made vessels in Chinese shapes and covered them with an off-white glaze, made opaque by the addition of tin oxide, to achieve the look of porcelain. Here the copying ended, however.

⁴ Charleston, p. 42.

⁵ Charleston, p. 43.

⁶ T. Hayashiya, M. Nakamura, and S. Hayashiya, *Japanese Arts and the Tea Ceremony* (New York: John Weatherhill, 1974).

⁷ Charleston, p. 43.

⁸ Oliver Watson, "Islamic Pots in Chinese Style," *Burlington Magazine* 129 (May 1987): 304-306 (quotation, p. 304).

Middle Eastern potters decorated the Chinese spin-offs in distinctive ways, painting them with distinctive Islamic motifs in copper green and cobalt blue.⁹

In the twelfth century, a new type of Chinese ware covered with carved decoration was imported into the Middle East. Islamic potters emulated these *chingbai* wares by reviving the ancient Middle Eastern technology for making quartz paste ware. Put simply, Islamic craftsmen replaced the clay in their formulas with a finely ground quartz powder, which in low-temperature kilns created a fine white body that looked like porcelain. This new frit ware became the basic material used for creating Middle Eastern ceramics, and was later used by Europeans, notably Italians during the Renaissance, seeking to emulate the porcelain look.¹⁰

The cross-cultural exchange between Islamic and Chinese potters revved up in the fourteenth century. A reverse transfer of technology occurred, with ceramics innovation moving from the Islamic world to East Asia during the early 1300s. Then, Chinese potters started using Persian cobalt to decorate porcelain. Esin Atil, curator at the Freer Gallery of Art, summarizes: “The employment of cobalt-blue is often referred to as one of the greatest innovations of the world of Islam and one which influenced Chinese ceramics.”¹¹ These new Chinese wares in blue-and-white reached the Middle East, where early fifteenth-century potters copied the shapes and decorations with great fidelity.¹²

How the Blue-and-White Bug Infected Europe

This summary of Islamic pottery and Chinese porcelain, however simplified, opens the doors on to a broader discussion of consumer taste and technological change. Pure white chinaware had captivated Middle Easterners, while deep Persian blue had made Chinese heads spin. Both technologies were catalysts for aesthetic change in different parts of the world. Middle Easterners—consumers, potters, and traders—played a crucial role in forging

⁹ Watson, “Islamic Pots in Chinese Style,” p. 304; Esin Atil, *Ceramics from the World of Islam*, Freer Gallery of Art, Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1973), pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Watson, “Islamic Pots in Chinese Style,” p. 304.

¹¹ Atil, *Ceramics from the World of Islam*, p. 3.

¹² Watson, “Islamic Pots in Chinese Style,” p. 304-305. For more on Chinese motifs on Islamic pottery, see Fay Arrich Frick, “Possible Sources for Some Motifs of Decoration on Islamic Ceramics,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 231-240.

links between the material culture of East and West. In the years ahead, Islamic preferences pressed westward, also helping to reshape the tastes of European consumers and the look of their ceramics.

As we have seen, Middle Eastern potters had emulated Chinese porcelain by covering earthenware with an opaque white glaze, establishing tin glazes as an Islamic tradition. Muslim conquests of North Africa and Spain carried the tin-glaze tradition, via emigrant Muslim craftsman, to the Iberian Peninsula by the thirteenth century. Crusaders also brought Islamic pottery to Italy, where earthenware manufacturers copied the opaque glazes. In each place, local tastes demanded distinctive designs, spurring design innovation. In Spain, the wares had a lustrous tint; in Renaissance Italy, majolica exploded with low-relief figures and a polychrome palette.

By the 1500s, Italian potters had the upper hand, however. Having mastered the tin-glaze tradition, they invented a distinctive polychrome style known as majolica that found ready customers among the wealthy classes. Italian princes and gentleman, who had long eaten off silver plates and drunk out of gold goblets, craved something new and different. White ceramics—called “porcelain” by one Venetian—fit the bill, primarily because the pale palette made food look and taste better than metallic dishes. The Italians had also adopted haute cuisine: new types of food served in multiple courses. The shift from eating to dining was accompanied by the rise of table manners and the need for specialized vessels to present the food. People no longer ate with their fingers or from shared bowls. Specialized dining equipage, including majolica plates and dishes, figured into the game of status competition. In the mid-sized city of Faenza and a handful of rural places, majolica workshops emerged to meet the need. Although majolica represented a very small percentage of Renaissance Italy’s artistic output, it had a broad influence in Europe over the next few centuries.¹³

By the early 1600s, pottery mania had spread to northern Europe, where entrepreneurs established tin-glaze factories—and helped to disseminate the porcelain aesthetic throughout the West. A snapshot of Dutch activity homes in on the point, while showing the important role of Italian majolica potters in technical transfer. In 1512 Antwerp, the Italian Guido Andriesz set up a tin-glaze pottery that ran until 1570s, alongside a rival business run

¹³ Richard A. Goldthwaite, “The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 42 (spring 1989), 13-14., 19-27.

by the Floris family, also from Italy. From Antwerp, entrepreneurs established potteries in Haarlem, which in turn generated spin offs in Delft (1584) and Rotterdam (1612). The potteries at Delft, which flowered during the Dutch golden age, had an enormous effect, reorienting the ceramic tastes of European consumers.¹⁴ The output of the Delft potteries rivaled the Middle East, particularly in tile production.¹⁵ More important, the term “Delft” became synonymous with blue-and-white earthenware.

Although the Delft potteries owed much to the tin-glaze tradition, they owed more to the accelerated pace of trade during the age of exploration. The china trade spurred the first porcelain collecting bug. Since the early fourteenth century, a few pieces of Chinese celadon and blue-and-white ware had found their way into the hands of European elites. For example, Queen Elizabeth’s favorite, the Earl of Essex, was reported to have owned a group gilded Chinese porcelains.¹⁶ However, most Europeans had settled for imitation porcelain, that is, tin-glazed earthenware. In 1499, Vasco da Gama returned to Portugal from India with porcelain gifts for his royal sponsor, Dom Manuel I. Portuguese adventurers reached China directly in 1517, and subsequent return voyages carried blue-and-white porcelain specially decorated for Manuel. By 1557, the Portuguese had established a commercial outpost in Macao, eighty miles south of Canton, dominating the trade between China, Japan, and the West.¹⁷ Portuguese traders were more concerned with carrying goods around East Asia than exploiting the Western craving for eastern luxuries.

By the turn of the century, other nations had ventured into the East Asian trade. Spain had gained access to Chinese porcelains through the Philippines. In northern Europe, the fortunes of the new Dutch Republic depended on overseas trade, and Dutch admirals battled the Portuguese for control of the high seas for access to Canton. Initially, Chinese porcelain found its way to the Netherlands when Dutch ships intercepted Portuguese merchantmen loaded with the goods. Among the most famous Dutch hauls were the 100,000 pieces of porcelain taken in 1604 from the captured Portuguese vessel, the *Catharina*.

¹⁴ Charleston, pp. 157-158.

¹⁵ Alan Caiger-Smith, *Tin-Glazed Pottery in Europe and the Islamic World* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 137.

¹⁶ Clare Le Corbeiller, “China into Delft: A Note on Visual Translation,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, new series 26 (Feb. 1968), p. 269.

¹⁷ Finlay, “The Pilgrim Art,” pp. 142, 166-167.

This blue-and-white chinaware, nicknamed *kraak-porcelain* after Portuguese cargo ships called carracks, was auctioned in Amsterdam.¹⁸

English and French royalty jumped at the chance to own genuine blue-and-white porcelain, vying with each other for pieces of *kraak-porcelain*. During the sixteenth century, the first porcelain collecting craze spread throughout the continent, infecting the European royalty and aristocracy, who rivaled each other for Asian china in the competition to show off their riches.¹⁹ The Dutch middle classes followed suit, buying blue-and-white baubles to decorate their townhouses and country villas.

By the early-seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company, or Vereenigte Oost-Indische Compagnie, had wrestled the international porcelain trade away from the Portuguese. After the Estates-General granted it an Asian trading monopoly in 1602, the East India Company imported Chinese blue-and-white porcelain directly from the Far East. A steady business developed through the East India Company's offices in Batavia, and one of its importing offices in the port of Delft. Between 1602 and 1657, the Dutch East India Company imported more than three million pieces of Chinese porcelain to Europe.²⁰ An interruption of the trade with China, caused by civil disturbances there, lasted from 1657 to 1683. Important kilns at Jingdezhen, where exports originated, were destroyed.²¹ To meet the demand for chinaware, the Dutch opened commerce with Japan, importing porcelains from there to Europe. The China trade hiatus and the steady demand encouraged Dutch potteries to jump on the blue-and-white bandwagon.

Dutch potteries responded to the fad for mock Oriental porcelain with entrepreneurial savvy, technical innovation, and aesthetic adaptation. In Delft, capitalist-investors owned the potteries and hired master potters to oversee daily operations. Elsewhere in Europe, potteries were run by traditional craftsmen or, if making luxury goods, operated under

¹⁸ Caiger-Smith, *Tin-Glazed Pottery in Europe and the Islamic World*, pp. 128-129; T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, as Recorded in the Dagb-Registers of Batavia Castle, Those of Hirado and Deshima, and Other Contemporary Papers, 1602-1682* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954); C. J. A. Jorg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982).

¹⁹ J. H. Plumb, "The Royal Porcelain Craze," in *In the Light of History* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), pp. 57-68.

²⁰ Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*, p. 227.

²¹ Arlene M. Palmer, *A Winterthur Guide to Chinese Export Porcelain* (New York: Crown Books, 1976), pp. 10-11.

thumbs of a wealthy patron who dictated output. The Delft masters, or shopkeepers, also ensured adherence to the rules set by the powerful guild that dominated the city's highly accomplished painting and engraving trades. At midcentury, many Delft potteries occupied old waterfront breweries, which provided good access to shipping and helped to reshape production. The vertical architecture necessitated the development of upright kilns and the division of labor.

Put simply, the Dutch potteries prospered by capitalizing on the vogue for Chinese export porcelain. They used traditional technology imported from the Middle East via Italy—low-fired, tin-glazed earthenware—while adjusting their decorating techniques to create design that met the growing European taste for Asian objects. By twenty-first century standards, the Dutch innovations were relatively uncomplicated. From around 1620 to 1670, the workshops made vessels from earthenware, painted them in cobalt blue, and covered them in opaque tin glazes. The result looked like blue-and-white porcelain. Around 1670, the potteries introduced multicolored decorations, inspired by Chinese enamels. They crafted these items just as the blue-and-white, achieving the polychrome look through additional painting. Each additional color was brushed on, and the piece was fired in a low-temperature oxidation kiln. This process melted the colors and the gilding on to the surface of the ware.

The Dutch potters aimed, not to make exact copies of Chinese porcelain, but to produce reasonable facsimiles that met consumer satisfaction. Today, style-conscious Europeans shop at Zara and H&M to find affordable examples of clothing recently shown on high-fashion runways. Shoppers don't expect to find exact replicas, understanding that the low-priced spin-offs are mass-market translations of runway lines. Similarly, Dutch blue-and-white earthenware was a translation of Chinese porcelain, rather than the real thing. To many consumers, they were good enough.²²

Delft fed the growing chinaware aesthetic with a range of articles: garniture sets of lidded jars that resembled Chinese shapes; pictorial plates for shelves and walls; and hand-shaped flower vases with multiple sockets like fingers. While the Dutch East India Company introduced tea into Europe around 1610, Dutch potters were slow to make tea wares, adding

²² Le Corbeiller, "China into Delft," p. 270.

the items to their repertoire around 1670. There was also little demand in the Netherlands for the enormous table services that kept the French faience potteries going. However, workshops in Rotterdam and Amsterdam adopted the blue-and-white style to tiles, using large kilns to make them by the thousands. These decorated tiles found ready application in Dutch interiors, where they covered walls, fireplaces, and stoves.

The Royal Porcelain Craze and Its Influence

Delft more than satisfied the middle-class craving for “china,” but European royals yearned for objects that would truly set them apart. During the sixteenth century, several Italian Renaissance princes, bitten by the porcelain bug, established laboratories for discovering its mystery. The experiments often took place behind castle walls, with some dukes conducting the secret trials themselves. There was a gentlemanly cachet associated with scientific pursuits, and the quest for porcelain enhanced a prince’s cultural capital. Ultimately, Grand Duke Francesco of Tuscany produced a type of artificial china, nicknamed Medici porcelain after his family dynasty. Modeled after Islamic frit wares of the twelfth century, Medici porcelain showed European royalty that it might be possible to make real china outside of East Asia.²³

European aristocrats who didn’t tinker with chinaware formulas in secret laboratories found other ways to augment their cultural capital through the porcelain craze. Outside of Berlin, royalty built specialized rooms to display porcelain in their palaces. Between 1652 and 1667, Louise Henriette, the wife of Friedrich Wilhelm I of Brandenburg-Prussia, created her *Porzellanabinett* at the Oranienburg palace. When the future King Frederick I of Prussia rebuilt the palace, he rearranged the collection. He also installed a mirrored *Kabinett* to display 400 more porcelain items at Charlottenburg palace, built for his wife, Sophie Charlotte, between 1695 and 1706. In Berlin during 1709, Augustus the Strong, king of Poland and elector of Saxony, probably saw these princely porcelain rooms. Shortly afterwards, Augustus started acquiring Asian porcelains and built a Japanese Palace to house his chinaware collection.²⁴

²³ Goldthwaithe, “The Social and Economic World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica,” pp. 28-29.

²⁴ Clare Le Corbeiller, “German Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, new series, 47 (spring 1990), pp. 5-6.

For Augustus, however, collecting didn't satisfy the drive for distinctiveness. By the time he saw the china cabinets at Oranienburg and Charlottenburg, Augustus was determined to uncover the secret behind china production. In 1710, he opened the first European porcelain factory at Meissen, directed by Johann Friedrich Böttger. Convention credits Böttger, an alchemist, with the European invention of porcelain, but recent scholarship suggests that Augustus had been financing china research by E. W. von Tschirnhaus, a distinguished natural philosopher, since the 1690s. In 1707, Augustus ordered Tschirnhaus to take the hotheaded Böttger, who had boasted knowledge of the philosopher's stone and claimed he could synthesize gold, under his wing. The two men collaborated until Tschirnhaus's death in the fall of 1708. The following spring, Böttger announced that he had discovered the formula for porcelain. The most likely scenario is the Tschirnhaus had uncovered the secret, and the opportunistic Böttger took advantage of this knowledge after the older man's death.²⁵

Regardless, Böttger directed the new royal porcelain works at Meissen, where he remained until his death in 1719. As noted by curator Clare Le Corbeiller of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Meissen factory was for Augustus the symbol of a new industry that would contribute to the Saxon economy as well as a profound cultural symbol. Meissen introduced a white ceramics that rivaled Asian porcelain in its hardness, translucency, and malleability. The key ingredient was kaolin, a type of white clay discovered at Colditz in 1700, and new high-temperature kilns that could be fired to 1400 degrees Celsius, necessary to fuse the kaolin, feldspar, and quartz in the ceramic mixture.²⁶

Between 1710 and 1750, Meissen alone manufactured porcelain in Europe, creating a stylistic precedent for later factories. Augustus played an important role as a tastemaker, commissioning porcelain for personal use and as diplomatic gifts, while lending examples of Chinese porcelain to the factory as product prototypes. Artisans from Augustus's court in Dresden played important roles at Meissen. For example, court silversmith Johann Jakob Irminger (1635-1724) became Meissen's artistic director in 1712, while lacquerer Martin Schnell (c. 1685-c. 1740) worked there between 1711 and 1712. Princely oversight added

²⁵ Martin Schönfeld, "Was There a Western Inventor of Porcelain?" *Technology and Culture* 39 (Oct. 1998): 716-727.

²⁶ Le Corbeiller, "German Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century," pp. 6-7.

prestige to the factory's output, ensuring that Meissen set the taste standards for European porcelain.²⁷

A great admirer of court life at Versailles, Augustus emulated French social customs, including the elaborate formal banquet. These lavish ceremonial meals required extensive table displays, including silver and porcelain. In the 1600s, mismatched assemblages of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain had met satisfaction, but in the 1700s matching services made from Meissen porcelain became the vogue at Dresden and at other European courts. In addition to matching dinner services, the Meissen factory also specialized in porcelain table ornaments. During the 1730s, small porcelain figures were added to the table decoration during the dessert course, replacing the sugar sculptures that had been introduced in Italy during the sixteenth century. Meissen figurines depicted the pageantry of court life, including royal pursuits such as the hunt and the theater.²⁸

Between 1750 and 1775, Meissen's success inspired a flurry of copycat factories, all supported by royal coffers. By midcentury, nobles across Europe had invested in private factories for making the fragile aristocratic bibelots. There were porcelain works at Berlin, Frankenthal, Fürstenburg, Höchst, and Nymphenburg in the German principalities; Vienna in Austria; Capo di Monte and Doccia in Italy; and Buen Retiro in Spain. The French king, Louis XV, added an extra royal imprimatur to the Sèvres line by personally supervising its annual sale.²⁹

When the porcelain rage crossed the English Channel, British capitalists, recognizing a timely investment opportunity, gave china mania a new twist. As the customs of sipping chocolate, coffee, and tea became hallmarks of English civility, the market for delicate drinking accessories expanded. In response, British entrepreneurs, who lacked access to the secrets of true chinaware production, introduced a type of mock porcelain named bone china after the calcined animal bones that gave the ware its distinctive whiteness. At Bow, Chelsea, Derby, Longton Hall, Lowestoft, and Worcester, factories imitated European and Asian styles in bone china.³⁰

²⁷ Le Corbellier, "German Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century," p. 7.

²⁸ Le Corbellier, "German Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century," p. 8.

²⁹ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 4.

³⁰ Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, p. 4.

The British example shows how the chinaware aesthetic diffused among the middle classes, permuting as it circulated through the culture. Bone china became one of the focal points in polite social rituals, including tea drinking. Technologically, bone china was a distinctive British innovation created by entrepreneurs in emulation of exotic Asian imports. The organization of the trade and its markets were dependent on tastes set in London, the great metropolis, and by consumption patterns that were new to the British Empire in the mid to late eighteenth century.³¹

During the late 1600s and throughout the 1700s, British consumers learned to appreciate Chinese porcelain, imported in vast quantities by the English East India Company, which like its Dutch equivalent had a chartered monopoly on the East Asian trade. From the mid 1740s to the mid 1790s, however, twenty-five English factories were created to make mock porcelain on British soil. Five were located in London; the rest were scattered throughout the countryside close to good clays, skilled labor, and water transportation. These factories targeted consumers up and down the social ladder. The factory at Chelsea made goods for the highest levels of society, including Queen Charlotte's household, while Bow manufactured a "more ordinary sort of ware for common use." Other factories, including those at Vauxhall and Limehouse, also concentrated on blue-and-white table and tea wares for everyday use. Whether from Staffordshire or Worcester, most English bone china was marketed through sales agents who had London showrooms frequented by the provincial merchants.³²

Aesthetically, how did English bone china compare with Asian and European porcelains? Many bone china factories emulated the chinoiserie produced by the tin-glazed potteries at Delft and the royal porcelain manufactory at Meissen. Although Worcester could produce high-quality wares equal to Sèvres, the factory became famous for tea wares that took their shape from English silver and their floral ornament from Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. The fusion inflected just the right combination of European and Asian styles, making

³¹ Hilary Young, "Manufacturing outside the Capital: The British Porcelain Factories, Their Sales Networks and Their Artists, 1745-1795," *Journal of Design History* 12 (1999): 257.

³² Young, "Manufacturing outside the Capital," p. 258.

Worcester the bone china of choice English consumers, from the middling sorts to the gentry. The chinaware aesthetic evolved, mutating into hybrid styles.³³

In the late eighteenth century, the chinaware aesthetic extended its reach to British North America through exports of Dutch tiles and pottery, Chinese porcelain, and English bone china. Imported to the seaboard colonies by British shippers, blue-and-white chinaware graced the tables of Philadelphia merchants, Virginia planters, and New York craftsmen. A few colonial businessmen took advantage of the growing market by venturing into porcelain manufacturing at the moment when fellow colonists lobbied for a boycott of British goods and the concomitant investment in domestic manufactures. In the years leading up to the American Revolution (1774-1783), entrepreneurs Gousse Bonnin, a native of England, and George Anthony Morris, a native of Philadelphia, established North America's first chinaware factory, using skilled German and English workers. In a 1769 Philadelphia newspaper, Bonnin and Morris announced their plans to establish a Quaker City factory for making "as good porcelain as any heretofore manufactured at the famous factory in Bow, near London."³⁴ The American China Manufactory was slow to get started, but in 1771 it captured the attention of the British press, which reported "that better china cups and saucers are made there than at Bow or Stratford."³⁵ One shopper reported visiting the American China Shop that year to buy some gilded tea cups that had a "border round the edges in imitation of *Nanking* China."³⁶

The British Parliament's repeal of the Townsend Acts shortly after the establishment of the American China Manufactory set in motion an intense competition between the Philadelphia factory and English counterparts. Now that English goods could be obtained tax free, some Americans questioned the need for a native porcelain industry. As British trade resumed, Bonnin and Morris abandoned their chinaware endeavor. Their experiment, however short-lived, testifies to the extension of the porcelain craze into North America. Just as European

³³ Young, "Manufacturing outside the Capital," pp. 262-263.

³⁴ *The Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 3, no. 49 (25 December 1769-1 January 1770), p. 402, cited in Michael K. Brown, "Piecing Together the Past: Recent Research on the American China Manufactory, 1769-1772," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (Dec. 1989), p. 556.

³⁵ *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), no. 13,062 (10 January 1771), cited in Brown, "Piecing Together the Past," p. 562.

³⁶ Joseph Shippen Jr. to Edward Shippen, 26 February 1771, Shippen Papers, Manuscript Group 375, The New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, N.J., cited in Brown, "Piecing Together the Past," p. 563.

royals enjoyed chinoiserie, colonists understood their privileges to include the consumption of sumptuous goods, such as English bone china and American porcelain.³⁷

Sumptuousness and the Porcelain Aesthetic

This short history of the porcelain aesthetic—a series of vignettes rather than a comprehensive survey—posits an alternative for thinking about the globalization of the ceramics trade in the early modern era. Notably, it allows us to understand the continuity between consumption in courtly and capitalist economies, rather than stressing the differences between the two. As anthropologist Jane Schneider has noted, the desire for sumptuous surroundings is fundamental to human experience. Today's mass merchandisers, from Macy's to Target, offer sumptuous products to the masses. In effect, they have democratized courtly consumption practices. Everyone can buy matching porcelain dinner sets with traditional motifs in Chinese, French, or English styles. The diffusion of the chinaware aesthetic offers an early example of this process, which Schneider has studied for fabrics and clothing.³⁸

Looking at porcelain from the vantage point of the aesthetic experience, rather than the production process, allows us to think more broadly about global industries. In the absence of trade associations, industrial unions, and professional organizations, what exactly constitutes an industry? If we define an industry by its material, we limit porcelain's reach to articles made from kaolin. If we think about the chinaware aesthetic, we can begin to capture the enthusiasm experienced by early modern consumers, who experienced the pleasure of courtly consumption by owning a piece of Chinese porcelain, a Delft plate, or an English teapot.

³⁷ As an aside, Americans merchants launched their own china trade in the 1790s, accumulating great fortunes that were invested and reinvested in industrial development during the antebellum era. The great industrial cities of Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts, for example, were bankrolled by New England families initially involved in the far eastern trade. This interesting sidebar speaks to the far reach of the chinaware aesthetic. Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Philip B. Scranton, eds., *Major Problems in American Business History: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), chap. 6.

³⁸ Jan Schneider, "From Potlatch to Wal-Mart: Courtly and Capitalist Hierarchies through Dress," keynote address at "The Fabric of Cultures" conference at the CUNY Graduate Center, New York, N.Y., March 10, 2006.