ART AND POLITICS: HOW AMERICAN AND CHINESE CULTURES Merged THROUGH THEIR TRADE RELATIONSHIP

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The following exhibit functionally presents four remarkable objects and artworks created by artists in China and America during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The artworks aim to represent the interchange of cultures between the two countries, enabling artists to embrace and be inspired by the other's customs.

The trade routes, established to exchange certain goods, sustained the growing relationship between China and America; thus, allowing them to expose each other to different art forms.

Three of the artworks exhibited establish the interconnectivity of culture and art, as each piece holds intricate designs that contribute to the characteristics of both cultures.

The final artwork presents a portrait of George Washington, one of America's most influential presidents who embraced the Chinese culture through the imports of Chinese artifacts.

The relation of all these artworks is an essential narrative of the positive impact that came from the United States and China's trade relationship, as it resulted in a unique exchange of cultures through magnificent art pieces.
Artist in Boston
Chair made during 1740-1760
Decoration added circa 1800

Made with Mahogany wood, paint, and reproduction upholstery
40 1/8 x 22 x 20 1/2 inches (101.918 x 55.88 x 52.07 cm)
The presented side chair is in the Queen Anne style by having “a yoke-form crest with a vasiform splat, trapezoidal slip-seat, and cabriole legs joined by vase-turned stretchers ending in pad feet.” (Peabody Essex Museum)

After 1800 there was an insurgence of interest in Chinese decoration in the Boston area, as evidenced by the chair. One of the most basic Chinese patterns is painted on the two sides of the chair. Furthermore, the chair has bridges, buildings, and figures in the middle.

In ancient China, such auspicious patterns had four meanings: “rich, noble, longevity, and joy,” which expressed people’s yearning for a peaceful and happy life. The chair’s expression of historical Chinese culture signifies the merge of cultures between America and China through their trade relationship.
Artist in Jingdezhen, China
Photo by Dennis Helmar
Made around 1750

Medium: Porcelain
5 1/4 x 7 5/8 x 3 1/2 inches (13.335 x 19.368 x 8.89 cm)
The astonishing porcelain teapot was made by artists in Jingdezhen, China during the 18th century. The teapot portrays a vivid image of three men propped up against crosses with men and knights surrounding them.

There is an absence of color within this teapot, instead, the artist seems to use a variety of dark shades to create depth within the work. However, there are hints of gold placed on specific areas, such as the armor of the knights, which makes the teapot more valuable.

The use of shadows is vital in this piece of art as it creates a three-dimensional image that brings the work to life. This art piece alludes to a religion that was not predominantly followed during the 18th century in China, being Christianity. The portrayal of Christianity in the teapot is an example of China embracing America's culture through art, as Christianity was a prominent religion during that time in America.
Artist in Jingdezhen, China
Photo by Dennis Helmar
Circa 1832

Medium: Porcelain
1 1/4 x 10 inches (3.175 x 25.4 cm)
The exhibited porcelain plate was collectively made by a group of artists in Jingdezhen, China.

The plate acts as an excellent symbol of how American culture was merged into Chinese artworks through their trade relationship during the 18th & 19th century. The various colors and vivid portraits of Chinese children, animals, and plants illustrated through traditional Chinese artistic techniques gives the plate an imperial aesthetic.

The presence of the American ship Friendship, also known as the Friendship of Salem, coupled with the American flag manifests how the trade route granted a pathway for the exchange of cultures.
Artist in the United States After Gilbert Stuart, Circa 1800

Oil on Canvas portrait of former U.S president George Washington.
13 1/2 x 11 inches (34.29 x 27.94 cm)
The exhibited painting is a portrait of former United States president George Washington.

Chinese porcelain and ceramic were used as testaments for luxury and wealth in the colonial powers. Washington specifically admired such artifacts from China. Therefore, to cement American access to Chinese imports, the American Empress of China ship was constructed along with a new trade route.

The ship set sail on Washington’s birthday and returned to the U.S with valuable imports such as fabrics, tea, and porcelain. Through the new trade route, the U.S and China were able to exchange cultures and art through iconic artifacts.

By contrasting Washington’s black and white outfit with the vibrant red curtain in the background, the artist places emphasis on Washington. The use of mainly red, blue, and white colors alludes to Washington’s American ideals and highlights his role in American trade and politics.
Bibliography


