The Complex Relationship of Economy and Culture

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Our exhibit

From a mug crafted across the globe with a wealthy American consumer in mind, to a chair made in New England modeled to replicate Asian artistry, there is a lively yet complicated conversation occurring between these nations. In the following exhibit, you will watch this complex interaction unfold before your eyes.
Child’s Chair
Artist in New Bedford, Massachusetts: 1815-20
Various woods, whalebone, walrus tusk, baleen, mother of pearl, and wool

Although the original artists is unknown, this piece was created in Massachusetts during the nineteenth century. The creator used inspiration from China to create a textured design around the back of the chair to give it an intricate look. While the main colors of the chair consist of various browns, the use of gold through the intricate designs give the chair a royal and expensive look. Many pieces of Chinese art from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consist of few or simple colors with complex designs to give them an eye-catching look. This chair was later purchased by Captain Gideon Howland Jr., who is assumed to have bought the chair as a gift for his daughter.
Here is an example of a privileged and rather greedy American customer whose wealth provided them access to the treasures being designed in Asia. Charlotte lived in Salem and married a rich John Forrester, and as a man involved in expensive trade, frequently adorned his wife with luxurious and foreign styles. She is shown here in a Kashmiri wool shawl; soft and colorful, this accessory simply revolutionized the fashion of the elites yet appropriated Asian culture.
Mug with a view of Guangzhou, 1875

In the 1800s Guangzhou, China was the most important port in China. The city was a main starting point for the Silk Road as it was near the Pearl River. The economy of Guanghao, China became dependent of tea as it’s main transport to countries in Europe and the Americas. This mug is a representation of the economy of global trade pushing its way into the culture of the town. It depicts an average day of merchants and townspeople paying, selling and shipping tea. Europeans and Americans could drink their tea out of the mug while appreciating where it came from.
Porcelain - Punch Bowl, 1800 - 1815

Similar to the mug from Guangzhou, China, this punch bowl was created in China specifically for Americans and European sailors as a souvenir. Unlike the mug this bowl was not made to be used but to be admired. This piece of fine art was crafted with a under construction ship on it as a symbol of American growth of economy with the help of the shipbuilding industry. Ships that they then used to sail over the China and trade. Chinese artists knew that symbols and scenes of American identity and greatness were becoming more popular. And inherent would become high ticket items that Americans in China on business would naturally be attracted to.
In Conclusion

Our exhibit is an examination of the cultural effects of global trade. From a chair emulating Asian art, a portrait of a wealthy American to Asian art specifically designed for American purchasing, our exhibit takes you on a voyage back in time and across the ocean. We accompany art as it makes its way around the world. And cultures as they intertwine with each other. In order to establish a better understanding of what we are now.