Loving Exploitation

Presented by Paulina, Shumin, Micky, and Heather
As the United States rapidly industrialized in the 1700s–1800s, they began to admire the exotic and foreign culture of the Chinese. Unfortunately, such ‘admired’ culture was followed closely with racism and exploitation. You will now witness the progression of American appreciation leading to the eventual exploitation of Chinese culture in the halls of this exhibit, curated by Heather Nadolny, Paulina Shiraishi, Shumin Guan, and Miky Rahmani.
Chinese artist (unknown)

*Holy water font, about 1735*

Porcelain
H: 8 ½ in, W: 5 3/8 in, D: 3 in
(H: 21.6 cm, W: 13.7 cm, D: 7.6 cm)

This vessel on display is meant to hold Christian holy water. The top is a beautiful, unique, baby blue floral design with the religious monogram, ‘IHS.’ The bottom of the vessel is meant to hold ‘holy water’ and has the same unique floral design.

Christianity, which spread to Asia through forced exploitative religious conversions, is a very present theme in this vessel. The usage of Chinese labor to create the vessel truly illustrates how the Chinese artistic style was adored by Westerners, but was also exploited for their religious needs.
Chinese artist (unknown)
Guangzhou, China

*Portrait of George Washington, after a portrait by Gilbert Stuart*
1800 – 1805

Reverse painting on glass
frame H: 32 ½ in, frame W: 25 ½ in

This portrait of George Washington replicates a portrait created by Gilbert Stuart. Washington is facing left while looking towards the viewer with a tight lipped expression.

This portrait embodies the theme of exploitation of Chinese artistry since an American ship captain during the peak of the Canton Trade commissioned Chinese artists to create these works. Due to copyright complications, Chinese artists were deemed unoriginal by many Westerners.
Punch Bowl, 1800–1815

Porcelain
dia.: 11 ¼ in (28.6 cm)

This elegant punch bowl was created by a Chinese artist in the beginning of the 1800s. On one side, it features the building of a ship with the inscription “The Strength and Wealth of a Nation.” On the other side, it presents an eagle holding onto American flags and military awards.
Chinese pottery was purposely Westernized as a way to appeal to American sailors so that it would be more likely to be brought to the Western world. Rather than to focus on traditional Chinese designs, the punch bowl glorifies the shipbuilding which was essential for American trading; it was created in such a way to advocate for American pride, as the eagle grasping onto the American flags is a patriotic symbol of America.
Sung Sing Kung Factory (Chinese artist)
Ningbo, China

Moon bed, about 1876

Satin wood, Asian wood, ivory
102 ⅜ in x 101 3/16 in x 66 ⅛ in (260 cm x 257 cm x 168 cm)

This lavish wood bed forms a moon shape with its curved top and features various carvings and inlays on all its surfaces. The intricate details of the moon bed model the staple of Ningpo, a city renowned for furniture.
A mere six years after the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 displayed this Chinese moon bed in its exhibition, the U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which barred Chinese immigrants from entering the United States for ten years. The exposition celebrated the centennial anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a document meant to grant freedom and liberty to all, but this notion of freedom did not extend to Chinese craftsmen and laborers. This blatant hypocrisy models how Westerners revered the aesthetics and art of Eastern cultures, but they refused to acknowledge the humanity of the people who created the art and allow them into the U.S.


