The World At Our Fingertips
Through Art and Culture

By: Nate Rahmani, Aroni Rosario, Victoria Valasiadis and Kitty Xia
Teapot (1750)

This teapot was made in Jingdezhen, China around 1750. The teapot itself is made out of porcelain which was produced predominantly in China for its durability and exotic characteristics (art). The design features 3 men on a cross while soldiers and people surround them. This is similar to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, a part of Christianity, which was a major religion that was taught in the West, making this teapot more appealing to the Western area. The teapot goes through many shades of grey to either emphasize or dull out certain details, but each individual brush stroke is very clear. The lack of color brings out the gold areas of the painting, from the nails holding the people on the cross to the helmets the soldiers are wearing. This piece of art was a mixture of both Chinese culture (art) and Western culture (Christianity), showing China’s acknowledgement and support to America.
Punch Bowl (1755)

This porcelain punch bowl made originally in Jingdezhen, China was imported to America and was eventually put into the Peabody Essex Museum. All around the punch bowl is a vibrant display of a large village with homes, hills and a main waterway in the center. Porcelain was a very common material during the 1700s because it was easy to draw or paint on. Porcelain doesn’t stain easily and the artist was able to draw complicated designs with attention to small details because they were not scared of making mistakes. They could simply erase any errors made. The design of this punch bowl is intricate and every inch of the bowl was carefully drawn to perfection. Punch bowls were not used in China during the 1700s, so it can be concluded that this item was made to be imported to the west, where they could get good use out of it.
Chair (1760-70)

This chair originates in Vizagapatam, India and was made around 1760-1770. The Nawab of Arcot presented it as a gift to Lady Harland, Sir Robert Harland’s wife in 1772. Robert served as the Commander-in-Chief for the British Navy at that time, which is why this gift was presented. The beautiful royal blue, solid ebony chair was engraved ivory with small flowers creating a tree. With the connecting flowers throughout the whole chair, it represented “the tree of life” and unity. In the 1700s, ivory was known to be a precious and sacred material mostly used by the rich. Ivory was a very desirable item for trade in Asia, which led to restrictions being implemented. The exchange of this ivory chair represented the ties between Britain and India and the shift in materials throughout the subcontinents. At the time, The British and French were competing with India for power because of their achievements and advancements. This ivory chair was gifted when the political forces shifted toward the British. Rather than keeping the chair for India’s own advancement, the use of the gift exchange in the 1700s was for a political advancement.
Oil Painting of Houqua (1835)

This oil painting is of Wu Bingjian, also known as Houqua, the once richest man in the world. With a net worth of over $8 billion, he acquired a majority of his wealth through the importation and exportation of goods between the British Empire and China. As one of the most prominent Hong merchants in the Thirteen Factories, he was one of the most well respected individuals in China. Self portraits throughout history have always been a display of wealth, but it was much more multi-dimensional than that in Chinese culture. Self Portraits were extremely prominent in Chinese culture because of how easy it made conveying one's cultural identity to others. In the case of Houqua, he gifted portraits of himself as a form of networking, and sharing the kind of man he was, through art. This oil painting shows Houqua sitting down, in a nicely furnished area, wearing formal cultural attire. Without knowing his background, one can assume he is a prominent person with wealth, and power because of the demeanor on his face, and the way he sits upright, sternly looking at the audience. When networking with his colleagues, gifting a painting like this makes potential business partners respect him even more, and make them aware that he is a serious man, both in his personal life, and the workforce. In the middle of the 19th Century, Houqua was one of the few authorized individuals with the capacity to trade silk and porcelain with the British Empire. Sharing an oil painting like this with foreign business partners instills trust between both parties, especially when the transactions are overseas, and it is harder to put a face to a name.
Cultural and Artistic Connection Between Asia and America

- Oil Paintings were more prominent in western civilization. The east and west had a symbiotic relationship, whether it was importation, or taking inspiration from one another.
- Houqua was in the import/export business, and as direct result of his business model, cultural diffusion is made possible. Valuable goods are traveling overseas, from country to country. Different countries have different resources, and as a result, they have to outsource certain goods. This dynamic is seen in society to this day with imported goods. More valuable items create higher demand and make them more desirable and wanted by other countries.
- Punch Bowls are a prime example of cultural diffusion because even though they are made in China, they are primarily used in America. Exporters like Houqua take advantage of this demand, and make profit from selling to foreigners looking for items that are harder to acquire in their own region. Americans in the end, end up with porcelain punch bowls with Chinese designs.
• The teapot was made out of porcelain which was mainly used in China, holding value for its sustainability and its beautiful artwork. The painting on the porcelain teapot represents Jesus Christ on the cross, portraying an aspect of Christianity. The painting aims to attract the Western area because of the religious appeal they had. It embraces the Western religion/culture as it also represents Chinese culture.

• The chair’s engraved ivory with flowers was one of a kind. Connecting flowers creating a hidden meaning behind it made the chair even more desirable. With it being made with ivory, which was a very wanted item at the time. The relationship between the two was very important in regards to art. Asia was able to influence other countries with their art and was used as a potential advancement. The history of trade in Asia still impacts our society today with all of the materials and goods that are imported to America. With this, history shows how Asia influenced America through art and imported goods.

• The impact that Asia has on American society is shown throughout our exhibit. With the different forms of art and materials, Asia has influenced America both culturally and artistically. This exhibit stretches to almost 100 years and the impact of Asia’s art is still prominent from beginning to end. To this day, desirable imported goods are imported from Asia and are needed in American society.