America Accumulating Cultures: The Import and Export of Chinese Products
A Cultural Exchange

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Throughout the 18th and 19th century sea trade between the U.S. and China led to a long period of cultural exchange. The influx of Chinese-made products in a Western style, along with products made in a Chinese style in America, signify this exchange. Come step into history and learn through the artistic styles and depictions of Chinese and American art over long periods of commerce.
Artists in Jingdezhen, China, about 1750, Porcelain
Artist in China, 1800-1815, Porcelain
Guan Zuolin, 1809, Oil on Canvas
Both the teapot and the sewing table demonstrate the exchange of cultures between Asia and the West. The sewing table was commissioned by an American merchant for his wife, and depicts a view of European-style residences in Macau. On the other hand, the teapot portrays a crucifixion scene. It is interesting to note how the sewing table was made from lacquered wood (only found in Asia) and made specifically for an American; similarly, the teapot was made of porcelain (typically made in Asia) and with a scene that would appeal to both Americans and Europeans in general. In short, these two items seem to represent a sort of commodification of Asian cultures and manufacturing processes, and an American fascination with them.
This punchbowl demonstrates the cultural and economic concessions held by the people of China when American Ships came to port. This portrait similarly upholds this idea through the depiction of a Chinese silk merchant by a Chinese artist who typically utilizes Western styles. The depiction of culture on both ends to promote economic activity is very characteristic of the connection between the U.S. and China during the early 19th century.
The Asian gilded-lacquer sewing table was made by Chinese artists who made the piece by using elements of Western styles within their art. This sewing table was used as a piece of decorative furniture that would show the wealth of the family, in this case, that of American merchant William Shepard Wetmore. The punch bowl is also a piece that is both decorative and functional, and made by a Chinese artist. Both pieces were also made for Americans, and both display clear influences from the Western world.
Although these images seemingly have no connection, they represent the cross cultural link between China and the United States. As trade between the two countries increased, the demand for Chinese goods increased. In a world before technological advancements, Asian culture was able to significantly impact the United States. The cultural exchange between these two countries was important because it shows that even though we were not as technologically advanced back then as we are today, there was still a need to explore the world and to bring the goods found in other countries back home, all in an effort to make the United States more diverse.