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Q&A

How did you become involved in doing research?

I became involved in research in my first year at the University of Kansas. I worked with Dr. Susan Earle, curator of European and American art at the Spencer Museum to place a sculpture in its time period and original location. It was a wonderful chance for me to explore hands-on, object-based learning. Now, I'm able to take graduate seminars in my field of art history, and research topics as varied as Chinese export porcelain and French painting.

How is the research process different from what you expected?

The research process is different than I expected in that it is so malleable and ever-changing. The project proposal and the final draft of my paper are two very different things.

What is your favorite part of doing research?

The hands-on nature of research and the chance to look at one object in such depth are by far my favorite parts of research. I could never have that kind of experience in a classroom!

Chinese export porcelain and global spaces of imagination

Julia Reynolds

ABSTRACT

This paper will examine a Chinese porcelain plate from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The plate was produced in Jingdezhen, China ca. 1785-90 and acquired in Iran in 1888. It is painted in pink enamel with a landscape scene in the center and a double border around the edges. The landscape depicts pagoda houses interspersed with rocks, flowers, and trees. It is heavily stylized so as to seem "exotic" and "oriental" to the European eye. The double border consists of a diaper border outlined with a spearhead border. While the plate was manufactured at the site of the imperial kilns, it was intended for export to Europe as part of Chinese porcelain trade. This is made evident in the English transfer-print decoration with its clear, crisp lines and decal-like look. Its purchase in Iran reflects British influence in Persia, which was a colonial subdivision of the British Empire from 1783 to 1971. This paper will consider the Chinese porcelain plate from the perspective of material culture and globalization as well as a limited amount of post-colonialism. Lines of questioning will include: the original setting in English dining customs and culture, its situation within the World Ceramics galleries of the Museum, and the role of British imperialism and its influence on those who used and consumed the Chinese porcelain plate. This will allow for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the artificial construction of China in the British Empire.

This paper will examine a Chinese porcelain plate (fig. 1)¹ in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum from the perspective of material culture and globalization. The plate is of European shape produced in China ca. 1785-90 and acquired in Iran in 1888. While the Victoria and Albert Museum purchased it in Iran, the British occupied the southern portion of Iran from 1763 to 1971, which indicates that a citizen of the British Empire owned it. The plate is painted with pink enamel in the manner of English transfer-print decoration. The pink enamel is known as “famille rose.” It originated in Europe in the Rococo era ca. 1750, and was used at the porcelain manufactories of Bristol and Staffordshire in England. This is seen in a cream pitcher made of hard-paste porcelain painted with pink enamel produced



Figure 2. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

in Bristol ca. 1770-1781, which is also in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 2).² Famille rose was introduced to China during the reign of Kangxi (1654-1722). Ordinarily, it was applied to the surface of glazed pottery, which had been fired, and was then re-fired at a lower temperature.³

The Chinese porcelain plate has a double border of diaper pattern edged with gilt. Within the double border is a flower motif composed of oriental lilies with large blossoms. The central design is a variation of the traditional Chinese landscape theme. The landscape is heavily stylized so as to appear “exotic” and “oriental” to the European eye. It is composed of Chinese architecture interspersed with rocks, flowers, and willow trees and branches. The Chinese architecture includes an open pavilion and a number of ornamental imitations of pagodas,



Figure 1. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

with a tiered roof and curved steps. It is located on a watercourse, which allows for a sense of perspective. It is also notable that there are no Chinese figures within the scene as were present in the blue and white “Willow Pattern.” This allows for a European audience to insert itself within the scene as a space for global imagination and creation.⁴

This paper will begin with a detailed description of material culture and globalization. It will look at the importance of engaging with material culture and the impact of globalization in the British Empire ca. 1785-1790. Modes of production will then be discussed at both Chinese and European porcelain manufactories. The Chinese porcelain plate will be looked at in its original setting in English dining custom and culture as well as its situation within the World Ceramics galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which offers a chronological and world-wide introduction to the Far East and South East Asia, the Middle East, and European ceramics prior to 1800. The conclusion will determine that British imperialism influenced those who used and consumed the Chinese porcelain plate. This method of organization will allow for a more thoughtful and organized presentation of information, as well as a more complete understanding of Chinese porcelain, often called “China,” as it was used to construct an artificial image of China within the British Empire.⁵

¹ “Dish,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33681/dish-unknown/>

² “Cream Jug,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O248369/cream-jug-bristol-porcelain-factory/>

³ “Dish,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33681/dish-unknown/>

⁴ Gerritsen and Riello. “Spaces for Global Interactions,” 112

⁵ For this and the following paragraph, please see Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, “Spaces of Global Interactions: The Material Landscapes of Global History,” in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 112

⁶ Gerritsen and Riello, “Introduction,” 4

MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture history helps us to understand objects as they relate to the everyday lives of ordinary people who lived in the past.⁶ However, “common people” did not necessarily leave behind the written records of kings, queens, prime ministers, and generals. Their lives are more easily traced through the material goods that they bought, sold, and used, which was a practice common to both the rich and poor. The “consumer revolution” of the eighteenth century, when more goods were available to larger social groups than ever before, was the catalyst for much historical research in the 1980s and 1990s. This was followed by studies of consumption patterns in Renaissance Italy, early modern continental Europe, and the nineteenth and twentieth century. More recently, consumption has been studied in the cultures of the Ottoman Empire, the Persian Empire, Ming and Qing China, and Colonial Latin America as part of an engagement with global history.

This is a relatively recent field of inquiry that has arisen over the past thirty years or so.⁷ Originally, it was the domain of sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, and was used to investigate pre-historic and ancient as well as non-Western cultures.⁸ However, it has become a part of other disciplines since history’s ‘material turn.’ Accordingly, material goods and artifacts serve as sources of information about past cultures and the social, cultural, and economic relationships of people’s lives. Within art history, this is represented by the transition from the fine arts and two-dimensional artifacts of painting, drawing, and sculpture to the decorative arts and three-dimensional artifacts. The

decorative arts include ceramic art, glassware, furniture, interiors, metalwork, textile arts, and woodwork. Most often, these art forms were made for use in the home and were ascribed special meaning by those who owned and used them.

While the worth of material culture studies in strengthening our understanding of the written and visual past has been made evident, there are several areas of limitation as well.⁹ Material limitation offers the perspective that the vast majority of objects do not survive. Although it is important for art historians to consider existing objects in relation to those that are absent, this is not always possible. Within the decorative arts, metalwork was often melted down for the sake of the precious metals and jewels. Another complication is that objects have often lost the context that made them meaningful. This de-contextualization must be acknowledged in art historical research. There are also conceptual limitations wherein objects survive over a period of time. The Chinese Ming vase is both a source for historians in the present and an object that existed 400 years ago when it was made. Since then, it may have lost one of its parts, or been chipped or broken.

There are also practical limitations in material culture studies. Many objects have restricted access. Those that are on display in museums and galleries are typically unavailable for close inspection by researchers. The vast majority of objects that are in storage are accessible only in cases in which the curators believe it will not endanger the object.¹⁰ There are also a number of objects that cannot be handled, such as ancient and medieval textiles.

Another consideration is that not all objects are in museum collections. Many are held by antique dealers, auction houses, private collectors, and other sources. This makes material culture a logistically complex area of study that requires the art historian to consult archives and textual sources such as exhibition catalogues, museum indexes, and online databases and resources. While material culture studies has the ability to enrich the study of art history, it must be approached with due consideration.

Although there are limitations to material culture studies, this paper will attempt to address them. While material limitation is a consideration, there are more than 1,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain in the Victoria and Albert Museum produced between 1750-1800 alone. While the pink enamel painted porcelain is not as well-known as the blue and white ware is now, it was a popular option at the time. De-contextualization requires the use of non-academic sources such as cookbooks and etiquette guides that provide insight into the English dining customs and cultures of the period. Practical limitations must be acknowledged as the most challenging to address. There is one photograph of the Chinese porcelain plate available on the Victoria and Albert Museum website. The description is also incomplete, and there is no mention of the gilding on the edges of the plate. However, the image is detailed enough to allow for close observation.

GLOBALIZATION AND TRANS-NATIONALISM

It is worth considering material culture outside of the traditional national boundaries.¹¹ The

⁷ Anne D’Alleva, “Art’s Context,” in *Methods and Theories of Art History*, ed. by Anne D’Alleva (London: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd, 2012), 53

⁸ Gerritsen and Riello, “Introduction,” 1

⁹ For this and the following paragraph, please see Gerritsen and Riello, “Introduction,” 8-9

¹⁰ Gerritsen and Riello, “Introduction,” 9

¹¹ Gerritsen and Riello, “Spaces of Global Interactions,” 111

theoretical and practical analysis of objects is one way to study wider geographies and connections between areas of the world.

Globalization began in the early modern period ca. 1400 to 1800 when new commodities circulated across continents and global markets. This is explained by many economists and economic historians via the intensification of the world mercantile networks as the result of new and more direct maritime routes and the fact that cheaper Asian wares found easy markets in Europe and, over time, also in the New World. However, this interpretation has been challenged in recent years by showing how early modern consumers were neither satisfied by unadulterated commodities or by simple customization. These commodities bore in their designs, forms, and materials if not the knowledge, then at least the appreciation of wider geographies.

Chinese blue and white ware, manufactured in China and exported to other parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, as well Indian cotton textiles decorated with colorful motifs were equally successful in the global market. They were traded by the millions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the English, Dutch, and French East India companies. These porcelains and cottons were integrated into the daily lives of these millions of people. Chinese porcelain was not only an alternative to local earthenware and other ceramics, but also an “imagined world” for the owner and consumer. According to Anne Gerritsen, these commodities “created a series of associations and ideas about its provenance.” This contributed to these commodities as new spaces for global interaction

and “reconfigured geographies” so that societies who were thousands of miles apart formed a connection.¹²

But the “imagined worlds” that commodities inhabited were mediated ones. They were the result of negotiation in which those imagined spaces emerged from a dialogue between producers and consumers.¹³ This is seen in the European shape of the porcelain plate, for which the East India trading companies supplied models and patterns for the Chinese potters. While the average English man or woman spent most of their life within a few miles, they became conscious of an expanded world through artifacts and commodities such as the Chinese figures on the surface of a Willow Pattern porcelain plate. Although porcelain had been manufactured in Europe since Meissen ca. 1710, it continued to have a Chinoiserie theme that allowed for the imagination of other worlds. People were able to interpret and extrapolate from their own viewing experience in a way that contributed to a sense of the “global imaginary.”

This sense of the global imaginary was closely intertwined with the way that China was treated within the British Empire. The British Empire was comprised of dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates, and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom. It began with overseas colonies and trading posts established by Britain in the late sixteenth to early eighteenth century. When this Chinese porcelain plate was produced ca. 1785-1790, England had relinquished its thirteen colonies in North America and turned to Asia, Africa, and the Pacific for economic sustenance. However, it remained powerful

and influential enough for George Macartney, 1st Earl Macartney, (1737-1806) to comment “of this vast empire on which the sun never sets, and whose bounds nature has not yet ascertained.” Britain became interested in China for its Chinese tea, porcelain, and silk. However, it did not have enough silver to trade for these resources.

The British resolved this issue through the trade of Indian opium. While Britain did not rule in Mainland China as it did in India and British West Africa, it still maintained a level of influence over its economic and political affairs. This is made evident by the East India Company’s production of opium, which was a highly lucrative commodity that had been banned in China by the Imperial edict of 1729. The increase of opium in the late eighteenth century contributed to the social instability that resulted in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856-1860). This relates to the Chinese porcelain plate in that citizens of the British Empire felt to be in a position of power and privilege over those of China. Consequently, they were able to define the way that they “performed” or “presented” China. The plate was then considered to represent China, even though it was European in shape and English in decoration.

PORCELAIN MANUFACTORIES

This Chinese porcelain plate was produced at Jingdezhen, in Jiangxi province, southern China. It is located in the transitional area between the Huangshan-Haiyushang mountain range and the Plain of Poyang Lake. Jingdezhen is named for the emperor Jingde (1004-1007) because the site of the imperial

¹² Gerritsen and Riello, “Global Spaces of Interaction,” 121

¹³ Gerritsen and Riello, “Global Spaces of Interaction,” 121

kilns was established during his reign.¹⁴ Jingdezhen has produced most of China's porcelain for more than 1,000 years. It is rich in natural resources of porcelain stone, Kaolin, coal, tungsten, gold dust, cuprum, fluorite, sulfur, limestone, and marble. Kaolin has been removed from active reserves for going on 300 years. The combination of raw materials, fuel, and cheap transport allowed it to produce porcelain for Asia, Europe, and America for several centuries. The significant state support it received was also helpful. Most Chinese emperors regarded Chinese porcelain as a profitable trade, with the notable exception of the first Ming emperor, Hongwu (1368-1398).

Hongwu tried to outlaw trade, but this ban was not effective and profitable trade continued into the Ming and Qing dynasties. There were once more than three hundred porcelain factories contained in Jingdezhen.¹⁵ The porcelain produced was pure white in color and without stain. The merchants who sold it referred to it as "Jao-chou Jade," and it was considered more beautiful than the red porcelain of Chen-ting-fu and the emerald green porcelain of Lung-ch'uan-hsien. While porcelain was considered a refined art, the porcelain manufactories were considered centers of manufacturing rather than centers

of art production.¹⁶ This is because of the perception that Jingdezhen relied on Peking, Nanking, Canton, and Europe for designs and decoration in the absence of local inspiration. This is made evident in the commissioning of dragon bowls, huge slabs, and pinth for columns for the Imperial Court at Peking, as well as the European shapes and patterns produced for the East India Companies seen in the Chinese porcelain plate.

While Jingdezhen made porcelain for Asia, Europe, and America, it was not well known outside of China.¹⁷ This is because of its location in Mainland China and the Chinese policies of relative isolationism. Jingdezhen is located about 300 miles inland from Shanghai, which is located on the Yangtze River Delta in Eastern China and served as a favorable port with economic potential for Europe, and required a boat trip up the Yangtze River into Po Yang Lake and then to the Chang River. Although it is more accessible today, it was likely not known by the citizens of the British Empire who would have purchased and gifted, and used and consumed this Chinese porcelain plate. Given that porcelain is not perishable, the remote location and minimal interaction of Jingdezhen with other countries was not a major issue for European porcelain trade. However,

Europe was not satisfied with sourcing their porcelain from China.

Chinese and Japanese porcelains were highly esteemed in the eighteenth century, but Europe wanted to be able to produce their own porcelain. The German alchemist Johann Friedrich Bottger discovered the materials required to produce white, translucent, high-fired porcelain in 1709.¹⁸ His patron, Augustus the Strong, then established a porcelain manufactory at Meissen, Germany in 1710. The manufactory developed a new and extensive range of enamel colors and the painters excelled at Chinoiserie and the traditional Chinese landscape theme. These fanciful depictions of an imagined China were the most popular form of decoration in this era. The success of Meissen led to the establishment of other porcelain manufactories in Europe. Chelsea was the most important porcelain manufactory in Britain and was established in 1743. It was closely followed by Bow in 1747, Royal Crown Derby in 1750, and Royal Worcester in 1751.

While the porcelain manufactories in Britain produced materials of fine quality, they did not allow for the global spaces of creation provided by authentic Chinese pottery. The East India Company may have dictated the European shape of the plate,

¹⁴ For this and the following paragraph, please see "The Chinese Imperial Kilns at Jingdezhen," The British Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/c/the_chinese_imperial_kilns_at.aspx

¹⁵ For this and the following paragraph, please see Chiang Chi, "A Memoir on Porcelain Manufacturing," *Ching-Te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City*, ed. by Robert Tichane (New York: New York State Institute for Glaze Research, 1983), 43

¹⁶ Tichane, "Conclusion," 422

¹² Gerritsen and Riello, "Global Spaces of Interaction," 121

¹³ Gerritsen and Riello, "Global Spaces of Interaction," 121

¹⁴ For this and the following paragraph, please see "The Chinese Imperial Kilns at Jingdezhen," The British Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/c/the_chinese_imperial_kilns_at.aspx

¹⁵ For this and the following paragraph, please see Chiang Chi, "A Memoir on Porcelain Manufacturing," *Ching-Te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City*, ed. by Robert Tichane (New York: New York State Institute for Glaze Research, 1983), 43

¹⁶ Tichane, "Conclusion," 422

¹⁷ Robert Tichane, "Preface," in *Ching-Te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City*, ed. by Robert Tichane (New York: New York State Institute for Glaze Research, 1983), ix

¹⁸ "German and Austrian Porcelain in the Eighteenth Century," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed May 15, 2015 http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/porg/hd_porg.htm

and the English transfer-print decoration, but it was more of a source of connection with China for the British person who used and consumed it as Chinese.¹⁹ The British Empire influenced the perception of China as “exotic” and “oriental” in that Britain was the absolute and China was the other.²⁰ China was defined and differentiated with reference to Britain and not Britain with reference to China. Because of this, the traditional Chinese landscape that the British perceived to be “Chinese” became an authentic representation of China to the Western world. This Chinese porcelain plate provided the impetus for an imagined space that contributed to the global image of China.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF ENGLISH DINING

It is worth considering how the plate would have been used as part of a material culture perspective. The French court of Louis XIV



Figure 3

established the customs of dining throughout Britain and mainland Europe with service à la Française. Service à la Française dictates that all of the dishes are placed on the table in a prescribed location for each course (fig. 3).²¹ The diners then help

themselves to the dishes nearest them and pass their plates to their neighbors for those that are out of their reach. After each course has been served, servants have a limited role confined to distributing the oil and vinegar and bread, as well as refilling the drinking glasses after washing them. It was considered poor form for servants to serve the diners, or to disturb the dishes once they were in place. While on the European continent, meals may consist of eight courses, including dessert, they were typically limited to three courses in England, following which the women retired to the drawing room for tea and the men remained around the table for drinks.

The first course was made up of soups and stews, vegetables and boiled fish and meats arranged in a centerpiece. Toward the end of the first course, “remove” dishes of meat or fish were placed at the end of the table and were intended to help with the wait between courses. The second course also consisted of vegetables, meats, and fish, with the addition of pies and baked goods. The second course was arranged in the same manner as the first and there would be remove dishes afterward as well. Elaborate desserts were popular in this time period and

often consisted of fresh and sugared fruits, sweetmeats, jams, jellies, and sugar sculptures intended to evoke gardens, architecture, and pastoral scenes. These natural themes were also evoked in the elaborate dinner and dessert services, such as the

Swan Service from Meissen ca. 1739-1740. The service is decorated with oriental flowers and a gold rim.

Porcelain sculptures conformed to this “natural” and “oriental” theme as well. The British Ambassador Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams had a great Meissen service gifted to him by Augustus III of Saxony in 1745, which included dessert dishes in the form of artichokes, laurel leaves, and sunflowers, as well as 166 figures, of which 54 had a pastoral theme and 34 were connected to the hunt. These natural themes are echoed within the landscape theme of this Chinese porcelain plate. There is also an additional element of the “exotic” and the “oriental.” Given that China is often seen as more natural and unspoiled than the West, it is understandable that the Chinese landscape was chosen with this theme in mind. It is also worth mentioning that most large households had a French confectioner to prepare sweetmeats and sugar sculptures for the dessert course. The design and decoration of the plate was still visible beneath these fine and “foreign” desserts.

It is worth considering French cooking in the light of “spaces for global imagination” because it can be inferred that the Western world was feminized and romanticized as well. While the average English man or woman was more familiar with France than China, it was still considered foreign and “exotic.” Both China and France contributed to the culture and customs of fine dining in England. This demonstrates the far-reaching influence of the British Empire. France was in the midst of the French Revolution (1789-1799) when the Chinese porcelain plate was produced ca. 1785-1790. During the French Revolution, the British supported the Revolutionaries both to weaken France and to uphold the

¹⁹ Gerritsen and Riello, “Spaces of Global Interactions,” 121

²⁰ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (1949) 1993.)

²¹ Ivan Day, “Pleasures of the Table,” *Historic Food*. Accessed June 22, 2015. <http://www.historicfood.com/Pleasures-of-the-table2.htm>

British liberal ideas. By employing a French confectioner to prepare sweetmeats and sugar sculptures, Britain subtly reinforced the power dynamics of the Britain-France relationship in a way similar to China.

MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

The Chinese porcelain plate is located in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Museum's collection includes more than two thousand years of art in every medium from many parts of the world.²² The Museum was established in 1852, following the success of the Great Exhibition of the previous year. It was founded with the intention to make works of art accessible to everyone, to educate working and middle-class people, and to provide inspiration for British designers and manufacturers. Generous funding meant that the Museum was able to make many important acquisitions. The Museum moved to its present site in South Kensington in 1857. In 1899, Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of a new building designed to give the Museum a façade and grand entrance. In honor of this occasion, it was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in memory of the support that Prince Albert had given to the foundation.

The Victoria and Albert Museum is the largest museum of decorative arts in the world and is comprised of more than 2,263,314 objects. However, only about 60,604 objects are on display. In the twentieth century, the Museum has continued to expand its historical collection as well as to acquire contemporary objects. While the Museum's collection is international, it has a number of important British works in the area of silver, ceramics, textiles, and furniture. These objects are

intended to provide insight into the history of design in the British Isles, as well as to broadly portray their cultural history. Additionally, the Museum has a strong Asian collection due to Britain's long "association" with India and South East Asia. Their East Asian collection is considered the best in Europe, and has an emphasis on ceramics and metalwork. There are more than ten Asian galleries that explore themes such as "Influences from Beyond Europe," and "Ceramics Study Galleries Asia and Europe."

The Ceramic Study Galleries house most of the Museum's ceramics collections and spans from Asian and Middle Eastern



Figure 4

ceramics to European pottery prior to 1800. The Chinese porcelain plate is housed within Room 145: World Ceramics (fig. 4).²³ The displays are organized chronologically and explore the "interchange of taste, style, and technology, between the East and West," as exemplified by the spread of blue and white ware from China to the Middle East and on to Europe. The gallery contains many of the Museum's masterpieces and spans more than 4,000 years of ceramic history, from 2500 BCE to present. By presenting this Chinese porcelain plate as part of this composite of cultures and time

periods, it is seen as "exotic" and "oriental," but not Chinese. While "correctness" is often considered the domain of the nineteenth and twentieth century, it is no more prevalent in this display than that it was when the plate was used in English dining ca. 1785-1790. Although people are no longer reliant on Willow Pattern porcelain for their construction of China, they still seem to heavily depend on it, as evidenced by this display.

BRITAIN AND THE ART OF EMPIRE

The history of this Chinese porcelain plate is marked by British imperialism. This is evidenced by the English culture and customs that combined elements of France and China to produce a uniquely British way of dining. This way of dining was characterized by the use of cultural domination and appropriation. By referring to the Chinese porcelain plate merely as "china," with an emphatically lower-case "c," Britain reduced China to a subordinate and lower-caste position within the Western world. China effectively became the artificial and inauthentic, heavily-stylized landscape that was displayed on the plate. It represented everything that Britain was not: the passive, feminine "Orient." This is made clear by the absence of figures, which allowed the British viewer to gaze without fear of confrontation. Because of this, the plate created a space of imagination in which the British viewer had absolute authority.

The legacy of British imperialism is also made evident by the display practices at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is shown passively within sleek modern cabinets with metal bases and glass shelves as compared to the way it was originally used and displayed. It is

²² For this and the following paragraph, see "A Brief History of the Museum," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed May 4, 2015. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/a-brief-history-of-the-museum/>

²³ "The Ceramics galleries: old and new," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed May 15, 2015 <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-ceramics-galleries-old-and-new/>

included with Asian, Middle Eastern, and European pottery before 1800, likely because it was produced in China and purchased in Iran. While it was made for and used by a British person, it is “othered” by virtue of its relationship to the Orient. Ultimately, the Chinese porcelain plate belongs in the British Galleries in company of the other objects and artifacts that belong to its time period and culture. It should be displayed actively in a way that reflects its original use. It has no more of a relationship to the ceramic art forms of the Middle East and North Africa than would a porcelain plate from the Chelsea or Bow porcelain manufactories

Additionally, British imperialism has been an important component of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Museum is located near the royal residence of Kensington Palace. This has been a residence of the royal family since the 17th century and is the official London home of

the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Harry, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Kent, and Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.²⁴ The Museum has a long tradition of royal support that began with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in the mid-nineteenth century. They hold many of the royal images of Queen Elizabeth II and recently had an exhibition entitled “Queen Elizabeth II by Cecil Beaton: A Diamond Jubilee Celebration.” While the Museum may present itself as a neutral and non-partisan institution, it relies heavily on the money of the wealthy members of society. Because of this, it must necessarily conform to their whims and fantasies in its display practices. This is why the Victoria and Albert actively perpetuates British imperialism today.

In conclusion, this Chinese porcelain plate has produced its own “world of ideas” in the spaces

of global interaction from ca. 1785-1790 to the present day. Rather than a true “model” of China, the Chinese landscape theme reflects a space for imagination through British imperialism, which has shaped the perception of China as “exotic” or “Oriental” in relation to the Western World. This space for imagination did not result in a true image of China in the eighteenth century, or today, as evidenced by the display practices at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Interestingly, the world of ideas that it has evoked has remained relatively constant. Britain is the absolute and China remains the “other,” existing only in relation to the West. While research for this paper began with the assumption that perceptions of China have changed over time, this is demonstrated not to be the case.

²⁴ “Kensington Palace,” The Official Website of the British Monarchy, accessed May 15, 2015 <http://www.royal.gov.uk/TheRoyalResidences/KensingtonPalace/Today.aspx>

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