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2. Romantic Domesticity: A Chinese World Invented at Home

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Houckgeest enjoyed a rare opportunity to depart the confines of Canton, traverse the Chinese interior, behold new sights and even tread on the hallowed grounds of the emperor that were inside the walls of the Forbidden City. After returning to the United States, however, he squandered this rarest of chances to disseminate knowledge to the public. With his failure, our narrative returns to its dominant storyline—the Qing ordinance barring foreigners from traveling in China. Indeed, this ban acquires tremendous significance when we recall that it took place in an age otherwise known for exploration. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, merchants, missionaries, sea captains, and naturalists were all thwarted in their attempts to explore the interior of China. Thus, at a time when much of the world was opening up to Western eyes, China remained a sealed book.

When men of science proved unable to demystify China, they left behind not only a vacuum of empirical data but also an enticing opportunity. And a rather unlikely group took great delight in stepping into the gaping void. Women and children in Europe and America elected to fashion their own version of China by interacting creatively with sources of imagery that were readily available within their homes: Chinese paintings, porcelain plates, and the volumes of *Arabian Nights*. The China that they created was truly splendid, it being replete with bucolic landscapes, enchanting mountains, picturesque pagodas, bountiful fruit trees, graceful willow trees, exotic birds and fish, meandering streams, and charming wooden fishing junks. Of course, this idyllic land was not China but Cathay. At the smallest whim, women and children could embark on pleasurable excursions to Cathay simply by invoking the strange land in their imaginations ¹.

These journeys of fanciful discovery coincided with, but existed in striking contrast to, the more-manly expeditions of scientific exploration. Whereas the latter required that one engage in extensive travel to distant climes, the former took place in the home and might involve nothing more than a trip to the cupboard. And whereas the cognitive tasks inherent in nautical, geographic, and ethnographic work demanded that one use his rational faculties, trips to Cathay required only that one possess a lively imagination. And finally, whereas the professional explorers transmitted their findings to the learned community through scientific tracts and ethnological exhibits, mothers employed entirely different media—playful rhymes and folk stories—to delineate the wonderful land of Cathay before their captive young auditors. In short, women and children seized the blank page of China and happily scrawled on it the imagined geography, topography, and ethnography of Cathay. In doing so, they mimicked in playful fashion the expeditions of scientific exploration then taking place in the men's sphere.

As women and children derived great pleasure from this form of domestic recreation, it is not surprising that Cathay achieved immense popularity in the United States, spreading easily and rapidly from one household to another and from one generation to the next. However, it is emphatically surprising that Cathay also enjoyed a strong measure of credibility. With only scant and unreliable data emanating out of China, many Americans apparently mistook the oriental dream world for the real Asian nation. This tendency of Americans to conflate the two becomes abundantly clear when one reads the reactions of sailors, merchants, travel writers, and diplomats arriving in Canton and confronting China for the first time. As this chapter will show, these worldly men often took what they saw and measured it against what they had expected to see—Cathay. When rational-minded mariners carry quaint images of an oriental paradise in their minds, we begin to understand the profound influence of simple trade objects, like common porcelain and mass-produced Chinese watercolors, and the enchanting stories that imaginative mothers told their young sons.

In this chapter I explain how ordinary people interacted with common household objects, and in that I depart from the typical study of Chinese trade articles, which focuses on luxury items belonging to wealthy Americans. Indeed, for this elite tier of society, objects from China arrived in a striking profusion of color and variety—exquisite porcelain, the finest silks, handsome lacquer ware, dazzling pieces of silver, hand-painted wallpaper, and sculptures carved meticulously from ivory and jade. The attractiveness of these objects notwithstanding, their steep price tags prohibited all but the wealthy few from enjoying them. Consequently, the images of China found on them reached only a small segment of society. Yet despite their modest influence over the

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American image of China, these finer objects have received considerable attention in books and articles because their age, beauty, and value render them sources of continuing interest for owners, collectors, and museums. In contrast, one finds comparatively little discussion on the more affordable commodities that truly did affect the popular imagination. To rectify this omission, this chapter is limited in scope, covering only those kinds of image-bearing goods that one would find in the typical American home: the inexpensive grades of porcelain and cheap Chinese watercolor paintings. We begin by examining a very common image, one delineated in blue and white, that many Americans encountered several times each day.

Chinese Export Porcelain

In the 1780s, the English traveler Claude C. Robin during his tour of America observed that “there is not a single person to be found, who does not drink it [tea] out of China cups and saucers.”² What Robin was witnessing was a sudden spread of Chinese blue and white porcelain that moved both horizontally across geographic regions and vertically through the social classes. Concerning the former, archeological digs, advertisements for auctions in newspapers, and manifests from vessels arriving in American ports all offer testimony to a tremendous proliferation of blue and white porcelain in domestic spaces across the eastern United States.³

As for the latter, two key developments contributed to the availability of inexpensive ceramics that Americans at almost any economic level could afford. First, though American traders carried the high grades of porcelain for their select clientele, they also loaded the compartments of their vessels with the commoner grades and even the misfires for very practical reasons. Cheap porcelain provided traders with an ideal cargo to place in the bottoms of ships because it did not suffer from prolonged exposure to moisture; by serving as a bulwark against the encroaching seawater, it protected the more valuable and perishable teas and silks placed on top of it. In addition, these ceramics were heavy and so provided good ballast for the long journey through turbulent seas.⁴

Second, starting in the 1780s, British porcelain manufacturers began to mass produce imitations of Chinese ceramics (with “willow ware” being the most famous example), which initially sold at lower prices than the genuine Chinese varieties. No longer possessing a monopoly, Chinese manufacturers responded with new measures designed to increase the efficiency of their production lines, enhance the appeal of their product, and cut the overall cost. At Jingde zhen, a city devoted entirely to porcelain production, the Chinese painted images on porcelain using a system of division of labor that possessed similarities with the modern assembly-line system. “One man traces the outline of a flower,” wrote a foreign observer, “another of a pagoda, while a third is at work upon a river or a mountain” (fig. 2.1). To further simplify production, the Chinese reduced the number of patterns that embellished the pieces. By 1815, between 80 and 95 percent of all pieces bearing landscape views carried a pattern chosen from a select group of just three or four.⁵

Finally, to ensure that the pattern included in this small group appealed to Western tastes, the Chinese examined the British design that had recently appropriated such a substantial portion of their market share—the willow pattern. Though undoubtedly suspicious of its artistic merits, the Chinese nevertheless began offering wares with a similar, though not identical, design.⁶



So in a bizarre sequence of events, Chinese porcelain painters now found themselves imitating a bad European imitation of original Chinese designs; as a result, much *authentic* Chinese export porcelain of this era, quite ironically, carried *ersatz* Chinese scenes.⁷ Outraged by the sacrifice of aesthetics for marketability, the twentieth-century American porcelain expert Warren Cox described the ludicrous situation: “It got so complicated that the terrible ‘willow pattern’ sentimentally concocted from Chinese originals was sent back to China to copy. Such is the effrontery of merchants!”⁸

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In this fashion, inexpensive Chinese porcelain found its way onto the cupboards of middle- and lower-income families. On a daily basis, fathers, mothers, and their children viewed appealing Chinese scenes on their plates, bowls, saucers, and cups, completely oblivious to the process of cross-fertilization with England that had brought about the formation of this tableware. And what they saw delighted them. Typically, a piece of Chinese-manufactured porcelain carried a

landscape design referred to as *shan shui* (hills and streams) by the Chinese. Most such designs included a handful of basic elements: birds, fruit trees, a willow tree, a junk with a fisherman, a bridge, an island, Chinese figures, pagodas, and Chinese houses (fig. 2.2). ⁹ Although Americans may have purchased the china because it was cheap and functional, they cherished it for its designs.



Why did American families find such simple pictures so alluring? For the individual with an active imagination, these images possessed more than just ornamental value; they offered a portal to a different world, the world they called Cathay. While sipping tea, one could escape household chores, misbehaving children, debilitating illnesses, or the pressures of the workaday world and take a brief flight of fancy to a strange but wonderful realm. The land depicted was one of perpetual spring in which humanity lived in perfect harmony with the natural world. That nature was friendly, unthreatening, and, above all, giving: It bountifully provided fish from the river, gigantic fruit from trees, shade from the sun, and delightful pastoral views on which to gaze. In short, Cathay resembled an oriental Garden of Eden.

In addition, in most households, pieces of china were the only objects that possessed an origin one could classify as exotic. Therefore, people fondly associated their cups and saucers with the romance of swift-sailing vessels, epic voyages through storms and pirate-infested waters, and distant Canton, the great Far Eastern emporium known for its strange people, novel sights, beautiful views, and unusual smells. According to Alice Morse Earle, a late-nineteenth-century collector of porcelain, the residents of American port cities in the past had purchased their dishes and cups on the wharves, directly from the merchants who had recently weighed anchor. There they could watch "the strange picturesque foreign sailors, barefooted and earringed," removing the porcelain from crates with their "bronzed tattooed hands." Purchased in this fashion, the pieces seemed steeped in the mysterious and exotic cultures of the orient. That "old blue Canton [china]" she wrote, must have "savored to the fair buyers" of the "far-away lands and foreign sights" and "the magic and mystery of the sea."

Earle desired so passionately to feel connected to the people and customs of China that she learned enough of the Chinese written language to read the characters on her porcelain: "I too belonged to what is in China the ruling class, the literati." Finally, to while away the dull hours of the day, she invented narratives that explained the various elements in a porcelain design: "I have woven about it and halloed around it an *Arabian Nights* romance of astonishing plot and fancy." As Earle demonstrates, objects shipped from China often played a large role in the imaginative life of a creative individual. "Truly, we of to-day," Earle concluded, "have lost all the romance." ¹⁰

The Willow Pattern

Earle was not the first to create a fabulous oriental tale to accompany a picture fired onto a piece of porcelain. At some point around the dawn of the nineteenth century, a spurious Chinese story developed around the famous willow pattern, even though the only porcelain bearing this exact design had its origin in England, not China. After many years and numerous mishaps, British potters in the 1780s finally produced porcelain that had the same physical properties as did the Chinese varieties. Having met Chinese standards, manufacturers next faced the challenge of crafting the appearance of their wares so that these could not only survive but ultimately flourish in a marketplace that continued to embrace Canton china. Using the popular *shan shui* designs as models, English porcelain designers executed landscape scenes in the Chinese style and placed these patterns on bowls, plates, and cups through a mechanical process called transfer printing. ¹¹

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Thomas Turner, working for the Caughley establishment in Shropshire in the 1780s, designed a precursor to willowware. ¹² Though his creation resembled the pattern that would eventually conquer the Western world, it could not be strictly classified as authentic willow because it did not possess all of the four elements that would come to define willowware: a willow tree in the central position, three figures crossing a bridge away from the main building, a fence stretching across the foreground, and two birds hovering in the top center (fig. 2.3). ¹³ Thomas Minton, working for Josiah Spode's pottery manufactory, designed the actual prototype at some later

point in the same decade. ¹⁴ Despite being the first to sell willowware, Spode did not remain the sole producer for long because, shortly after the pattern's inception, several other porcelain manufacturers obtained copies of it. ¹⁵ By the end of the 1780s, numerous porcelain factories were churning out willowware, much of it intended for the American market. ¹⁶

The British-designed willow pattern pleased American consumers for mostly the same reason as the Chinese *shan shui* patterns. Still, with its production in England, willowware lacked one critical attribute that had contributed heavily to the success of its Chinese competitor: the mystique and romance that origin in a distant Far Eastern country could lend to an object?

Compensating for this shortcoming, a pseudo-Chinese tale evolved around the non-Chinese willow pattern. This willow legend, like the pattern that inspired it, emerged as a Western attempt to capture a Chinese essence.

Whether the legend arose on its own out of the popular imagination or was the result of an ingenious marketing scheme by a British potter, one cannot say for certain. Regardless, the story proved enormously popular in England and soon migrated across the Atlantic to the United States.



The most important feature of this legend, and what contributed to its contagious appeal, was that any piece of porcelain bearing the willow pattern provided the illustrations for the narrative. In an era in which illustrated storybooks were both expensive and rare, the willow legend allowed mothers of modest means to tell a story to their children at bedtime or during meals and even show illustrations. Since the legend mutated as it moved from person to person and from one culture to the next, several versions of the legend eventually came into existence. However, all tell a romantic tale of two star-crossed Chinese lovers—a mandarin's daughter and his lowly bookkeeper.

As the story goes, a powerful mandarin serves the emperor as the customs officer of a great seaport. His position allows him to acquire great wealth because smugglers repeatedly offer him bribes in order to avoid paying customs fees. When word of the mandarin's corruption begins to circulate, he removes himself from his post and retires to his mansion in the countryside, taking only his accumulated wealth, a bookkeeper named Chang, and his daughter, Koong-se. Fearing an official investigation, the mandarin orders Chang to square away his books so that they can bear scrutiny. Chang loyally executes this task, only to find himself summarily discharged by the mandarin upon its completion. However, prior to his dismissal, Chang and Koong-se fall in love.

Knowing that the mandarin would never approve of the union of his daughter with a lowly bookkeeper, the two young lovers meet surreptitiously every night beneath the fruit trees, which are included in the pattern. When the mandarin learns of these clandestine trysts, he confines Koong-se to a room overlooking the river and demands that a strong palisade (pictured on all specimens of willowware) be built all around the mansion grounds to keep Chang away from his daughter. Worst of all, he also makes arrangements for her to wed Ta-jin, a wealthy duke who is her equal in status but far more advanced in age. The wedding is to take place when the peach tree blossoms (pictured). Upon hearing the news of Koong-se's engagement, a despairing Chang realizes that he prefers death to a life without his beloved. To his lover across the river he floats a hollow coconut containing a note in which he vows to commit suicide when the buds on the peach tree open. Though greatly depressed, Chang also formulates a plan to steal Koong-se away.

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One evening, Ta-jin arrives at the mansion bearing a box of jewels that he intends as a gift for his fiancée. That same night, Chang appears at the mandarin's doorstep disguised as a beggar seeking alms. Since Chinese custom requires the wealthy to treat the poor charitably, Chang gains entrance into the house and soon finds Koong-se in her room. Down in the main hall, the mandarin and Ta-jin enjoy an evening of entertainment, food, and wine. When the latter induces sleep, Chang seizes the box of jewels and quietly leads Koong-se out of the mansion. Unfortunately, as the lovers attempt to sneak past the mandarin, he awakens, raises the hue and cry, and proceeds to pursue them himself. The two lovers flee across the bridge as the mandarin, holding a whip, follows closely behind (pictured). It must have been one of the earliest instances of what later became known as a chase scene.

The lovers find a fisherman with a junk (pictured) who is willing to convey them to a nearby island, where they promptly hide in a gardener's hut. The enraged duke, hoping to have Chang

put to death for stealing both his fiancée and his jewels, deploys his spies to search the area. When the duke's soldiers arrive on the island, Chang and Koong-se escape onto a boat and sail to another island. To support themselves, they begin to sell off the jewels one by one. But as time passes, the two realize they are safe and begin to build a new life. Chang constructs a house (pictured) and brings the land to a profitable state of cultivation. He also writes a book on gardening, and it brings him a degree of fame. As for the duke, his desire for revenge continues to smolder in his heart. And so, when the literary reputation of Chang reveals his whereabouts, the duke dispatches his soldiers to the island. Chang valiantly resists their advances but is mortally wounded in the process. Greatly distraught, Koong-se flees into the house and lights it on fire with herself inside. At this point, the Chinese gods, who are watching the tragedy unfold from on high, decide to intervene; they place a curse on the vengeful duke and take pity on the unfortunate lovers. As is pictured in the pattern, they turn Chang and Koong-se into kissing doves just before they perish. [17](#)

With the willow legend, mothers captivated their juvenile audiences by projecting a narrative of love, danger, and adventure onto a make-believe Chinese landscape. And the tremendous popularity of this legend had the effect of creating a vogue for willowware. Since supply in England was able to keep pace with demand in the United States, cups, bowls, plates, and saucers bearing the design soon flooded American society. Ada Walker Camehl, who collected china around the dawn of the twentieth century, found plenty of willowware even out in rural areas of the United States. [18](#) To the porcelain connoisseur Warren Cox, the proliferation of willowware occurred to the detriment of good taste: "Nothing could better exemplify the utter dearth of aesthetic consciousness than the stupid copying of this design which lacks every element of true Chinese painting and any real claim to beauty whatsoever, and the maudlin stories wrought about it to please the sentimental old ladies of the late eighteenth century." [19](#)

The "maudlin stories" to which Cox referred are of course the willow legend in its myriad permutations. The story became such an integral part of American folklore that it even found its way into verse. In fact, along with the usual nursery rhymes, a poetical version of the story was commonly recited to children by their mothers:

So she tells me a legend centuries old
Of a Mandarin rich in lands of gold,
Of Koong-Shee fair and Chang the good,
Who loved each other as lovers should.
How they hid in the gardener's hut a while,
Then fled away to the beautiful isle.
Though a cruel father pursued them there,
And would have killed the hopeless pair,
But kindly power, by pity stirred,
Changed each into a beautiful bird.

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Like any retelling of the willow legend, this poem was clearly designed to be repeated in the presence of a piece of willowware, because it points out the various elements in the pattern that correspond to specific moments in the story: "Here is the orange tree where they talked, / Here they are running away, / And over all at the top you see / The birds making love always." [20](#)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow also fell under the magical spell of the willow pattern in his childhood years. However, he did not require the legend to fire his imagination, because the image by itself was sufficient to transport him to an imaginary world. The willow pattern that "we knew / In childhood," he wrote, enabled these "coarser household wares" to transcend their purely utilitarian function. With "its bridge of blue / Leading to unknown thoroughfares," the willow pattern offered a portal to an enchanted world where one could observe the "solitary man," the "white river," the "arches," and the "fantastic trees." So different, novel, and powerful, the willow pattern made an unmistakable impression on the imaginative Longfellow and others like him; it either "filled us with wonder and delight" or "haunted us in dreams at night." [21](#)

Another poem on the subject suggests that many people actually believed that both willowware and the romantic willow legend came from China, not England. And as the poem indicates, these mistaken origins played an integral role in transforming the dining experience in nineteenth-century America:

My Willow ware plate has a story,
 Pictorial, painted in blue,
 From the land of the tea and the tea plant
 And the little brown man with a queue.
 Whatever the food you serve, daughter,
 Romance enters into the feast,
 If you only pay heed to the legend,
 Of the old chinaware plate from the East. 22

Since the story sounded Chinese and the design looked Chinese, the willow pattern and the accompanying legend had the combined effect of masking the true origin of the porcelain—just as the English producers had hoped it would. Many Americans who believed that this spurious Chinese legend was authentic told it at the dinner table to imbue an otherwise quotidian meal with the romance and exoticism associated with China. 23 In this way, an ordinary meal could take on an ersatz Far Eastern splendor: “Romance enters into the feast.” Since any revelation of willowware’s true origin threatened to spoil the enjoyment, Americans tended to consider all blue-and-white porcelain as Chinese and could become testy when apprised of a piece’s true English roots. 24 The willow pattern and the accompanying legend achieved such ubiquity in American life that one must consider their pervasive influence if seeking to understand how an idealized vision of China permeated Americans’ thinking in the early nineteenth century.

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Watercolors on Pith

Americans encountered porcelain far more than any other image-bearing commodity, but one other inexpensive trade article also offered scenes of Chinese life: export watercolors. Although many people mistakenly referred to these as “rice paintings,” the actual surface was pith, an inexpensive vegetable-based paper that was light, brittle, and translucent. 25 Unlike the simplistic *blue-and-white shan shui* or willow patterns, these paintings were varied, detailed, and colorful. Executed by Chinese artists, they illustrated Chinese people, customs, ceremonies, plants and animals, trades and industries, and landscapes. Though serving no practical purpose, the paintings nonetheless found their way into many American homes because they were affordable enough to appeal to the individual who desired visual information on China but did not have deep pockets.³⁰

Chinese watercolors have a history dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, but it wasn’t until the 1830s that they could be purchased in an American store. Before then, they were uncommon enough that a minister looking back on his childhood years in the 1820s recalled his intense fascination with one particular Chinese painting owned by a neighbor:

Fifty years ago, when the humble parlors of frugal New England possessed but few pictures, and those of little artistic merit, we used to go to a neighbor’s, and ask . . . that we might satisfy childish curiosity by gazing upon the portrait of a Chinese lady, done by a native artist in brightest reds and blues, and brought to this country by a sailor friend of the family who had voyaged to Canton. The little feet peeping out beneath the ample folds of the wide pantalets were objects of greatest interest. We were told that said feet were cramped to infantile dimensions by wearing, in infancy, an iron shoe. 26

In addition to illustrating how starved people were for pictures (which explains some of their fixation on willow and *shan shui* designs), the above extract suggests that, to see a picture of this type, one had to know (or at least be not too many degrees of separation removed from) someone who had visited Canton. Unavailable on the American market, Chinese watercolors were something that traders, sailors, and missionaries brought home in limited quantities as gifts or souvenirs. In 1790, William Bentley, a pastor in Salem, wrote of a strikingly colorful “Image of a Mandarin” presented to him by a sea captain. The trader Robert Bennet Forbes returned from China bearing export watercolors for friends and family. Similarly, John Haskell carried home an album containing pictures of Chinese ships. And Hugh Brown, a missionary, purchased several sets of twelve paintings in Canton for about two dollars each. 27

Rarities in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century, these paintings became common when merchants began to view them less as souvenirs and more as tradable commodities that could be shipped to the United States in bulk. In the early 1830s, Nathaniel and Frederick Carne began to import Chinese export watercolors to New York. According to one observer, when these paintings reached the American market "they took amazingly."²⁸ When other traders decided to follow the example of the Carne brothers, the Chinese responded by stepping up production. By 1848, Samuel Wells Williams, an American missionary in China, estimated that the industry employed two thousand to three thousand people.²⁹

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The most famous and prolific of all Chinese watercolor painters was known to foreigners as Tingqua, though his true name was Kwan Luen Chin. Tingqua was the brother of Lamqua, an accomplished Chinese painter in the Western style who had been the protégé of the English painter George Chinnery. The younger Tingqua chose watercolors as his medium in part out of familial deference to his brother, who worked primarily in oils. In Canton, Tingqua owned a studio where he directed a small stable of watercolorists. Though all paintings produced by this studio are attributed to Tingqua, many never received so much as a single brushstroke from the master painter. He would create original compositions, and his assistants would churn out as many reproductions as the market demanded.³⁰

To produce copies quickly and effectively, many watercolor studios employed an operational system in which a sheet of pith paper would pass from one artist to the next, with each responsible for painting a particular element. A French observer visited a studio and described the process:

Here it is that are painted those little silk covered albums which are sent to England and the United States and even to France. . . . There is no art in this. It is purely a mechanical operation, in which the system of division of labor is faithfully practiced. One painter makes trees all his life, another figures; this one draws feet and hands; that one houses . . . but none of them capable of undertaking an entire painting.³¹

Other studios implemented a transfer printing technique whereby the painter obtained a general outline by tracing a master design through the translucent pith paper and then proceeded to fill in between the lines with color.³² In this way, the Chinese mass-produced watercolor paintings in much the same fashion as they did images on porcelain.

Though produced solely by Chinese hands, these watercolors bore the imprint of Western tastes. Osmond Tiffany, an American tourist who traveled to Canton in 1844, drew a line of distinction between traditional Chinese art and these export watercolors: "The painters are a numerous class in old and new China streets, and are certainly much better than I expected to find. I mean those artists who have learned to paint in the English style; though the genuine artists, who practice in the native fashion, are very good in their way." One can explain the radical differences between the two aesthetic styles by calling attention to the scientific purpose that these watercolors executed in "the English style" were originally intended to serve.³³

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The Chinese began producing these watercolors well before 1800, at a time when the Western world was awash in the ideals of the Enlightenment. For Westerners with scientific leanings, obtaining knowledge of China entailed the classification of everything found in China according to a strict taxonomy. In this spirit, Europeans communicated to the Chinese their desire to obtain pictorial information on the nation's human society as well as on its extensive flora and fauna. In short, they sought detailed and accurate paintings of any living thing that could be systematically assigned an appropriate place in the Great Chain of Being. To meet this demand, a new type of Chinese painter emerged who operated under what was to him a novel aesthetic, one centered more on realism and possessing none of the subtle or impressionistic qualities of traditional Chinese painting.³⁴

With this new objective, Chinese watercolorists soon produced a tremendous corpus of paintings that bordered on the encyclopedic. Osmond Tiffany vouched for their comprehensiveness, saying they depicted "everything enacted in life."³⁵ Indeed, the paintings provided a pictorial version of

the Great Chain of Being, or at least of those links that were indigenous to China. Like the museum of Charles Willson Peale in Philadelphia, where one could view much of creation displayed hierarchically, from the portraits of the founding fathers on down to preserved specimens of beetles, surviving Chinese watercolors show China represented from top to bottom, from the most august examples of human beings on down to insect and plant life. ³⁶

At the pinnacle rests the emperor himself, seated on the dragon throne, all decked out in his dazzling imperial robes. That he appears before a completely white background suggests he was as much a specimen for scientific inquiry as he was a subject for art (fig. 2.4). Proceeding down the Great Chain, one encounters mandarins and their wives, soldiers, tradespeople, and commoners. In addition to the various classes of human beings on offer from the watercolorists are various zoological, entomological, and botanical subjects: Chinese birds, fish, animals, insects, and flowers. As a further reflection of the scientific interests guiding this artwork, many of the species depicted are provided with Latin names used in the Linnaean system of nomenclature; the name *Helubium speciosum*, for example, accompanies the picture of a lotus flower. ³⁷ Of course, since the Chinese did not employ the Linnaean system, Europeans and Americans necessarily provided these labels. In fact, Tingqua, upon completing a series, would typically present it to the American missionaries stationed in Canton, who would give each individual composition an appropriate title. ³⁸

In addition to covering China vertically along the Great Chain, watercolors moved laterally, offering illustrations of the various customs, trades, pastimes, and vices of the Chinese people.



Americans could view depictions of a wedding ceremony, a funeral, methods of torture and punishment, sailing vessels, and gambling as well as the various stages involved in the preparation and consumption of opium (fig. 2.5). The artists also depicted the various stages of production in the four major industries of China—silk, rice, tea, and porcelain. Americans particularly coveted sets of watercolors treating the latter two items in that list. Nearly everyone purchased those goods, and so they were curious about the production process. Sets of thirteen paintings (one painting for each step of the process) were the norm, but a masterful composition by Tingqua compacted all stages of tea production into a single view (fig. 2.6). ³⁹ Also popular were the panoramic views of Canton, the famous port from which all tea and porcelain had come (fig. 2.7). ⁴⁰ These pictures came both in albums and in sets that included a brocaded silk frame with a glass front; with this display apparatus, one could rotate the paintings, perhaps featuring a different one each day (fig. 2.5). ⁴¹

Despite the scientific impetus behind the creation of these paintings, modern scholars have challenged their verity. With respect to the scenes of China's major industries, Craig Clunas, an authority on these watercolors, has argued that the Westerner was not seeing "an accurate piece of reportage" because the artists themselves had probably never visited the locations they depicted.



But since the artists did understand the tastes of their customers, the Westerner received his own glamorized preconceptions "reflected back at him by an artist whose sole concern was to please." In particular, the production of porcelain, for which thousands labored in "cramped and primitive workshops," came across in these pictures as a delightful cottage industry. ⁴²

And with respect to the panoramic views of Canton, Carl Crossman has written that the landscape is always highly idealized—with clear sky, cottony clouds, and unpolluted water. ⁴³ Concerned more with sales in a highly competitive market than with infallible realism, watercolorists understandably presented a version of China that would entice Westerners. Though not necessarily inaccurate, the paintings did depict a platonic ideal more than a geographic reality.



The idealized nature of these paintings, more than their scientific merit, explains their popularity with the general American public. In the aggregate, all these paintings may have amounted to a Great Chinese Chain of Being, but ordinary people encountered them in a disorganized or piecemeal fashion; they never viewed all of the works at one time arranged in the hierarchical manner prescribed by the Linnaean system. Even if they did, few possessed the scientific background to understand the importance of such an arrangement. Instead, the paintings, when hung on a wall or viewed in an album, were able to stimulate the interest of the beholder for a

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reason utterly divorced from their underpinnings in science: For families who already owned willowware or Canton china, they provided a more detailed look at Cathay.

The Real China?

Americans clearly enjoyed marveling at the Chinese scenes found on teacups and sheets of pith paper, but to what extent did they believe the world depicted on these commodities reflected the actual China? Were they able to draw a line of distinction between geographical reality and a charming picture on a commodity? Chinese watercolorists embellished their scenes with such subtlety that their works came to enjoy a reputation for unimpeachable accuracy. Osmond Tiffany asserted that actual scenes of Chinese life "all appear in perfect truth in these productions." So confident was Tiffany of their verity that he boldly proclaimed, "He who studies them has a better opportunity of seeing things as they actually exist in China, than if he stayed there ten years."⁴⁴ As for porcelain, one might assume that people knew better than to believe that these simplistic designs could reflect the actual landscapes of China. But if Americans did trust that these idyllic images were accurate, then they must also have believed that their vision of Cathay was accurate.

Surprisingly, compelling evidence suggests this was indeed the case. Brantz Mayer, a travel writer from Baltimore who visited Canton in 1827, held porcelain accountable for shaping perceptions of China. "Our general notions of the arts and civilization of the Empire," he observed, "were derived from . . . 'that world before perspective,'—a China plate."⁴⁵ In 1845, a writer for the *Boston Atlas* wrote that "our first ideas of China-dom were formed at meal times, and illustrated with *plates*."⁴⁶ Samuel Goodrich, the popular author of children's books for young readers, was so certain that children were using Canton china to imagine the country and its people that, in his *Manners and Customs of Nations* (1844), he introduced China by alluding to this commodity: "Everyone is familiar with their dress, personal appearance, and aspect of their houses, from the drawings in their porcelain."⁴⁷ Another children's book, *Peter Piper's Tales About China*, instructed young readers to examine Canton china for accurate information on China. "You may form a good idea of the manner in which the Chinese dress upon ordinary occasions," the author advised, "by noticing the figures which they delineate upon their tea-cups, and their other articles of porcelain."⁴⁸ As late as 1900, L. C. Meyer, an Englishman, helped his readers visualize the Chinese: "You have seen their pictures, for they often draw pictures of themselves on their china."⁴⁹

With respect to willowware in particular, in 1843 a British writer attested to its instructive value: "The earliest record that we have of Chinese customs, is to be found in the willow pattern plate. From this it would appear that the Celestials are in the habit of fishing from the tops of bridges."⁵⁰ In 1887, Carter Harrison, the former mayor of Chicago, used the famous willow pattern to prove his point that frequent and repeated small events, such as the daily exposure to an image, can affect one's outlook: "Men's opinions [are] moulded, or at least colored, by the veriest trifles—colored into prejudices which require time and care to eradicate. He whose mother's treasured porcelain service was of the old blue willow pattern, has, more or less, his impressions of the Celestial Empire fashioned upon the model he studied upon the plates from which he ate."⁵¹ Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, the travel literature of Thomas Cook and Son attempted to entice Americans to purchase a packaged tour of China by invoking their collective memory of the willow pattern: "Foochow [Fuzhou] at once reminds us . . . of the renowned 'Willow Pattern' which usually decorated the dinner plates."⁵²

Owners of willowware and Canton china, then, apparently took quite seriously these small designs that we now deem unrealistic and purely ornamental. Our next step is to understand why they did. First, one must consider that these patterns first appeared in a historical period in which visual images in general were scarce. At the turn of the nineteenth century, printing technology had yet to achieve a high proficiency in the mechanical reproduction of pictures, so that newspapers were largely devoid of images. And lithography and photography, which would effectively democratize the visual image later in the century, had yet to be invented. As a result, pictures of any kind were hard to come by for those who could not afford paintings and books with engraved illustrations, and so Chinese landscapes on porcelain enjoyed a heightened currency for a brief period during which they received a great deal of attention from their curious owners.

Second, the spread of these objects coincided with a shortage of accessible information on China. In an effort to preserve stability by keeping the outside world at bay, the Qing government confined Westerners to the foreign factories, a small zone designated for international trade located on the waterfront just outside the city walls of Canton. Although this edict proved constraining, the lack of access did not mean that information was entirely unobtainable; in fact, several lengthy works by European authors were available to anyone with the money to buy them, the time to read them, and the education to understand them. ⁵³ However, even those holding such a weighty tomes in their hands might not learn much from it because it forced the reader, in the words of the American trader William Wood, "to wade through such a mass of comparatively uninteresting matter, and tediousness of detail, that few choose to purchase their knowledge of China at the price of so much patient research." In 1830, Wood wrote a book on China partly because a truly accessible source for information on China had yet to appear. ⁵⁴

Third, although Americans lacked a trustworthy source for information on China, a literary work highly cherished during that era contained rich descriptions that seemed to corroborate the images on porcelain. Before the Civil War, one of the most common volumes found on American bookshelves was *Arabian Nights* (it also went by the title *The Thousand and One Nights*), a large collection of oral literature compiled over several centuries. ⁵⁵ For any literate child, these volumes were almost standard reading. According to the preface to a children's edition of 1848, "the *Arabian Nights* are to our childhood what . . . the writings of Shakespeare are in after life." ⁵⁶ Andrew Carnegie recalled the magical effect of *Arabian Nights* on his childhood imagination in the 1840s. "I was carried into a new world," he wrote. "I was in dreamland as I devoured those stories." ⁵⁷ Though we in the present tend to think of the work as Middle Eastern, a couple of tales are actually set in China, a fact not overlooked by nineteenth-century readers. They knew, for example, that Aladdin, perhaps the best-known character in the entire work, was Chinese. ⁵⁸ They also appeared to believe that the book, far from being pure fancy, imparted legitimate ethnographic information about Eastern cultures. Indeed, they were told as much in the introductions to some of the early editions: "The *Arabian Nights*," one translator proclaimed, "is more descriptive of the people, customs, and conduct of Eastern countries . . . than any existing work," and travelers to those parts have confirmed "the correctness and authenticity of this work." ⁵⁹

That China and *Arabian Nights* were melded together in the American imagination is supported by numerous references connecting the two. When Caroline Howard King visited the Chinese exhibits at the East India Marine Society in Salem in the 1830s, she described them as having "a touch of the dear old *Arabian Nights*." ⁶⁰ In 1844, New Yorkers enjoyed a theatrical production called *Aladdin the Wonderful Lamp* that contained characters named Tongluck, Kein Long Fong Whang, and Widow Ching Mustapha. ⁶¹ In 1847, the Boston Museum presented *The Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin of the Wonderful Lamp*, a musical composed by the popular songwriter Thomas Comer. ⁶² When former president Ulysses S. Grant toured China in 1879, a member of his party described his surroundings as being "like a scene from the '*Arabian Nights*.'" ⁶³ In sum, if trade objects offered an unrealistic view of China, the fantastical scenes from *Arabian Nights* only compounded the problem. Thus, when Alice Morse Earle invented "an *Arabian Nights* romance" to accompany the designs on her Canton china, she probably was not the only one to fuse these two unreliable sources of images into a single enchanting vision. ⁶⁴

Fourth, many Americans put credence in Cathay for the simple reason that they wanted to do so. As the imaginative musings of Alice Morse Earle, the poetry of Longfellow, and the popularity of the willow legend all attest, the vision of Cathay filled various psychological needs. Many people had a strong desire to escape their daily lives and enjoy a taste of the exotic, and now they were able to look to china bowls and plates to deliver just such an experience. Of course, the pleasure afforded by these small fantasies hinged on the absence of empirical evidence refuting the existence of Cathay. Since some Americans traveled to China regularly, one would expect their firsthand accounts to puncture the fiction of Cathay, once and for all. What did travelers to China report when they returned home?

Travelers Weigh In

Interestingly, Americans who visited China often made comparisons between the scenes before

their eyes in Canton and the idyllic mental images formed by frequent exposure, during their childhood, to pictures on both porcelain and pith. Some travelers expressed disappointment at the failure of the real China to match dreamy Cathay, while in the opinion of others China satisfactorily met all expectations. Regardless, that so many referred to this comparison in their accounts offers testimony to the ability of these pictures to shape attitudes toward China and to etch deep and lasting impressions in the American psyche.

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No less of a figure than Commodore Matthew Perry appears to have invested watercolors and blue-and-white china with a degree of credibility. Perry arrived in China in 1853 to use the area of Canton, Macao, and Hong Kong as a temporary Far Eastern station from which he would launch his expedition to Japan. When he gazed on Canton for the first time, the emotion he registered was one of supreme disappointment. According to Francis Hawks, who compiled the official account of the expedition using the commodore's notes and journals, Perry had brought to the experience an inflated idea of the beauty of China, and the actual place failed to match his expectations.

He had imagined that it would be more striking to a stranger than in his case it proved to be. He expected to behold myriads of boats, decked with gay banners, and moving with cheerful activity in all directions. His fancy had sketched a pleasing picture of beautiful floating domiciles, moored under the banks of the river, and inhabited by a hundred thousand people in variegated costume; he recalled to memory the stories of the lofty pagodas lifting roof above roof, . . . *the snug cottages with the picturesque bridges and the comfortable Chinaman under the shade of a willow, with nothing to do but fish, all of which we have been accustomed to read, and pictures of which served to amuse us in our childhood.* . . . But the sketches of imaginative *boyhood* were . . . dispelled by the sober realities of maturer years. There was nothing of all this beautiful picture of crowded and happy life. There were, indeed, boats and people, pagodas and cottages, bridges and trees; but there were also filth and noise, poverty and misery, lying and roguery, and, in short, anything but a picture of quiet content and Arcadian simplicity. [Emphasis added.] ⁶⁵

During the years of his "imaginative boyhood," Perry had clearly constructed China as a bucolic paradise, and his trip to China in his adult years exposed these unrealistic hopes for what they were. That said, one must not overlook that all the elements Perry expected to see did indeed exist; unfortunately, their charm and beauty were spoiled by the presence of less desirable qualities—squalor, noise, penury, and mendaciousness.

But as for the sources that Perry had used to construct his idyllic vision, Hawkes unfortunately makes only a vague allusion to books and "pictures." These pictures very likely included the popular watercolor depictions of Canton that presented an idealized version of the harbor city ([fig. 2.7](#)). Indeed, they portrayed the great Chinese port as clean, colorful, happy, and lively—just as Perry had expected. Furthermore, Perry's references to bridges, cottages, pagodas, fishing, and a willow tree all strongly suggest the influence of blue-and-white porcelain china. That Perry would have such images stored in his memory should not come as a surprise. Having been raised in the coastal town of Newport, Rhode Island, he was almost certainly exposed both to Chinese watercolors and to porcelain on a regular basis. Since merchants, sea captains, and sailors regularly brought back views of Canton as souvenirs, the young and curious Perry would have viewed them one way or another. Of porcelain, too, he would have seen plenty, both in storefront displays and on his own dining room table.

Perry's case is most perplexing because, if anyone should have known better, it was the commodore. Though one can understand and forgive his faith in Chinese watercolors, he was too intelligent, rational, and well-educated to be likely to take seriously the simplistic and unrealistic images on porcelain. More importantly, Perry was unlike most Americans of his time in that he had waded through many of the dull and lengthy books on China. Before his departure, he prepared himself for Asia by subjecting himself to a rigorous study regimen in which he pored over every source he could find on the Far East. ⁶⁶ Yet somehow, despite this wealth of information, the blue-and-white image not only held its ground but was able to trump the knowledge he had acquired from serious scholarly sources.

However, Perry was not alone in endowing commodities with the power to shape preconceptions, as a log entry from an anonymous sailor approaching Canton indicates:

I was as happy as any person ever was to see anything. I scarcely believed I was so fortunate as really to be in China. As we sailed up the river I would cast my eyes from side to side: the thoughts and ideas I had pictured in my mind of it were not lessened in brilliancy, rather increased: the immense number of buildings that extended as far as the eye could reach; their fantastic shapes and gaudy colors; their trees and flowers *so like their paintings*, and the myriads of floating vessels; and above all the fanciful dresses and gaudy colors of their clothes, all serve to fix the mind of the stranger, upon his first arrival. [Emphasis added.] [67](#)

Just as Perry had recalled "pictures" of China, this ebullient sailor refers to "paintings." Judging from his mention of the landscape, vegetation, architecture, sailing vessels, and attire of the people, one can assume that he too was alluding to watercolors on pith, in which such elements were common.

Like the anonymous sailor, the tourist Osmond Tiffany also compared the approach to Canton with what were probably albums of Chinese watercolors. "Now we entered the river proper and had a fair view of the Canton province," he wrote. "Presently we descried the unique and exclusively Chinese towers, the pagodas, such as we had seen in picture books; and we hailed them as old friends and familiar." [68](#) Like Perry, both the sailor and Tiffany treated these painted views as legitimate conveyors of geographic information. Unlike the commodore, they found to their great delight that reality in China actually conformed to their preconceptions.

Similarly, a sailor named Charles Tyng found that China fared well when compared to images he had seen on commodities. Tyng was only fourteen when, in 1815, he made his first approach to Canton on board the *Cordelia*, and he found the scenery so striking that he was able to recall it in vivid detail many decades later when he wrote his memoirs (published in 1878).

The scenery along the river, which is thickly settled, is exceedingly interesting, and to one like me, who never saw anything of the kind before, it was wonderful. We passed a pagoda of large size, seven stories high. It was about a mile from the banks of the river. *It is exactly of the same form as pictures & models of pagodas which I had seen before. . . . The houses were curious, similar in appearance as those seen on china plates, and other ware.* The country seemed crowded with inhabitants, young and old, all moving about like ants round an ant hill. [Emphasis added.]

The first sight of China must have been exhilarating for a young boy. Using pictures and porcelain as his frame of reference, Tyng could only attempt to comprehend the remarkable sight. [69](#)

These glowing first impressions notwithstanding, the negative opinion expressed by Perry appears to have been the more typical response of Americans viewing China for the first time. John Latimer of Delaware, a trader in the employ of Russell and Company, resided in Canton for long intervals between 1815 and 1831. He noted the potential of Chinese commodities to mislead. "Canton is seen to most advantage from a great distance," he wrote in 1821. "I mean you form a greater idea of the beauty of it *by viewing its products* than if you were to be here" [emphasis added]. During his prolonged tenure in Canton, Latimer met with enough new arrivals to the city to detect a repeated pattern of behavior: "I never knew a person who was not greatly disappointed on landing and finding everything so different from what he expected." Evidently, those who had never visited China before used images on commodities to form an imaginative construct that, they would later conclude, surpassed the actual place in beauty and charm. [70](#)

With so many traders sharing this experience, one would expect that word of their disenchantment with China would eventually reach the ears of Americans back home. After all, at the major eastern ports in the United States, ships bearing merchants returning from China arrived on a regular basis. They probably did not communicate their disappointment or

disseminate a negative view of China, for three reasons. First, it was clearly not in the economic interests of the traders to puncture the idyllic vision. Since consumers associated Chinese trade articles with their country of origin, merchants knew profits could suffer if the American opinion of China darkened. For example, compare the above description of Commodore Perry's approach to Canton in 1853 with one that appeared the same year in a serialized adventure story set in China and published in P. T. Barnum's *Illustrated News*:

The blue river . . . softly descended to the sea, between two rows of pretty villages, which recalled those on porcelain plates. . . . Far in the distance the eye was lost amid mountains, blue and dreamy as the hues of the setting sun, or among endless collections of rice-fields and gardens. As night came on, all sank in its dark flood. 'China is a painted dream.' [Emphasis added.] ⁷¹

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Writing for Barnum's paper, the author intended solely for his story to please and entertain; the readers, he knew, wanted to believe that the "porcelain plates" they owned depicted the Chinese landscape correctly. As a result, his description reflected not realities in China but rather the desires of Americans who would never travel there. ⁷² Merchants in the China trade, like the author of this story, understood these desires quite well and knew they contributed heavily to their commercial success. And so, even if a trader despised China, he simply lacked the economic incentive to broadcast his condemnation to the public.

Second, the merchants withheld their criticism of China because, in the decades before the Opium War, the aforementioned Qing edict prevented them from seeing much of the empire. Major Samuel Shaw, the first American consul in Canton, recorded in his journal that "Europeans, after a dozen years' residence, have not seen more than what the first month presented to view." The "few observations to be made at Canton cannot furnish us with sufficient data from which to form an accurate judgment." ⁷³ John Sword, a disgruntled American trader, decried the small size of the area in which he was sequestered. He added with frustration that he could not give an account of a country he was prohibited from seeing. ⁷⁴ John Latimer echoed these observations: "From this country it is impossible for me to write any thing descriptive that can be interesting, being debarred the privilege of going in to the Country and even into the city [Canton]. . . . Our business constantly occupies our attention." To ensure that visitors enjoyed at least one authentic Chinese experience during their stay in Canton, Latimer often treated them to expensive feasts served and eaten "in the Chinese style." ⁷⁵ For Latimer and others, stringent governmental restrictions and their own all-consuming concentration on trade-related matters combined to eliminate almost any chance for a reliable description of China.

Latimer also remarked that, since his arrival, he had had "very little time to gratify my curiosity further than what I found in the stores where my business called me." ⁷⁶ The stores to which he referred were the Chinese-owned shops that were located beside the foreign factories and that catered to European and American customers. Brantz Mayer, who visited China in 1827, became terribly bored because the Qing law had placed such severe restriction on his movement. Like Latimer, Mayer found himself depending on these stores to supply an educational experience. "Shopping is the only relief for idleness and ennui in Canton," he wrote, "and the daily lounge through such cool and picturesque streets is as entertaining as a museum." ⁷⁷ Another American tourist, Osmond Tiffany, also observed that the stores have "the appearance of a museum." And he found the shops that sold watercolors particularly edifying, because he rated displays of these watercolors more instructive than a ten-year residency in China. ⁷⁸ Even young Charles Tyng described the stores using the term: "In the stores . . . there was everything that one had never seen before," he wrote. "It was like a museum." ⁷⁹ Finally, B. L. Ball, a physician who toured Canton in 1848, wrote that one of the shops "seemed like a museum, and we streamed along . . . feasting our curious eyes." ⁸⁰ The experiences of these five individuals suggest the supreme irony of the situation: Men who actually sojourned in China found themselves learning about the country from the local shops that displayed Chinese commodities, many of which were exported to, and therefore available in, the United States.

A third reason traders did not disabuse their countrymen of the idealized visions of China that were then in general circulation is that many of them had visited a real place in China that actually resembled a *shan shui* or willow pattern. While the foreign factories dominated the life of the merchant, one option did occasionally present itself to those eager to see another side of

China. That was a trip to the pleasure gardens of the hong merchants. The Chinese government, not wanting to sully its hands in the daily transactions with foreigners, gave a small group of eight to thirteen men the privilege of brokering the entire foreign commerce of the empire. Though these hong merchants paid Peking dearly for this opportunity, they were often able to turn it into astounding profits.

Some hong merchants spent a portion of their personal fortunes building and maintaining luxurious pleasure gardens on Honam Island, located across the Pearl River from the foreign factories. These Chinese gardens were spectacular man-made environments composed of artificial mountains, exotic birds and fish, flowers of brilliant colors, willow and fruit trees, winding pathways, meandering streams, zigzagging bridges, and handsome pavilions. According to Maggie Keswick, who has written extensively on the subject, Chinese gardens possessed an "extraordinary magic" that gave the visitor the effect of being "transported to a fairy landscape quite unlike any other on earth."⁸¹ To give his private gardens this magical quality, Houqua, the wealthiest of all the hong merchants, diverted \$200,000 annually toward its upkeep.⁸²

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On occasion, a hong merchant would allow a group of foreign traders or travelers to enter his artificial world. Since these men knew of the reputation of these gardens and had grown bored by life in the foreign factories, they readily accepted such invitations when they came. Almost without exception, guests described the gardens not only in glowing terms but also using a vocabulary that could just as easily have applied to patterns on porcelain. Some even remarked specifically on the uncanny resemblance between the two. When Brantz Mayer received his invitation in 1827, he seized the chance to spend a day in the private gardens of Manhop:

Passing . . . through a large circular gateway, we entered an extensive garden of flowers and shrubbery laid out in all the fanciful devices of the East. . . . On every side in the miniature vallies [*sic*], lakelets spread out filled with lilies . . . and swarming with gold fish that chased each other among the blossoms. Coquettish summer-houses of bamboo and cane, were twisted into every grotesque shape. . . . Light bridges, whose airy lines seemed spun of gossamer, were hung over the narrow streams . . . in this exquisite picture of Oriental fantasy and taste.⁸³

Apparently aware that his descriptions defied believability, Mayer insisted on the truthfulness of his account and even gave his stamp of approval to a comparison he knew his readers wanted to make: "Fanciful and beautiful as this might seem to a reader who has never been in the East, yet we assure him, that *in China he would be forced to believe the glowing descriptions of the Arabian Nights are not drawn from the imagination*" [emphasis added].⁸⁴

The *Arabian Nights* to which Mayer referred also contained a description of Chinese gardens. In one tale, "The Princess of China," the daughter of the emperor lives in the palaces of her father, who "has furnished them in the most sumptuous style." Each includes, as one of its most beautiful features, a garden: "Nor has he forgotten to embellish the gardens, which are attached to them, with everything, that can delight the senses; smooth lawns, or pastures enamelled with flowers; fountains, canals, cascades; groves thickly planted with trees, through which the rays of the sun never penetrate, and all differently disposed in each garden." As the story goes, the princess of China loves her palaces and gardens so much that she refuses all of the suitors who would wed her and take her away.⁸⁵

Osmond Tiffany, too, saw China through the lens of *Arabian Nights*. "In the Arabian Tales the central flowery kingdom [China] is considered the land of enchantments," he wrote, and then proceeded to allude to the two tales set in China: "Though I did not fall in love with a princess of China, yet to my vision there were as many wonders displayed as were unveiled by the genie of the lamp of Aladdin."⁸⁶ Since Tiffany passed nearly all of his time in China observing life and commerce in the foreign factories, his trip to the legendary estate of the hong merchant Puntinqua almost certainly contributed heavily to his highly idealized view of the country.

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Interestingly, at some point before this day trip, Tiffany had stopped into the chinaware shop of Cumchong, a Cantonese merchant. While perusing the displays of porcelain, he paused to examine the variety of Canton china that had been "exported in the millions of sets" to the United States and other Western countries. In describing the pattern, he noted the trees with

leaves "like cherries" and the "three men passing over a triangular bridge," details that strongly suggest he was looking at Chinese-designed imitations of willowware. Later, when Tiffany beheld Puntinqua's pleasure garden, the pattern lingered in his memory:

The house stood in the midst of the water, and was approached by bridges winding about in various directions, and guarded by balustrades as intricate and fantastic as the ivory carvings. There were bridges beginning every where, and ending in nothing at all. . . . Everything was queer, different from any thing we had ever before seen, and perfectly Chinese. *We thus learned that the extraordinary representations on porcelain . . . were not fictitious creations, but faithful realities. The bridge shaped like a truncated triangle on Chinese plates we actually saw. . . .* [Emphasis added.] [87](#)

Unlike Commodore Perry, Tiffany had visited a Chinese garden and therefore could report the existence of a place that corroborated the idyllic image on blue-and-white porcelain. Thanks largely to this experience, he left China with none of the disenchantment that would characterize Perry's reaction several years later. After all, he had seen Cathay with his own eyes.

Though diplomatic matters occupied the commodore during his stay in China, one member of his expedition found the time to embark on a tour before Perry's squadron embarked for Japan. In 1853, Bayard Taylor, the most celebrated travel writer in antebellum America (and the subject of chapter 8), was able to visit several of China's largest coastal cities because, after the Opium War, the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) made such excursions possible by opening up additional ports to foreign intercourse. In Shanghai, Taylor visited a famous "Tea Garden" and, to help his readers visualize the sight, he made reference to a familiar image. The garden resembled the "old-fashioned plates of blue Liverpool ware," Taylor wrote, alluding to one of the many producers of willowware, "with a representation of two Chinese houses, a willow tree, a bridge with three Chinamen walking over it, and two crows in the air." Though Taylor loathed China, he nevertheless considered a Chinese garden to be "a fair sample of what is most picturesque in Chinese life." [88](#)

Like the three travel writers—Mayer, Tiffany, and Taylor—traders also described the gardens as splendid, strange, and enchanting. Only the perennially glum John Sword could sound a dour note. Commenting on his visit to the gardens of Houqua, he criticized them as "arranged in very bad taste" and referred to his host as a "miserable looking old wretch." [89](#) Sword excepted, the traders who visited Honam Island reached a consensus. Written accounts by William Wood, Charles Manigault, Samuel Shaw, William C. Hunter, and Bryant Parrott Tilden, to name just a few, indicate that they all fell under the spell of Chinese gardens. Tilden even referred to his visit to the gardens of Paunkeiqua as "one of the most happy days of our lives." And on returning to the foreign factories at the end of the day, he was besieged by curious "yankees" who all wanted to know "where I had been, and what I had seen." [90](#)

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Not surprisingly, later in the nineteenth century, when a few well-off Americans were fortunate enough to visit China, they arrived with the *shan shui* and willow patterns deeply ingrained in their memories. Walter Bole, who visited Canton in the 1860s, immediately drew the connection between Chinese gardens and porcelain when confronted with the former. Viewing the gardens at the Temple of Longevity, Boles wrote that "they reminded me forcibly of the old-fashioned wedgewood ware, known as the 'willow pattern.'" [91](#) As the century progressed, the relationship between Chinese gardens and the famous pattern changed; what had been viewed as a coincidental resemblance became direct causation in travelers' accounts. Francis Clark, a tourist in China in the 1890s, claimed that a specific garden in Canton had actually inspired the ubiquitous willow pattern:

Let us go into the Guild Hall of the tea merchants. . . . [W]e are especially interested in a little garden behind the Guild Hall, for, *from this garden the famous willow pattern was copied, which is found upon the blue china ware of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers.* The original tree which gave it its name has died, but the other features are the same which have been perpetuated so many scores of millions of times, on the plates and cups and saucers and teapots and

teacups, which, in the olden time, were treasured by the mothers and handed down to the daughters with such scrupulous care. [Emphasis added.] [92](#)

Where did Clark get this notion? She got it from the Cantonese tour guide who organized and led her tour. "We were exceedingly fortunate, on our arrival at Canton, in finding the best guide it has ever been our good fortune to secure," Clark wrote. "Mr. Ah Cum, Jr., deserves to have his name embalmed in history." [93](#) Ah Cum Jr. belonged to an enterprising family that had dominated the sightseeing business in Canton since 1858 and would continue to do so well into the twentieth century. (The father and founder of the company, "Ah Cum" had taken Walter Boles around Canton three decades earlier.) [94](#) Quite possibly, the tour guides from this family had listened repeatedly over the years to tourists exclaiming that Chinese gardens bore a striking resemblance to the willow pattern, which they erroneously attributed to Chinese potters. After a while, the family perhaps decided to enhance their tours by making the false claim that a particular garden had served as the model for the famous pottery design. If so, tourists must have relished the opportunity to step inside a three-dimensional version of the famous pattern. [95](#)

Even if the Ah Cum family did perpetrate this rather benign hoax, the falsehood involved was minor. By tracing back the line of influence, one can see that Chinese gardens did in fact shape the willow pattern, albeit indirectly, through the intermediary of landscape painting. Though all experts on porcelain agree that the actual willow pattern sprang from the mind of an English pottery designer in the 1780s, this individual was clearly attempting to imitate the popular *shan shui* landscapes found on Canton china. The Chinese porcelain painters responsible for these designs had borrowed extensively from the long tradition of landscape painting in China; they employed the same artistic conventions and possessed the same view of man in relation to the natural world. Continuing the chain of influence, landscape painters in China historically played a large role in the development of Chinese gardens, as officials and wealthy men often hired landscape painters to design their private gardens. For these projects, the artists would implement the same art esthetic, conventions, and motifs that animated their paintings. [96](#)

Nearly all Chinese, rich and poor alike, dreamed of owning a garden that they could use either to entertain friends or to find a pocket of serenity in an otherwise chaotic world. [97](#) Constructing one, however, was no easy task; a Chinese garden required a tremendous amount of planning, skill, materials, and labor. One had to dig the grottoes; build hollow mountains; excavate lakes or ponds, fill them with water, and introduce varieties of colorful fish; construct various architectural elements including bridges, pavilions, winding paths, and kiosks; and import the recommended vegetation, such as chrysanthemums, peonies, orchids, lotus flowers, peach trees, plum trees, and bamboo. And of course, one could not forget the obligatory willow tree! Finally, one needed to erect the high walls that could block out the dust, noise, and confusion of the outside world. [98](#)

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Even when the construction was complete, this interaction between the garden and the landscape painter did not cease. The finished garden might attract another painter, who would use it as inspiration for his own landscape painting. In this way, the three Chinese art forms—porcelain, paintings, and gardens—developed together and ultimately influenced the English porcelain industry. Painters designed gardens that became the subject of later landscape paintings; porcelain painters transferred these paintings onto a ceramic surface; finally, English potters studied Chinese wares in order to develop designs for their own ceramics. Ah Cum's family, it seems, had not really lied after all. [99](#)

Though American traders were probably unaware of the centuries-old cross-fertilization that resulted in *shan shui* and willow patterns, their visits to the private gardens of the hong merchants clearly affected their overall outlook on China. These luxurious properties were the only part of China—at least the only part not organized to handle international commerce—that traders saw with their own eyes. Probably, most of them knew better than to believe either that the gardens were microcosms of China itself or that the vast interior of the country resembled on a larger scale these marvelous cultivated landscapes. That said, a garden was no less true to American traders in the sense that they perceived it as being pristine Chinese culture, Chinese culture distilled to its purest essence—a bastion of oriental splendor that broke up the monotony of their purely mercantile existence in the foreign factories. In sum, American traders might not have punctured the exaggerated visions of Cathay held by their countrymen, because they saw only a tiny portion of China that was unadulterated by contact with the West—and what they saw was truly spectacular. Or, to put it differently, if a potential customer in New York held up a china plate

in the company of a merchant and inquired whether or not one could find such a scene in China, the merchant's answer was an emphatic Yes.

Conclusion

Through their interactions with porcelain, Chinese watercolors, and *Arabian Nights*, ordinary Americans—predominantly mothers and housewives—developed an unrealistic construction of China as a pastoral oriental dreamland: the fantastical kingdom of Cathay. If a merchant in the China trade was observant, he could alight on a valuable insight into the psychology of his consumers: Chinese landscape scenes played a large role in the popularity of Canton china. Although people purchased these bowls, plates, and cups out of necessity, they treasured them because their origins in China imbued them with a romantic aura. In short, sales of both Canton china and willowware benefited from what we could call a “China effect.”

But not all Chinese goods carried charming landscape scenes. And so the challenge to merchants was somehow to extend the China effect to a commodity such as tea that, since it carried no image, did not necessarily signify China in the popular imagination. In chapter 3, I explore how merchants used aggressive advertising and creative marketing to establish in the minds of consumers a mental association between China and tea—an association that has endured to the present day. And since this effort required merchants to paint a colorful portrait of their subject, they unwittingly made a major and lasting contribution to the American image of China.

Notes:

Note 1: Although the name *Cathay* can have different meanings, which depend on the context in which it is used, for our purposes it refers exclusively to the imaginary construction of China that was prevalent in Europe and the United States and that was legendary for its beauty, mystery, and exoticism. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Nancy Ellen Davis, “The American China Trade, 1784–1844: Products for the Middle Class” (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1987), 114. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Davis, 67, 122. Ping Chia Kuo, “Canton and Salem: The Impact of Chinese Culture upon New England Life during the Post-Revolutionary Era,” *New England Quarterly* 3 (1930): 431. In the early nineteenth century, a Boston or Salem dwelling might have as much as one tenth of its “effects” originating in China, and Philadelphia would not have fallen too far short of that figure. Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682–1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 6. In Charleston, South Carolina, Chinese export porcelain is one of the most commonly found ceramics at archeological sites, accounting for 24 percent of all ceramics uncovered. The majority of these are shards of the blue and white inexpensive dinner and tea wares. Robert A. Leath, “‘After the Chinese Taste’: Chinese Export Porcelain and Chinoiserie Design in Eighteenth-Century Charleston,” *Historical Archaeology* 33, no. 3 (fall 1999): 50. [Back.](#)

Note 4: In 1815, Charles Tyng, a sailor with the *Cordelia*, explained the order used by the crew to load a cargo in Canton: “The first part of the cargo was boxes of china tea sets, dinner sets &c. These were placed in the bottom of the ship, being much heavier than the rest of the cargo. They answered for ballast. Then came the tea of various kinds.” Charles Tyng, *Before the Wind: The Memoir of an American Sea Captain, 1808–1833*, ed. Susan Fels (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 36–37. Robert Copeland, *Spode’s Willow Pattern and Other Designs after the Chinese* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 4; and David Quintner, *Willow! Solving the Mystery of Our Two-Hundred-Year Love Affair with the Willow Pattern* (Burnstown, Ontario: General Store Publishing House, 1997), 166. [Back.](#)

Note 5: C. Toogood Downing, *The Fan-qui in China, 1836–1837* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), 2:98; Crosby Forbes, *Hills and Streams: Landscape Decoration on Chinese Export Blue and White Porcelain: A Loan Exhibition from the Collection of the China Trade Museum* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibition Foundation, 1982), preface. [Back.](#)

Note 6: Crosby Forbes, preface. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Quintner, 168; and Ivor Noël Hume, *Pottery and Porcelain in Colonial Williamsburg's Archaeological Collections* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg, 1969), 40. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Warren Cox, *The Book of Pottery and Porcelain* (New York: L. Lee and Shepard; distributed by Crown, 1944), 611–12. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Crosby Forbes, preface. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Alice Morse Earle, *China Collecting in America* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1892), 186–87, 191–93. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Whereas all Chinese ceramics were hand-painted, the British employed this mechanical technique. A design engraved on copper was printed onto a piece of tissue paper, which was then transferred onto the ceramic object. Crosby Forbes, preface; Davis, 119. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Copeland, 4. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Geoffrey Godden, "The Willow Pattern," *Antiques Collector* (June 1972): 148–50. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Copeland, 33. [Back.](#)

Note 15: It was a common practice both for potters to lend engravings to one another and for successful factories to purchase the master patterns belonging to potters who were selling their businesses. Copeland, 4. [Back.](#)

Note 16: As a sign of the increasing success of the British industry, Charles Tyng reported that in 1821 his ship used stones for ballast, whereas in 1815 the practice had been to use Chinese porcelain: "China ware was no longer shipped, the English ware having taken its place." Fels, 75. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Harry Barnard, *The Story of the Wedgwood Willow Pattern Plate* (Hanley, England: Catalogue Printers), 2–7. Josiah Wedgwood and Sons published this guide book to Wedgwood porcelain. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Ada Walker Camehl, *The Blue-China Book: Early American Scenes and History Pictured in the Pottery of the Time* (1916; reprint, New York: Dover, 1971), xxvii. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Cox, 768–69. [Back.](#)

Note 20: In this version of the story, the father, not the duke, finds the lovers on the island. Camehl, 287. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Longfellow composed "Kèramos" in 1877 and first published it in *Harper's. The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Samuel Longfellow (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1886), 3:231–32. Another American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, viewed a porcelain "China tea-set" as strange but intriguing. In *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), he described it as "painted over with grotesque figures of man, bird, and beast, in as grotesque a landscape . . . a world of vivid brilliancy" ([Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 76–77). [Back.](#)

Note 22: Quintner, 152. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Perhaps realizing that Americans preferred to think of the willow legend as of Chinese origin, the Buffalo China Company, the first American pottery company to produce willowware, misinformed potential customers in its 1905 catalog: "The legend illustrated by the Blue Willow ware decoration is centuries old. It originated in China and forms a love story so alive with human interest that it never grows old." Quintner, 128. Similarly, Ada Walker Camehl wrote that what she believed was a Chinese story had inspired Thomas Minton to make the original willow pattern. Camehl, 287. Finally, Amy Carol Rand, in an article instructing women how to design table linen using the willow pattern, also wrote under the misconception that the pattern was Chinese in origin (*The Modern Priscilla* [July 1910], 4). [Back.](#)

Note 24: Earle, 181–82. [Back.](#)

Note 25: In Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill* (1875), the protagonist, Rose, states that a Chinese man she meets "looked as if he had walked out of one of those rice paper landscapes on the wall" (Cleveland: World, 1948), 72. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Reverend E. Wentworth, "Celestial Women," *The Ladies' Repository* (August 1874), 136. [Back.](#)

Note 27: *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905), 1:175; Margaret C. S. Christman, *Adventurous Pursuits: Americans and the China Trade* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984), 113; and Haskell's album, doc. 7, Downs Collection, Winterthur Library; Hugh Brown, account book, 1844–45, Downs Collection, Winterthur Library. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Walter Barrett, *The Old Merchants of New York City* (New York: Carleton, 1863), 44. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Samuel Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Education, Social Life, Arts, Religion, &c., of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848), 2:175. [Back.](#)

Note 30: For information on Tingqua, see *Chinese Repository* (May 1847), 209–10. In 1850, the *Frolic*, owned by Augustine Heard and Company, departed Canton for San Francisco with four cases of paintings from Tingqua's studio. The ship wrecked off the coast of California. Thomas Layton, *The Voyage of the "Frolic": New England Merchants in the Opium Trade* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 134. [Back.](#)

Note 31: The French observer was named M. La Vollée. Quoted in Carl L. Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings, and Exotic Curiosities* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Antique Collectors' Club, 1991), 200. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Downing, 98. See also John Warner, *Tingqua, Paintings from His Studio* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1976), introduction. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Osmond Tiffany Jr., *The Canton Chinese; or, The American's Sojourn in the Celestial Empire* (Boston: James Monroe, 1849), 83–84. [Back.](#)

Note 34: The anonymous author of a book devoted to Chinese history made the following statement about the paintings' relationship to Western science: "Some native artists employed at Canton and Macao, by English naturalists, have delineated various specimens in botany and zoology scientifically" (*The People of China; or, A Summary of Chinese History* [Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1844], 164). [Back.](#)

Note 35: Tiffany, 83–85. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Two repositories for these fragile works are the Downs Collection at the Winterthur Library and the Asian Exports Department at the Peabody Essex Museum. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Collection 111 (14 boxes), Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Library. [Back.](#)

Note 38: *Chinese Repository* (May 1847), 209–10. [Back.](#)

Note 39: For all thirteen stages, see Crossman, appendix G. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Crossman, 183–84. [Back.](#)

Note 41: The Asian Exports Department at the Peabody Essex Museum owns several of these display apparatuses. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984), 25–29. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Crossman, 184. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Tiffany, 85. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Brantz Mayer, "China and the Chinese," *Southern Quarterly Review* 12, no. 23 (July 1847): 6. [Back.](#)

Note 46: *Boston Atlas* (15 September 1845). Quotation is cited in Ronald J. Zboray and Mary

Saracino Zboray, "Between 'Crockery-dom' and Barnum: Boston's Chinese Museum, 1845-47," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (June 2004): 272. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Samuel G. Goodrich, *Manners and Customs of Nations* (Boston: G. C. Rand, Wm. J. Reynolds, 1844), 343. [Back.](#)

Note 48: *Peter Piper's Tales about China* (Albany: R. H. Pease, n.d.), 4. The book is located in the Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Books Division. Neither the author nor the date of publication is given. However, that it is a part of the series Peter Piper's New Lithographic Toy Books probably places it in the 1840s or 1850s, when lithographic images began to appear in children's books. [Back.](#)

Note 49: L. C. Meyer, *Far Off; or, Asia Described* (London: Longmans, Green, 1900), 87. [Back.](#)

Note 50: The writer apparently took the Mandarin's whip from the willow legend to be a fishing pole. *Punch's Guide to the Chinese Collection* (London: Punch Office, 1844). [Back.](#)

Note 51: Carter H. Harrison, *A Race with the Sun; or, A Sixteen Months' Tour from Chicago around the World* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 130. [Back.](#)

Note 52: "Information for Travelers Landing at Hong Kong," pamphlet (published by Thomas Cook and Son, n.d.), New York Public Library, Travel Pamphlets, BEI n.c. 1-4. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste Grosier, George Staunton, and Sir John Barrow all wrote books on China that were published in this period. [Back.](#)

Note 54: William W. Wood, *Sketches of China: With Illustrations from Original Drawings* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1830), vi-vii. [Back.](#)

Note 55: According to Orville A. Roorbach, who compiled a record of every book published in the United States between 1820 and 1861, twelve editions of *Arabian Nights* appeared in this period. Roorbach, ed., *Bibliotheca Americana: Catalogue of American Publications, Including Reprints and Original Works, from 1820 to [January 1861]*, 4 vols. (New York: Peter Smith, 1939). Other editions were widely available before 1820, the first year covered by Roorbach. For instance, the Rare Books Division at the Free Library of Philadelphia owns five separate American editions of the book published before 1820, with the earliest dating back to 1794. The Free Library also owns several British editions that were probably sold in the United States. See also Holly Edwards, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 170. [Back.](#)

Note 56: *Tales from the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, as Related by a Mother for the Amusement of Her Children* (New York: Edward Walker, 1848). [Back.](#)

Note 57: *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie*, ed. John C. Van Dyke (1920; reprint, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 25. [Back.](#)

Note 58: The tale begins with the following lines: "In the capital of one of the largest and richest provinces in the kingdom of China, there lived a tailor, whose name was Mustapha. . . . His son whom he called Aladdin, had been brought up in a very careless and idle manner." *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp* (London: Hardy, 1789), 1. Another well-known tale, "The Princess of China," is also set in China. [Back.](#)

Note 59: *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Edward Forster (London: W. Savage, 1810), 1:x. In the early nineteenth century, when the American publishing industry was in its infancy, the bookselling market was dominated by English publishers and distributors. This edition was published in England but was probably also sold in the United States. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Caroline Howard King, *When I Lived in Salem, 1822-1866* (Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press, 1937), 28-30; and Walter Muir Whitehill, *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem: A Sesquicentennial History* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1949), 45-46. [Back.](#)

Note 61: George C. D. Odel, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931). [Back.](#)

Note 62: T. Comer, *Favorite Melodies from the Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp; as Produced at the Boston Museum* (Boston: Prentiss and Clark, 1847). The

book can be found in the Library of Congress, Performing Arts Reading Room. [Back.](#)

Note 63: John M. Keating, *With General Grant in the East* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1879), 188. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Earle, 193. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Francis L. Hawks, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, Performed in the Years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the Command of Commodore M.C. Perry, United States Navy* (Washington, D.C.: A. O. P. Nicholson, printer, 1856), 135. [Back.](#)

Note 66: William Heine, *With Perry to Japan: A Memoir*, trans. and ed. Frederic Trautman (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 6. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Dorothy Hawes, "To the Farthest Gulf: Outline of the Old China Trade," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 77 (April 1941): 120. Hawes does not cite the source for this first impression of Canton. [Back.](#)

Note 68: Tiffany, 40. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Tyng ascended rapidly through the ranks, becoming a captain, ship owner, and merchant. Though he possessed talent, his rise was aided by his family connections. He was related to James, Thomas, and Samuel Perkins, who were prominent merchants in the China trade. Tyng, *Before the Wind*, xiii-xiv, 14, 28-29. [Back.](#)

Note 70: Joan Kerr Facey Thill, "A Delawarean in the Celestial Empire: John Richardson Latimer and the China Trade" (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1973), 51. [Back.](#)

Note 71: "English and Chinese," *Illustrated News* (21 May 1853), 322. [Back.](#)

Note 72: It was the positive view of the approach to Canton, not the negative one, that tended to filter into children's books, as is evident in the following passage from *Peter Parley's Tales about Asia*: "By and by we began to approach Canton. The banks of the river were beautifully cultivated; the plains, the slopes, and the very hills which hung over the water, were covered with many kinds of fruit, grain, and vegetable. The whole landscape . . . seemed like one extensive garden. . . . At first it all appeared to me a dream. The houses . . . were unlike any I had seen before. . . . The fashion of the boats was strange; the dress, complexion, and features of the people were all new." [Samuel G. Goodrich], *Peter Parley's Tales about Asia* (Philadelphia: Desilver Jr. and Thomas, 1833), 21-22. [Back.](#)

Note 73: *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton*, ed. Josiah Quincy (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1968), 167-68, 178-179. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Davis, 243. [Back.](#)

Note 75: Thill, 34. Benajah Ticknor, *The Voyage of the Peacock: A Journal*, ed. Nan Powell Hodges (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 178. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Thill, 34-35. [Back.](#)

Note 77: Mayer, "China and the Chinese," 15. [Back.](#)

Note 78: Tiffany, 85, 90. [Back.](#)

Note 79: Tyng expected that the shopkeepers would become annoyed by his frequent visits, apparently because he was just a boy and unlikely to make a purchase. He was pleasantly surprised by their kindness; they would "take things down to show me" and even give him small knickknacks free of charge (*Before the Wind*, 34). [Back.](#)

Note 80: B. L. Ball, *Rambles in Eastern Asia, Including China and Manila, during Several Years' Residence* (Boston: James French, 1855), 121. [Back.](#)

Note 81: Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden: History, Art, and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1978), 14-15. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Elma Loines, ed., *The China Trade Post-Bag of the Seth Low Family of Salem and New*

York (Manchester, Maine: Falmouth Publishing House, 1953), 6. [Back.](#)

Note 83: Manhop later failed as a merchant and was exiled to the frontier region in the northwest of China. Mayer, "China and the Chinese," 18–19. [Back.](#)

Note 84: Brantz Mayer, *A Nation in a Nutshell* (1839), 24. The book is located in the Library of Congress, Department of Rare Books.. [Back.](#)

Note 85: Forster, *Arabian Nights*, trans. Forster, 3:21. [Back.](#)

Note 86: Tiffany, 271. [Back.](#)

Note 87: Tiffany, 70–71, 166–67. [Back.](#)

Note 88: Bayard Taylor, *A Visit to India, China, and Japan, in the Year 1853* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1859), 330. [Back.](#)

Note 89: Davis, 243. [Back.](#)

Note 90: Wood, 92–94; Jane Gaston Mahler, "Huguenots Adventuring in the Orient: Two Manigaults in China," *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 76 (1971): 12; *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 179; William C. Hunter, 40; and Lawrence Waters Jenkins, *Bryant Parrott Tilden of Salem, at a Chinese Dinner Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 17, 23. [Back.](#)

Note 91: Walter Bole, "A Day in Canton," *Appletons' Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* (23 July 1865), 108. [Back.](#)

Note 92: Francis E. Clark, *Our Journey around the World* (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington, 1894), 172. Clark was president of the United Society of the Christian Endeavor. [Back.](#)

Note 93: Clark, 164–65. [Back.](#)

Note 94: See the advertisement placed in *Cook's Tours*, a sightseeing guide published by Thomas Cook and Son: "The oldest Guides to the City of Canton are the AH CUM FAMILY who, for three generations since 1858, have conducted nearly all the Principal Visitors with perfect safety through the mazelike labyrinth of that most curious but fascinating City" (New York Public Library, Travel Pamphlets, B.E.I. n.c. 1-4). The guidebook is undated but probably appeared just after the turn of the century. Carter Harrison, who had just finished serving four terms as mayor of Chicago, embarked on a trip around the world. In Canton, he received a tour from Ah Cum. Harrison, 117–29. Also in 1894, George Raum, an American tourist, secured the services of the Cantonese tour guide (George Raum, *A Tour around the World* [New York: William S. Gottsberger, 1895], 368–72). [Back.](#)

Note 95: Even today, guides at a Chinese garden in Shanghai, reputed to have been in existence since the sixteenth century, make the same claim to tourists. Quintner, 126. [Back.](#)

Note 96: Julia B. Curtis, *Chinese Porcelains of the Seventeenth Century: Landscapes, Scholars' Motifs, and Narratives* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1995), 20; and Osvald Sirén, *Gardens of China* (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), 3. [Back.](#)

Note 97: Lew Chew, a Chinese American businessman in New York, recounted a memory from his childhood in China in the mid-nineteenth century: "I worked on my father's farm till I was about sixteen years of age, when a man of our tribe came back from America and took ground as large as four city blocks and made a paradise of it. He put a large stone wall around and led some streams through and built a palace and summer house and about twenty other structures, with beautiful bridges over the streams and walks and roads. Trees and flowers, singing birds, water fowl and curious animals were within the walls. . . . The man had gone away from our village a poor boy. Now he returned with unlimited wealth, which he had obtained in the country of the American wizards." Hamilton Holt, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 183. This interview was originally published as "The Biography of a Chinaman" in the *Independent* (19 February 1903). [Back.](#)

Note 98: Sirén, 4, 10–14, 32–36, 42. [Back.](#)

Note 99: Keswick, 91, 101. [Back.](#)

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