China *from* China

Porcelain and Stories of Early American Trade

LYMAN ALLYN ART MUSEUM
In collaboration with the Dietrich American Foundation
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Cover:
Plate and Platter from a Dinner Service with the Emblem of the Society of the Cincinnati for George and Martha Washington of Virginia, China, 1784–85. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1507-1, -2

DIRECTOR'S FOREWARD

This exhibition invites you to explore the rich history of the China Trade and the unheralded role of some of Connecticut's intrepid citizens. In the decades following the American Revolution, merchants and captains from coastal and riverfront towns – New London, New Haven, Hartford, and Middletown among them – set their sights across the Pacific. Their ships braved long voyages and uncertain markets in pursuit of silk, tea, porcelain, and profit.

The objects brought home were more than luxurious novelties; they were emblems of global connection, status, and taste. Connecticut households soon displayed Chinese export wares alongside American-made furniture, reflecting a new aesthetic shaped by trade. Behind the elegance of these pieces lies a fascinating story of cultural exchange, ambition, and the early stirrings of globalization. With this installation we seek not only to showcase the beauty of the objects and paintings, but also to trace the intricate human and economic networks that made their journey possible.

As a museum invested in interpreting the art and history of our region, we are proud to highlight the role Connecticut merchants played in this global enterprise. We are deeply grateful to the Dietrich American Foundation – especially its president – and to the other lenders and scholars, whose generous contributions and expertise have shaped this exhibition. Together, these efforts help us better understand how global trade shaped local lives – and how our inherited material culture reflects the complexities of our interconnected world.

Sam Quigley, Director
Lyman Allyn Art Museum

INTRODUCTION

By Eric Jay Dolin, author of When America First Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money in the Age of Sail

On February 22, 1784, the arc of American and Chinese history shifted. As the sun rose in the brilliant blue sky and gentle winds rippled the surface of water, the *Empress of China* sailed out of New York Harbor heading for Canton,* China. At the same time, another ship, the *Edward*, also headed out of the harbor, bound for London with Congress's dispatches containing the definitive articles of peace that ended the American Revolution. The coincidental sailing of these two ships provides a historical juxtaposition that could have been conjured by a novelist. While the *Edward* was delivering what could arguably be called the birth certificate of the United States, proclaiming the arrival of the newest nation, the *Empress of China* was making a very important statement of its own, announcing to the world that this new nation, no longer shackled by Great Britain's trade restrictions, was ready to compete in the international arena. And it is no surprise that one of the first places Americans chose to go was China. After all, they had long had a love affair with Chinese tea, porcelain, silk, and furniture, and now they could acquire these and other exotic items for themselves.

* Modern day Guangzhou

Portrait of the Chinese Merchant Howqua (Wu Bingjian), (1769–1843), ca. 1850. Lam Qua (Chinese, 1801–1860). Oil on canvas. Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH, gift of Eleanor Briggs, 2017.12. >

Over the next century, the American-China trade blossomed. There were many positive attributes of this relationship. In America, steaming cups of delicious and aromatic bohea, pekoe, souchong, bing, hyson, and singlo tea brightened the day of millions of people. The need to get tea more quickly across the oceans to avoid spoilage spurred the creation of majestic and exceedingly fast clipper ships, arguably the pinnacle of vessel design and beauty during the Great Age of Sail. Chinese porcelain tea cups, joined by a profusion of teapots, plates, and bowls, adorned tables throughout the ever-expanding nation, making for more gracious meals and entertaining. Silk attire brought a lustrous shine and a soft, smooth feel to the most fashionable apparel and furnishings. Elaborately carved Chinese chests, tables, chairs, and chaise longues, along with impressive paintings displaying Chinese and American themes, were given places of honor in stately homes and a burgeoning number of museums. Many China traders became fabulously wealthy. These men spread their capital throughout the economy, investing in, among other things, real estate, banks, mining, textiles, and insurance companies. They also supported numerous philanthropies and cultural institutions. Those investments and support left an indelible mark on the country, creating infrastructure, nurturing growth, and improving the lives of many Americans.

From the Chinese perspective, trade with America brought great wealth to Hong merchants and the government, especially in the early years of the relationship when Americans paid for what they desired with rivers of silver. The Americans brought other commodities that the Chinese wanted as well. Ginseng was in great demand as an energy booster, an aphrodisiac, and a curative for an impressive array of maladies. Seal skins, and the markedly more valuable sea otter pelts, were transformed into luxurious fur capes, belts, mittens, and caps. Bêche-de-mer, or sea cucumber, flavored soup and enhanced sexual prowess. Sandalwood contained a fragrant oil that made the fine-grained, yellowish-brown wood prized in China, where it was carved into exquisite furniture, and used to make sweet-smelling incense burned in houses of worship. And the Chinese who came to America for education helped transmit knowledge and build bridges between the two countries.

Connecticut was a significant player in the China trade. For example, sealers from Stonington took the lead in finding new hunting grounds to support the great demand for pelts. One of the most intrepid of those sealers, Nathaniel B. Palmer, piloting his diminutive sloop Hero became the first American, and, arguably, the first person to sight Antarctica. And Samuel Russell of Middletown rose to become one the most successful of all China traders.

But the benefits of the China trade must be weighed against the serious problems it caused. The killing of seals and sea otters, and the cutting down of sandalwood trees, resulted in what twentieth-century ecologist Garrett Hardin called “the tragedy of the commons.” In each case strong demand, limited supply, greed, and a lack of regulation inevitably left a path of destruction as those shared natural resources were decimated by individuals acting in their own self-interest, while disregarding the long-term implications of their actions. Rookery after rookery of seals was ravaged, as scores of ships were filled with thousands, often tens of thousands of skins, year after year. By the early 1800s, the sealers themselves began reporting that their prey were becoming scarce, and in some areas had completely disappeared. It was the same story for sea otters, whose numbers weren’t large to begin with. As for sandalwood, the verdant hillsides of Hawaii and Fiji were quickly transformed into an ecological wasteland, denuded of much of their forests and littered with mangled branches and stumps. Despite these dynamics, the trade in seal and sea otter pelts and sandalwood persisted for many years, but with ever-decreasing returns.

Heard Island – South Indian Ocean, late 19th century. Unknown American artist. Oil on canvas. Mystic Seaport Museum, 1939.1256.

Another major problem was opium. As the decades passed and American merchants ran out of things that the Chinese wanted, opium filled the void. Although Great Britain led the way in the illegal opium trade, the Americans contributed significantly to the flow of the drug into China. This not only damaged Chinese society by creating millions of addicts, but it also drained the country of precious silver which the Chinese increasingly used to pay for the opium. When the emperor attempted to cut off the trade, the result was the devastating first Opium War (1839-42), which was prosecuted and easily won by Great Britain. The subsequent treaties ending the war were less negotiated than dictated to China at the end of a gun. Among the most onerous provisions were the requirement that China pay a $21 million indemnity to Britain, mainly to cover the costs of the war and all the British opium the Chinese had destroyed; open additional ports to trade; and cede Hong Kong to Britain. The war and its aftermath were, understandably, profoundly humiliating to the Chinese.

Deep Plate, "The Seamstress" or "The Embroideress," ca. 1750. Chinese for the Dutch market, after a French print. Porcelain. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Mrs. H. Goodwin, 1971.128.

The treaties said nothing about opium, and the drug continued to flood into China. This and other flashpoints between Britain and China led to the second opium war (1856-60). Once again, Britain handily defeated the Chinese, bringing on yet more humiliation. Worse still, the victor forced the vanquished to legalize opium, triggering the further expansion of the pernicious trade. Although the Opium Wars were not American wars, Americans still bear a heavy responsibility for having brought so much of the drug into China.

One of the most interesting aspects of the China trade during its first century is the hope it engendered for a huge financial windfall. Given China's enormous population, American merchants and politicians viewed the country as a vast potential market, and they dreamed of the day when the hundreds of millions of Chinese would generate a tidal wave of profitable consumerism. Yet, throughout this period, the United States maintained a gaping trade deficit with China. In other words, America imported a far greater value of goods from China than it exported in return.

The truth was that the Chinese were not that interested in American products. Yet another reason the China boom failed to materialize was that China was not nearly as rich as many Americans had imagined. There was a huge polarity in wealth, and apart from a very small percentage of wealthy people, the large majority of Chinese were extremely poor. The Chinese, however, were not without spendable cash, but they used much of that cash to purchase opium instead of other items the Americans could provide.

Of course, the enormous trade deficit with China persists, and it is interesting to note that this one aspect of the China trade is the same today as it was in the beginning. America still imports from China much more than it exports to that country. Thus, to some extent the old dream of China becoming a vast, almost limitless market for American goods remains unrealized.

This wonderful exhibit shows that the early China trade was complex and multi-faceted. China was one of America's first trading partners, and as such it played a significant role in the evolution and growth of the United States, greatly impacting its economy and culture. As you consider the objects assembled and the story they tell, I hope you reflect on the deep connections between America and China, and the importance of the relationship between the two countries. By highlighting our shared past, it is hoped that this exhibit will foster stronger ties and a better future.

The Hongs and a Church at Canton. Unknown Chinese artist, ca. 1847–1856. Oil on canvas in a period Chinese frame. Collection of Ginger H. and H. Richard Dietrich III.

< *Peacock Rank Badge*, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), ca.18th–early 19th century. China. Silk, gold metallic thread. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Mrs. F de P Townsend, 1946.28.

CONNECTICUT AND THE CHINA TRADE

By Tanya Pohrt, PhD, Curator, Lyman Allyn Art Museum

China from China: Porcelain and Stories of Early American Trade explores the early trade relationship between the United States and China, highlighting Connecticut's role in this commerce. Through fine and decorative arts and historical objects, the exhibition considers how trade with China shaped American identity, fostered cultural exchange, and laid the foundation for a complex and long-standing geopolitical relationship. Chinese artists and craftspeople produced a range of fine goods for the export market, including silk, porcelain, painting, and lacquerware. At the center of this trade was tea, grown, harvested, and exported from China in vast quantities in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before the American Revolution, colonists strenuously objected to the British crown's tax on tea, making the United States' freedom to trade directly with the Chinese an important symbol of the economic and political promise of the young nation.

Following American independence, merchants could enter in direct trade with the Chinese, and the first official American mercantile voyage to China on *The Empress of China* embarked in 1784 from New York harbor. John Morgan of Groton, Connecticut, was the carpenter on this key voyage. Although Morgan died at sea on the return trip, several pieces of porcelain he acquired in China are now in the collection of Mystic Seaport Museum.

Fig. 1.1 >
Teapot from Tea Service owned by Captain Ralph Smith & Honor Deming Smith of Middle Haddam, CT, ca. 1800. Chinese. Porcelain. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1937.28 & .29.

The lucrative West Indies trade, a focus of much of Connecticut's economy in the mid-to-late 18th century, was curtailed by the geopolitical shifts and trade embargoes of the Early Republic. As a result, Connecticut merchants sought new markets, seeing opportunity in the fur trade with China. Large numbers of fur seals were discovered on the rocky Antarctic islands off the coast of South America; these were hunted, skinned and brought to China, where the highly valued fur was traded for tea, silk, and porcelain. Many Connecticut vessels followed this trading pattern in the 1790s and early 1800s, including ships from Stonington, led by Captains Edmund Fanning and Nathaniel Palmer, and New Haven. Captain Daniel Green and the Townsend family in New Haven built and sailed the *Neptune*, whose influential first voyage is discussed in another essay. Chinese porcelain survives from some of these early voyages, often ornamented with patriotic American symbols such as the eagle and shield (fig. 1.1), here brought back by Captain Ralph Smith of Middle Haddam, Connecticut.

While the Chinese produced many goods desired by the West, there were fewer items that Westerners could supply in return. In addition to fur, the Chinese sought silver, American-grown ginseng, and sandalwood sourced in Hawaii and the Fiji Islands, along with growing quantities of opium. By the 1820s, the decimation of the fur seal population due to overhunting, the overharvesting of sandalwood, and the profitability of opium led many British and some American firms to traffic in the drug, including Robert Bennet Forbes, Benjamin Chew Wilcocks, and Russell & Company, founded by Samuel Russell of Middletown, Connecticut. Opium was imported to China from Turkey and India in growing quantities, leading to objections and tension with Chinese officials that resulted in two armed conflicts, the first Opium War (1839-1842) and the second Opium War (1856-1860). Olyphant & Company was an exception, refusing to deal in opium on religious and moral grounds. A partner at Olyphant, William Winthrop Parkin, later retired to New London, Connecticut, bringing Chinese goods such as this embroidered silk shawl with him (fig. 1.2).

Fig. 1.2 >
Embroidered Silk Shawl (detail), ca. 19th century. Purchased in China by William Winthrop Parkin (1820-1902). Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1950.45.

In the 1840s, Stonington Captain Nathaniel Palmer recognized the need for a faster transport time to China. He contributed to the design of advanced clipper ships—streamlined vessels with a sharp, concave bow and a wider bottom to carry perishable Chinese tea to Western consumers in a fraction of the earlier time. Using this new design, the *Houqua* was built in 1844 for A.A. Low & Bros. Palmer captained several voyages of the *Houqua* to China to, including a 1846 trip that included Palmer's niece, Sarah Elizabeth Fanning, as a passenger. Fanning kept a journal of the trip, recording her experiences of daily life at sea and the beauty of the island of Macao.

Fig. 1.3
Ship portrait of Challenge, ca. 1860. Unknown Chinese artist, Hong Kong.
Paul Foundation, Griswold Inn Collection, Essex, Connecticut.

In the era of the tea clipper ships, the N. L. & G. Griswold firm, founded by Nathaniel Lynde Griswold and his brother George Griswold of Lyme, Connecticut, imported tea from China in large quantities, sailing out of New York harbor (fig. 1.3). The Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme and the Griswold Inn in Essex hold objects related to N. L. & G. Griswold's success in shipping Chinese tea and other goods.

Other Connecticut seamen had ties to China in the mid-19th century, including Latham B. Avery of Groton, who served as a Naval officer in the Pacific. He presented a dinner service of Chinese export porcelain (fig. 1.4) as a wedding gift to his sister, Mary Jane Avery. Avery was Master of the American vessel *Golden City* and also took part in Commodore Perry's expedition to open Japan to the West in 1853-54.

Fig. 1.4
Plate, Famille Rose pattern, from a service purchased in China by Latham Burrows Avery (American, 1817-1856), ca. 1850. Avery Copp House Museum, Groton, CT, 1992.12.689B.

Connecticut played a significant role in educational and exchange programs between China and the U.S. In 1854, Yung Wing (1828-1912) was the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university, attending Yale after studying at an American-sponsored missionary school in China in his youth (fig. 1.5). Following graduation, Wing worked as an interpreter in China, later returning to Connecticut as an organizer of the Chinese Educational Mission, a program that brought 120 Chinese boys to study in New England between 1872 and 1881. Based in Hartford, Connecticut, the program encouraged education, dialogue, and cross-cultural understanding. The Connecticut Museum of Culture and History holds a variety of objects related to this history, including a Chinese porcelain teapot and basket that Yung Kwai (1861-1943), one of the Chinese Educational Mission students, gave to his American host family as a token of gratitude.

While this exhibition focuses on the early era of American and Chinese trade and cultural exchange, it offers material to reflect on how these early interactions laid the groundwork for modern U.S.-China relations, inviting visitors to consider how Connecticut and America's early role in this global relationship continues to echo today.

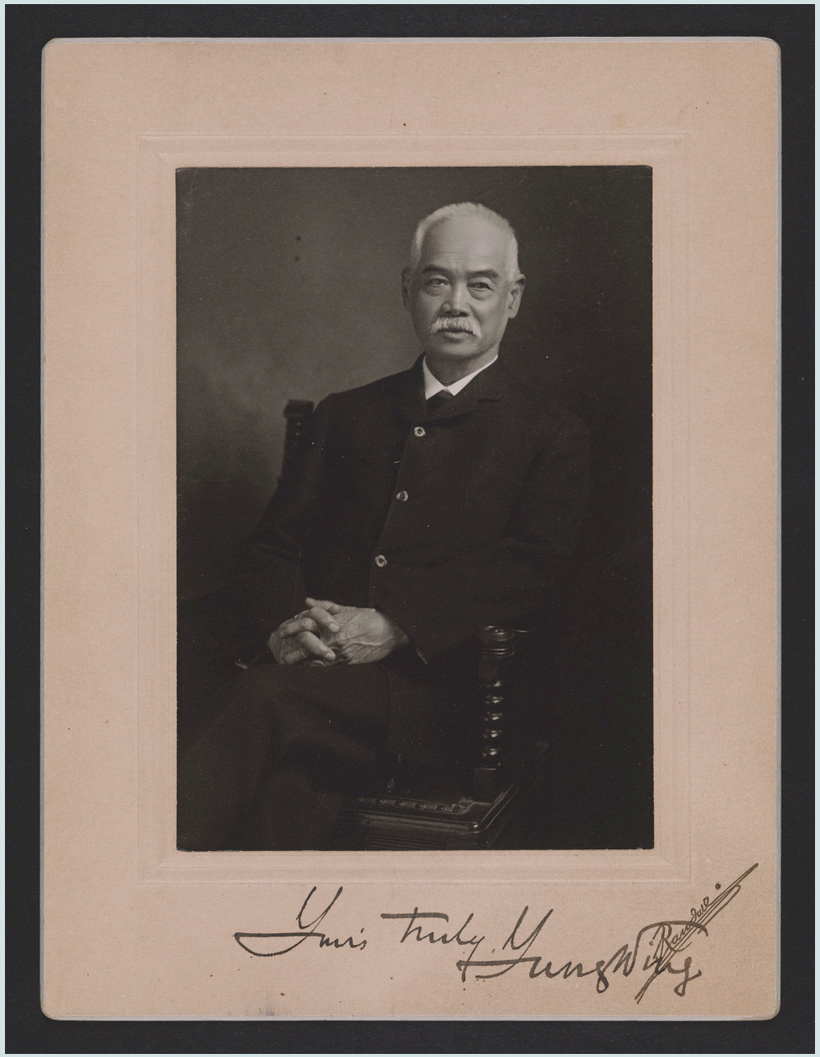

Fig. 1.5
Photograph of Yung Wing (Chinese, 1828 – 1912), Hartford, ca. 1900. Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, 2000.189.4.

Covered Tureen and Stand from a Fitzhugh Dinner Service showing an American Eagle with Shield, ca. 1800–1815. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.323-1, 2.

"Quaker Farmer" Service, possibly Morris family of Pennsylvania, ca. 1810–20. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1511-1,-2,-3.

THE DIETRICH AMERICAN FOUNDATION AND THE CHINA TRADE FOR THE AMERICAN MARKET

By Deborah M. Rebuck, Curator, The Dietrich American Foundation

H. Richard Dietrich, Jr. (1938-2007), a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, began to collect American art and artifacts as a young man. Interested in people and stories, this led him first to collecting books and then other objects that give history a human context. He saw his collection as tangible links to understanding this country's story and often chose objects out of a desire to connect with specific people of the past. In 1963, he established the Dietrich American Foundation to research and collect historically important examples of American decorative and fine arts, primarily of the eighteenth century. The collection is diverse, including furniture, silver, ceramics, Pennsylvania German decorative arts, scrimshaw, historical documents, manuscripts, maps, prints and paintings. Virtually all these objects are American, except for the important collection of Chinese-made ceramics and paintings for the American market.

The very first objects purchased for the foundation in 1963 were Chinese export porcelain, a plate and a platter, made for the American market and from the famous Society of the Cincinnati service of 302 pieces owned by George and Martha Washington (fig. 2.1). Dietrich's fascination with the China trade and love of American history and George Washington made this first purchase for his newly formed foundation a natural fit.

This initial foray led to a collection of close to 500 pieces of porcelain in addition to several paintings and watercolors, all chosen by Dietrich to illustrate the complexities and captivating history of the American China trade. The China trade was one of the most significant drivers of American economic expansion in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. From the departure of the first American vessel, the *Empress of China*, in 1784, only months after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, to the rise of powerful American trading houses in the 1830s, trade with China played a crucial role in shaping the United States' early commercial identity. Dietrich imagined the adventure and hardship, and also the significance and stories of cultures meeting. The addition of a hong bowl to the collection with an image of the *Empress of China* on the interior (fig. 2.2) set the stage for the study of the trade with China with its unusual hong system. A coffee cup and saucer showing sample border decorations (fig. 2.3) helps us understand the personal nature of the choices available to clients selecting a service from the Chinese. Clients often provided engravings for Chinese artists to copy, such as the design on a covered Masonic cider jug in the collection (fig. 2.4). Images such as a painting done by an unknown Chinese artist of *A View of a Potter's Shop* (fig. 2.5) show the process of creating porcelain and were brought back to America by the ship captains and merchants as reminders of what they had seen on their journeys.

Much of the early decoration of porcelain for the American market was maritime and patriotic images, both of which appealed to Dietrich. In addition, Dietrich's desire to connect objects with specific people led to purchases of many services with known family histories. The porcelain in the collection descends from 47 known families, the majority from Philadelphia, with additional examples from Massachusetts, Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland and Connecticut. These families were leaders in politics, finance and trade during the early years of the Republic and their porcelain reflects the various designs and patterns popular at the time.

Richard Dietrich's interest in Chinese export porcelain for the American market and in the history of the China trade continued throughout his life. Exhibitions of the Dietrich American Foundation's collection of porcelain and individual loans of objects to museums across the country continue today.

Fig. 2.1
Plate and Platter from a Dinner Service with the Emblem of the Society of the Cincinnati for George and Martha Washington of Virginia, China, 1784–85. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1507-1, -2.

These two pieces are part of the service George Washington purchased and used in the first presidential homes in New York and Philadelphia and later in his home at Mount Vernon. They are decorated with the emblem of the Society of the Cincinnati—the American bald eagle and the figure of Cincinnatus (a Roman farmer turned soldier defending his beloved Rome) receiving implements of war while being crowned by Fame. The Society of the Cincinnati was organized in 1783 as a fraternal society of French and American officers who fought together in the American Revolution.

Major Samuel Shaw (1754-1794), a charter member of the Society, went to China in 1784 as the supercargo on the *Empress of China*. On this first voyage, Shaw commissioned various items of porcelain to be decorated with the emblem of the Society of Cincinnati, including the dinner service purchased by Washington.

Fig. 2.2
Punch Bowl with View of Hongs of Canton, China, ca. 1784. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1554.

This punch bowl shows the Danish, French, Imperial Austrian, Swedish, English, Dutch and American flags flying before their respective factories along the busy Pearl River waterfront in Canton. This is one of the earliest examples to include the American flag, which was permitted to fly after the 1784 arrival of the *Empress of China*. The interior of the bowl shows an image of this ship, commanded by Captain John Green (1736-1796) of Philadelphia. The bowl, which was brought back on Captain Green's first voyage to China, descended in the Green family.

Fig. 2.3
Coffee Cup and Saucer showing Sample Border Decorations, ca. 1790–1800. China. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1350.

This cup and saucer illustrate the wide variety of border designs available to clients for custom-ordered pieces. Clients could also give specific instructions for the central decoration of their pieces.

Fig. 2.4
Covered Masonic Cider Jug, ca. 1805. China. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1580-2.

This cider jug is one of a pair owned by the Foundation. Each side is decorated with a gilt oval enclosing twenty-seven Masonic symbols. Of these, the globes symbolize the universality of Freemasonry; the head of wheat, plenty; the square, virtue; and the twenty-four-inch gauge, the hours of the day. The source for this design was from a print first published in London in 1760 and reprinted in America in 1776. Prints such as this were often given to Chinese decorators to copy; in this case the print was copied so faithfully that the number key on the print was even included on the porcelain decoration. Many of the prominent colonists, including thirty-two of the fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Congress, were Freemasons.

Fig. 2.5
A View of a Potter's Shop. Unknown Chinese artist, ca. 1800-1850. Oil on canvas. Dietrich American Foundation, 6.8.1337.

Images of the manufacture and shipping of Chinese decorative arts such as pottery were sought after by the American ship captains and merchants who first visited China. They brought them back to their homes in America as souvenirs and reminders of what they had seen on their adventuresome journeys. The Chinese attention to detail is seen in this painting with its depiction of the variety of workers engaged in various porcelain production tasks, including throwing a vase on a potter's wheel, packing the wares into wicker baskets and lining up the finished works on raised planks to dry in the sun. The number six appears in the upper-left corner of the painting, indicating its number in what would have been a series of scenes. Similar scenes of tea production were also highly popular with Americans.

THE CHINA TRADE AND MIDDLETOWN'S SAMUEL RUSSELL

By H. Richard Dietrich, III, President, The Dietrich American Foundation

Centering around commodities such as tea, silk, and porcelain, early trade with China brought immense wealth to American merchants and helped establish the young nation's presence on the global stage.

The China trade fostered innovations in finance and shipping while providing critical capital for further industrial development and expansion in America. These large-scale trade ventures laid the groundwork for modern corporate finance. In doing so, they created a new class of wealthy American businessmen, who reinvested their profits into further ventures, including American industry, infrastructure, urban development, and also philanthropy.

The rise of prominent American trading firms was a hallmark of this period in the China trade, centering not just on Boston and New York, but also places like Connecticut. Russell & Company, in Middletown, was founded in 1824 by Samuel Russell (1789–1862), and grew to be the largest of all firms trading with China in the early to mid-19th century.

Samuel Russell came from modest means. Orphaned and without family support at twelve, he began his career as an apprentice clerk for a maritime trade merchant, Whittlesey & Alsop, in Middletown. In 1819, Russell arrived in China in the employ of trading partners in Providence, Rhode Island. By 1824, he had gone into business on his own, founding Samuel Russell & Company with earnings from his first China voyage.

Fig. 3.1
Portrait of Samuel Russell, ca. 1820s, by the Chinese artist Lam Qua (Kwan Kiu Cheong, 1801-1860). Collection of Ginger H. and H. Richard Dietrich III. Photo by Bruce M. White.

For H. Richard Dietrich, Jr., who attended Wesleyan University in Middletown, Russell was a natural figure of fascination. Dietrich collected this small Chinese painted portrait of Russell by the artist Lam Qua (Kwan Kiu Cheong), which was painted in the 1820's when Russell was in his thirties. *Photo by Bruce M. White.*

Russell made a fortune, returning to Middletown and his newly built home in 1831. The Russell House, (fig. 3.3) built in 1828 by architect Ithiel Town, is one of the great early Greek Revival houses in the United States. He reportedly saw with surprise the scale of the new home his wife had built as his ship approached from the river. It would be his home until his death in 1862.

Russell applied his substantial profits from the China trade to business ventures closer to home for the next thirty years. Russell Manufacturing Company would become the biggest employer in Middletown and produce cotton and elastic woven goods, including suspenders and later seat belts. Samuel Russell also invested in railroads and these business ventures and the money produced show the multiplier effect of the wealth of the China trade.

It seems improbable today to think of a small city like Middletown being at the center of the China trade, but its place on the Connecticut River offered a good harbor and access out to the ocean beyond. This was a time of growth and great prosperity in Middletown. Wesleyan University was founded in 1831, the same year as Russell's return. In 1937 his stately home was deeded by Thomas Macdonough Russell, Jr. to Wesleyan, ending five generations of Russell family ownership. Other evidence of Russell family generosity stemming from the China trade can be seen in Middletown's large stone public library in the heart of the city and a memorial chapel in the prominent Indian Hill Cemetery. The Russell name is not hard to spot as one explores the city.

Fig. 3.2
Tea Chest, Russell & Co., ca. 1850. Wood and paper. Middlesex County Historical Society. Photo by Bruce M. White.

A rare surviving example of its type, this tea crate in the collection of the Middlesex County Historical Society is one of the many thousands that made their way to Middletown. The variety of tea this one carried is extra fine Young Hyson green tea. *Photo by Bruce M. White.*

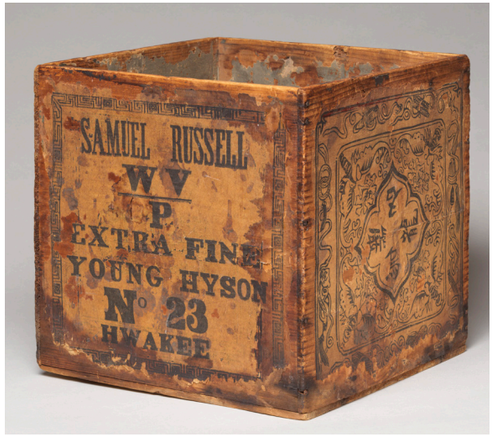

Fig. 3.3
Russell House, ca. 1900. On Middletown's historic High Street. Photo courtesy of Samuel Russell II.

Samuel Russell provides an interesting case study of an American merchant of the time and the evolving role opium played in the American trade with China. The importation of the highly addictive drug from Turkey and India into China went expressly against Chinese law and yet found a lucrative market. In his early career, Russell was a primarily an importer of Chinese silks, ceramics, and tea (fig 3.2). While Americans began smuggling the drug in the early 1800s, Russell's agency was probably not involved in the opium trade until it merged with Perkins & Co. in the late 1820s. Despite his early lack of involvement with opium, Russell often mentioned the trade in his letters, an indication of its increasing prominence on the commercial stage. By 1831, Russell himself had retired to Middletown, but Russell & Company's role in the opium trade was ramping up.

Opium gradually became a more significant part of American trade with China, as well as a more corrosive threat to the country. Following the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, China was forced to open five "treaty ports" to foreign trade, including Canton (Guangzhou) and Shanghai. The opening of these ports allowed private British firms to establish permanent commercial operations in China and led to British-controlled enclaves in cities like Shanghai and Hong Kong.

As a sign of the lasting importance of Russell and the China trade, on September 13, 1847, a new clipper ship called the *Samuel Russell* set sail, captained by Stonington, Connecticut native Nathaniel Palmer, who had helped supervise the ship's construction. With a fast, innovative design, the *Samuel Russell* was considered one of the two most advanced ships of its day.

This later trade looked very different from the early American trade with China, which was more focused on establishing relationships between people and the excitement of two countries forging a bond through trade. The focus of this exhibit is on those earlier decades of trade and individual-led entrepreneurship between people like Samuel Russell and their Chinese counterparts, people like the unidentified Hong merchant pictured here. Such a portrait would have been displayed in the home of the American merchant as a sign of respect and friendship (fig. 3.4). These people-to-people exchanges were what started it all.

Fig. 3.4
A Hong Merchant, attrib. to Lam Qua, (Chinese, 1801–1860), ca. 1835–40. China. Oil on canvas. Collection of Ginger H. and H. Richard Dietrich III. Photo by Bruce M. White.

A young hong merchant wears his embroidered rank badge of a mandarin square on his coat. Authorized by the Imperial Court to act as intermediaries between the Chinese Government and foreign traders, hong merchants traded directly with the Western agents permitted to conduct business in Canton. The artist Lam Qua was a prolific and successful portraitist, with up to twenty artists working for him. *Photo by Bruce M. White.*

THE VOYAGE OF THE NEPTUNE, 1796-1799

By Amy Trout, Curator, Connecticut River Museum

New Haven tried its hand at international trade in 1647 with a venture to England in a vessel known as "The Great Shippe." That ship never returned—except as a spectral vision in the sky a year and a half later, according to accounts by several residents—and New Haven then shied away from such an ambitious voyage for over a century. But merchants in the young United States saw their opportunity to invest in new trade with China while Europe was distracted with conflict. In 1792, New Haveners, backed by New York and Hartford investors, began a thirty-year China trade experiment. Beginning with a vessel called the *Nancy*, merchant Elijah Austin and captain Daniel Greene sailed to the Falkland Islands, where they killed and skinned fur seals. They found a ready market for the skins in Canton and planned for future voyages. Austin died of yellow fever in 1794, but Greene found financial backing from Ebenezer Townsend and Townsend's son, Ebenezer, Jr. Together they built a ship, *Neptune*, 350 tons with 20 carriage guns, and crewed it with 36 men and boys.

The voyage of the *Neptune* was remarkable for three reasons: it garnered more profit than any other American China trade vessel of the period; it started what was to become a profit-driven near extermination of the South American fur seal; and it was documented by five existing firsthand accounts. The profit was the result of finding the right agent at exactly the right time. Hong merchant Ponqua Sumity offered $3.25 per pelt, giving them a quarter of a million dollars with which to buy Chinese goods such as teas, silks, and furniture. This success encouraged a flurry of activity to fit out other Connecticut vessels for the trade. To repeat the success meant the slaughter of fur seals – tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of them. The *Betsey*, which followed the *Neptune* to Canton, carried over 100,000 skins. The price per skin, however, decreased with every subsequent voyage. Each voyage found fewer seals and had to alter course to seek them out. They soon discovered they had glutted the Chinese market and nearly wiped out the species in so doing.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the *Neptune's* 1796-1799 voyage is the documentation from five crew members. Ebenezer Townsend, Jr., kept a detailed account of the voyage that was published by the New Haven Colony Historical Society in 1888. The New Haven Museum also has unpublished accounts from the ship's doctor, David Forbes, and a greenhand, Elijah Davis. These manuscripts verify the accounts in Townsend's diary during the first half of the voyage then diverge to describe life while sealing on Mas Afuera, a Pacific island off the coast of Chile. Eleven crew members signed a contract to stay on the island to seal while the *Neptune* proceeded to China. As part of that crew, Forbes and Davis documented the difficulties of living on the island: eating mountain goat meat, slaughtering and skinning seals, and building little huts for shelter. Oliver Bradley, a half-seaman aboard the *Neptune*, also stayed at the island and his diary is in the collection of the Connecticut State Library. Lastly, there is the remarkable logbook of John Hurlbut of Wethersfield, one of the mates aboard the ship. Together, these accounts comprise more than just a recording of the weather, course, and sightings of the voyage – they illuminate a full-fledged adventure rarely imagined outside of a Hollywood studio.

New Haven's South Seas China Fleet (as it was later called by local historians) consisted of twelve vessels, most of which tried to follow the "New Haven Model" of leaving port with an empty cargo hold and harvesting their commodity (the fur seal skins) while en route to China. The vessels were: *Nancy* (1792-1794); *Polly* (1792-1793); *Neptune* (1796-1799); *Betsey* (1799 – 1801); *Oneida* (1799-1801); *Hope* (1799-1802); *Sally* (1800-1803); *Huron* (1802-1804); *Draper* (1802-1804); *Triumph* (1807-1809); *Zephyr* (1815-1818) and *Huron* (1820-1822). By the early 19th century, the vessels struggled to find seals, sailing farther and farther south to continue the trade. Their persistence led to the discovery of Antarctica, but the latter voyages failed to bring profit and New Haven dropped out of the China Trade. The only remnants of this remarkable era are the few prized objects and writings now preserved by families and in museum collections.

Punch Bowl showing the Hongs of Canton, China, ca. 1786–1789. China.
Porcelain painted en grisaille. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

THE CHINA TRADE: A COLLECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

By Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr., PhD

I am often asked how I became interested in China Trade paintings. It began 30 years ago, when I was asked to lecture on cellular communications technology in Beijing. After three days of lectures, I was asked to do an abbreviated version in Guangzhou (its traditional western name is Canton) in the south of China. A date was planned that allowed me to first see the key sights of Beijing. On the arranged date in Guangzhou, I lectured for the entire day to a packed auditorium of engineers. After my lecture, someone mentioned that it was the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, a public holiday featuring dragon boat races on the Pearl River. I felt somewhat horrified as I could have easily adjusted the date of my lecture.

A few years later while attending some auctions specializing in maritime paintings, I began to observe and learn about China Trade paintings. I was fascinated with the tremendous amount of detailed work put into some of these paintings and their relationship with the early American trade with China. I started to collect and study these paintings and to learn the history that led to their creation. Several years later, I met, through Historic New England, an elderly man who had collected works on paper related to the American trade with China. I invited him to my house to see my collection of paintings. He decided that I was where his large collection of books and original documents related to American exploration of the Pacific and the China Trade should land. As books, maps, letters, and other documents have become available, I have continued to build upon that part of the collection. There is a small community that does research on China Trade paintings, and as time permits, I try to add to that body of knowledge using the books and documents in my collection and those held in reference libraries.

Most paintings were not signed and the provenance (trail of ownership) has often been lost. Yet these paintings are fascinating in their own right. Chinese artists painted what they could sell. Many were trying to explain China to a western audience—until 1842 most westerners venturing to China had seen only what was visible from their ship, the Portuguese settlement of Macau, or a very small section of Canton—the hongs, also called factories, which a few traders were allowed to visit for only part of the year. In the tradition of the western pierhead painter, many are portraits of the ships visiting China. Some try to convey the life of the emperor and the other few privileged in China. Others try to explain the production of items purchased by western traders. To appeal to western tastes, Chinese artists had to paint realistically, learn perspective, and to paint in oils. Some China Trade painters, such as Lamqua and Youqua became extremely skillful in oils. Tingqua, another skillful painter who was the brother of Lamqua, focused on paintings in gouache. The collection of paintings and documents is a small window into the very complex relationship between the United State and China that began in 1784 when the ship the Empress of China arrived in Canton.

About 15 years after my original visit to Guangzhou (Canton), I was there again for the Dragon Boat Festival. Instead of lecturing, I enjoyed the festivities and races. And yes, my collection has a painting of a Dragon Boat with a crew of more than 60, rowing in cadence to the drummers.

Chinese Merchant Lin Chong, ca. 1835–1840. Lam Qua (Kwan Kiu Cheong) (Chinese, 1801–1860). Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr. >

The French Concession at Shanghai, ca. 1864–1865. Unknown Chinese artist. Oil on canvas.
Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

ADDITIONAL WORKS IN EXHIBITION

1 *The Anchorage at Whampoa*, 1786 or 1787, unknown Chinese artist. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

2 *Outward Bound, Long Island Head, Boston Harbor*, 1832. Robert Salmon (American, born England 1775–ca. 1848). Oil on panel. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

3 Punch Bowl showing the Penn Family Coat of Arms, Chinese for the British market, ca. 1725–1740. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1954.

4 Teapot, ca. 1780. Canton, China. Porcelain. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1972.753a.

5 Tea Caddy, ca. 18th century. Chinese. Porcelain, silver. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Dr. Bertram Schaffner, 1971.33.

6 Armorial Plate, Mills Impaling Webber, ca. 1745. Chinese for the British market. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1772-2.

7 Plate, coat of arms of Charles Grant of Dalway, Scotland, ca. 1775. Chinese for the British market. Porcelain. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1937.32.

8 Armorial Sauce Tureen with Stand, Arms of Chadwick, ca. 1791. Chinese for the British market. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.7-1a,b,c.

9 Coffeepot from a Coffee and Tea Service showing the Rhode Island Coat of Arms, 1802–5, cipher *GWS* for an unidentified owner. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1208-1-8.

10 Punch bowl, brought back on the *Empress of China*, ca. 1784. Chinese. Porcelain. Mystic Seaport Museum, 1938.77.

11 Cup from a Service for Captain John B. Green (1736–96) of Philadelphia, ca. 1787. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.2241-4.

12 Cream Pot with Lid from a Dinner Service owned by Samuel and Jean Ross Breck, Jr., ca. 1809. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1960.

13 Two Handled Cup and Saucer from a Tea Service showing the Emblem of the Society of the Cincinnati, ca. 1789-1790. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1304-1,-2.

14 Bowl showing Mount Vernon, ca. 1805. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.122-1.

15 George Washington Memorial Custard Cup and Cover for Joseph and Rebecca Heath Sims of Philadelphia, ca. 1800. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.208.

16 Plaque with aspects of the United States Coat of Arms and Chinese motifs, ca. 1870. Chinese. Carved and painted wood. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

17 Plate showing Figure of Hope from a Dinner Service owned by Elias Hasket Derby of Salem, MA, ca. 1810. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1338.

18 Mug with cipher "SG," possibly for Stephen Girard of Philadelphia, ca. 1795. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1967.

19 *Chinese Tea Industry (Harvesting Tea)*, attributed to Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870), ca.1850. Watercolor and gouache on paper. Mystic Seaport Museum, 1970.42.

20 *Chinese Tea Industry (Crating Tea)*, attributed to Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870), ca.1850. Watercolor and gouache on paper. Mystic Seaport Museum 1970.49.

21 Partial Tea Service showing an American Man-of-War, ca. 1810. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1583.

22 *Two Views of Manufacture of Porcelain*, ca. 1870–1880. Chinese. Watercolor on paper. Dietrich American Foundation, 7.8.1339 and 7.8.1340.

23 Porcelain packed for overseas shipping, ca. 19th century. Chinese.Brought back by a Stonington sailor. Historic Stonington, gift of Kate & Tim Love, 2009.

24 Mug showing an American Man-of-War, "Suturduy Night," ca. 1785–1800. Chinese. Porcelain, Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1584.

25 Hot Plate with Draped Flags and Shield, ca. 1800. Chinese. Porcelain. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Lawrence W. Miner, 1935.3.618.

26 Soup Plate from a Dinner Service showing the Morgan family coat of arms for Elias Morgan of Hartford, CT, ca. 1790–1795. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1356.

27 Painted paper fan depicting the Whampoa Anchorage with American and European ships, ca. 1820s. Chinese. Paper, gouache, ivory. Collection of Ginger H. and H. Richard Dietrich III.

28 Sewing table, ca. mid-19th century. Chinese. Wood, lacquer, paint. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Esther R. Bascom, Rosalie R. Rooks, Joyce Edwards, and Pauline Perry, 1986.100.

29 Embroidered sleeve bands, ca. 19th century. Chinese. Silk. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1933.54e.

30 Yuanbao or 'sycee' ingots, ca. 19th century. Chinese. Silver. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1949.88.91c & d.

31 Miniature portrait of Captain Daniel Greene, ca. 1798, attributed to Spoilum (Guan Zuolin). Chinese. Watercolor on ivory in leather case. New Haven Museum, 1974.15.

32 Covered Cider Mug from a Dinner Service brought on the *Neptune* for Amos and Sarah Townsend of New Haven, ca. 1799. Chinese. Porcelain. New Haven Museum, 1973.558.

33 Bowl, owned by Captain Edmund Fanning of Stonington, ca. 1790s. Chinese. Porcelain. Historic Stonington, 2010.700.020.

34 Visiting card case, ca. 1850, Chinese. Carved sandalwood. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1984.134.

35 Sealskin muff, ca. 1880. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Miss Florence Baker, New London, CT, 1957.59.

36 *View of the ship Alert of New London (fore and aft)*, 1845. John Ewen, Jr. (American, active 1840s). Oil on canvas. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Frederick W. Sheffield, 1947.191

37 *Portrait of Captain John Sanford Barnum* (1804-1872), ca. 1840s/50s, by Youqua (Chinese, active 1840 -1870). Oil on canvas. Historic Stonington, 2008.0416.006.

38 *View of Canton Waterfront*, ca. 1830-1840. Unknown artist. Chinese. Oil on canvas. Dietrich American Foundation, 6.4.1342.

39 Name chop with puzzle ball handle (Samuel Russell), ca. 1819–1831. Chinese. Ivory. Collection of Samuel Russell II.

40 *Portrait of Howqua (Wu Bingjian)*, ca. 1845. Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870) or studio. Gouache on paper. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

41 Letter from Howqua (Wu Bingjian) to Messrs. LeRoy, Baynard & McEvers, November 14, 1815. Ink on paper. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

42 *Hongs of Canton*, ca. 1805. Unknown artist. China. Oil on brass. Dietrich American Foundation, 6.4.1070.

43 *Howqua's Garden*, ca. 1835-1840, attributed to Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870) or studio. Ink and gouache on paper. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

44 *Views of Chinese fishing vessels*, mid-to-late 19th century. Chinese. Gouache on pith paper in a glass and fabric box. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Mrs. Frederic S. Newcomb, 1945.195.27.

45 *Chinese Food Stands, Macao*, ca. 1838–39, Auguste Borget (French, 1808–1877). Graphite on paper. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1975.171.

46 *Two Chinese Men Gaming*, ca. 1825-40, George Chinnery (British, 1774-1852). Graphite on paper. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1979.172.

47 *Portrait of Captain Benjamin Smith*, ca. 1790, Spoilum (Guan Zuolin, Chinese, active 1770–1810). Oil on canvas, Dietrich American Foundation, 6.1.HRD.1935.

48 *The French, American and British factories at Canton*, ca. 1835. Lam Qua (Kwan Kiu Cheong) (Chinese, 1801–1860) or studio. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

49 *The Verandah of Nathaniel Kinsman's Residence at Macao, Looking Across the Praya Grande*, ca. 1835. Lam Qua (Kwan Kiu Cheong) (Chinese, 1801–1860). Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

50 *Foreign Cemetery at Whampoa*, ca. 1850. Sunqua or Youqua school. Oil on canvas. Dietrich American Foundation, 6.4.1046-2.

51 Plate from a Dinner Service for Benjamin Chew Wilcocks of Philadelphia, ca. 1813. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.1359.

52 Platter from a Fitzhugh Dinner Service for Edward and Ann Renshaw Thomson of Philadelphia, ca. 1810-1830. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.217-3.

53 Plate from a Dinner Service for Ethelbert Marshall Smith of Smithtown, New York, ca. 1860. Chinese. Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.514-53.

54 *Residence of Dr. George Rogers Hall in Shanghai, China*, 1854. Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870). Gouache on paper. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

55 Saucer, ca. 1750. China. Porcelain. Florence Griswold Museum, gift of the Old Lyme-Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library, from the Evelyn MacCurdy Salisbury Ceramics Collection, 1980.71b.

56 *The Bark Monsoon*, ca. 1835–1840. Sunqua (Chinese, active 1830–1870). Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

57 *Imperial High Commissioner Keying*, 1845. Tingqua (Guan Lianchang) (Chinese, 1809–1870) or studio. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

58 *Attack on the Taku Forts and the Involvement of the US Navy Ship* Toey-Wan, ca. 1860. Unknown artist. Chinese. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

59 *The Entrance to the Pearl River (Zhujiang River), the Bocca Tigris*, ca. late 18th century to 1825. Unknown artist. Chinese. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

60 *View of Hong Kong*, 1861. Unknown artist. Chinese. Oil on canvas. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

61 *Persane*, ca. 1840–50. Godefroy Engelmann (French, 1788–1839) (Lithographer) after Edouard Wattier. Hand-colored lithograph on paper. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1983.52.

62 Opium pipe, ca. 19th century. Thailand. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 1979.182.

63 Ship model for the tea-clipper ship *Houqua*, designed by Nathaniel B. Palmer and John W. Griffiths and built for A. A. Low & Brother in 1844. Model built by Alan Burghardt. Wood, textile, paint. Historic Stonington, gift of the artist.

64 Silver cann, ca. 1850. Khecheong of Canton, China, Maker's Mark: KHC with Chinese chop. Brought back from China by Captain Nathaniel Palmer of Stonington. Historic Stonington, gift of Mr. Lindsay Bradford, 2009.500.0577.

65 *Portrait of Captain Augustus Henry Griswold*, ca. 1820, Gustave de Galard (French, 1779–1841). Oil on canvas. Florence Griswold Museum, gift of Gay Wilmerding, 2020.16.1.

66 Tea Box from N.L.G.G. Panama, ca. 1830. Wood with hand-painted gouache on paper label. Florence Griswold Museum, X1972.244.

67 Teapot, Cup and Saucer from green Fitzhugh pattern service owned by the Griswold family, ca. 1820. Chinese. Porcelain. Florence Griswold Museum, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Griswold Terry Atkins, 1985.9.1A&B, .3, .16.

68 Teapot in Wicker Basket, ca. 1870–1900. Unknown Chinese maker. Porcelain, wicker, brass, cotton. Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, gift of Leontine M. Thomson, 2022.44.1a-c.

69 *Empress and Regent of China, Cixi or Ci'an*, ca. 1863. Unknown artist. Chinese. Gouache on paper. Collection of Dr. Edward G. Tiedemann, Jr.

Tea Bowl and Saucer showing Tea Production, ca. 1750. Chinese for European market.
Porcelain. Dietrich American Foundation, 2.1.HRD.1812-1,-2.

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