

Chinese Wallpaper, Global Histories and Material Culture

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Chinese wallpaper as global material culture. It goes beyond the traditional contexts of Europe, the eighteenth century country house and the 'Chinese room', in which Chinese wallpapers have historically been assessed, to examine how and why people have used Chinese wallpaper in a wider variety of temporal, cultural and spatial contexts. In so doing, it challenges a long tradition of Eurocentric approaches to Chinese wallpaper and Chinese export art more generally.

Developed collaboratively by European merchants and Chinese craftsmen for export markets in Europe in the late seventeenth century, Chinese wallpapers combined images, materials and techniques drawn from longstanding traditions of Chinese visual culture, with a western decorative format to create a hybrid object that was simultaneously Chinese and European. The continued production of Chinese wallpaper in China today and its application in diverse decorative contexts, ranging from period rooms to sleek contemporary design concepts provides evidence, not only of its continued appeal, but also its remarkable adaptability and cosmopolitan character.

The enduring presence and appeal of Chinese wallpapers in the global material landscape raises questions regarding how and why they are used in different geographical locations, cultural spaces and time periods and how they are understood in these diverse contexts. Using case studies in eighteenth-century

Britain, twentieth-century North America and twenty-first century China this thesis constructs a global account of Chinese wallpaper, drawing out its diverse meanings and values and highlighting the global cultural connections that influenced their development and subsequent interpretation.

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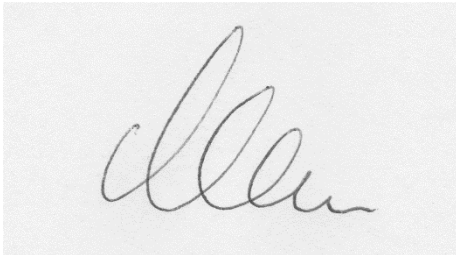
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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alan', written on a light-colored background.

Date: 25th September, 2018

Abbreviations

The full titles of the following institutions are given on their first appearance in the thesis. On all subsequent references only the acronym is employed.

EIC *East India Company*

V&A *Victoria and Albert Museum, London*

Introduction: Chinese Wallpaper as Global Material Culture

A short ride aboard one of China's high speed bullet trains quickly transports passengers from the bustling city of Shanghai to the industrial city of Wuxi in Jiangsu province, south east China. Shanghai's sky scrapers are rapidly left behind and low rise buildings and fields soon take their place. Before long, monolithic factory buildings, bearing a host of international brand names, begin to populate the landscape. Wuxi is an historic city but is best known as a key centre of China's thriving modern industry and commerce.

Among the many factory buildings and industrial units in Wuxi is a workshop owned by luxury British interior design company, de Gournay. Inside the anonymous concrete building, teams of artisans work busily in bright, open studios, meticulously hand crafting pictorial Chinese wallpapers, based on historic eighteenth and nineteenth century examples, for the global luxury market (Figure 0-1 and Figure 0-2).¹

¹ Among the many other companies currently producing Chinese wallpapers at various levels of the market are Iskel Wallpapers, Paul Montgomery studio, MISHA, Shimu, Griffin and Wong, World Silk Road, Neo Silk Road and Acheer. While these companies focus on producing so called 'chinoiserie' Chinese wallpapers, most also *manufacture hand painted reproductions of French block printed scenic wallpapers, Japanese and Korean inspired wallpaper designs and modern eclectic ranges. With thanks to Jemma Cave for bringing many of these companies to my attention, Cave, Jemma. Creative Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 3 April 2013.*



Figure 0-1 Painter working on a bird and flower design Chinese wallpaper panel at de Gournay workshops in Wuxi, China. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]



Figure 0-2 De Gournay 'Earlham' design in standard colours on emerald green dyed silk. [Source: Photograph by Werner Strauber https://degournay.com/earlham-design-standard-design-color-0?return_url=L3dhbGxwYXB1cnM/Y29sbGVjdGlvbj1jaGlub2lzZXJpZSZ.]

Chinese wallpapers create extraordinary visual impact with their detailed and large scale designs. Their effects are transformative and transporting. They blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality, the extraordinary and the mundane, interior and exterior, self and other and they bring distant cultures within reach. They also offer a rich seam of information regarding the mechanisms of intercultural exchange, past and present and the concept of cultural translation, as they move through different cultural frameworks and are adopted into diverse cultural narratives.

Developed collaboratively by European merchants and Chinese craftsmen for export markets in Europe in the late seventeenth century, Chinese wallpapers combined images, materials and techniques drawn from longstanding traditions of Chinese visual culture, with a western decorative format to create a hybrid object that was simultaneously Chinese and European. The continued production of Chinese wallpaper in China today and its application in diverse decorative contexts, ranging from period rooms to sleek contemporary design concepts (Figure 0-3) provides evidence, not only of its continued appeal, but also its remarkable adaptability.

The enduring presence and appeal of Chinese wallpapers, as part of the global material landscape, provokes questions regarding how and why they are used in specific contexts and how they are read and understood in different geographical locations, cultural spaces and time periods.



Figure 0-3 Custom made part embroidered Chinese wallpaper in 'Non such' design made by Fromental. [Source: Image courtesy of Fromental, London.]

Research Objectives

This thesis investigates Chinese wallpaper as global material culture; as a product of global connections and a producer of global connections. It goes beyond the traditional contexts of Europe, the eighteenth century country house and the 'Chinese room', in which Chinese wallpapers have historically been assessed, to examine how and why people have used Chinese wallpaper in a wider variety of temporal, cultural and spatial contexts. Using examples in nineteenth and twentieth century north America and in present day China, as well as historical examples in Europe, this thesis examines the use of Chinese wallpaper, in both public and domestic spaces, as an evolving hybrid product of global connections and appeal.

Several comparative case studies and examples are used to illustrate the accumulation of meanings and value that this material has acquired over time. A number of specific questions are asked of each of the case studies and examples in order to describe their value and significance; Where and how was Chinese wallpaper used? How did it get there? What did Chinese wallpapers mean for whom and why?² This examination of Chinese wallpaper in specific local use contexts ultimately highlights the web of global connections that Chinese wallpaper has created as it has moved through time and space and the values that those connections have created.

Against this backdrop, this thesis goes on to argue that Chinese wallpaper is part of an ongoing global trade which reflects changing economic power dynamics; its adoption mirroring the rising global influence of the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, successively. This argument is supported by the case studies, which describe and illustrate the spread of Chinese wallpaper to new global markets.

Historical context

By the end of the eighteenth century, three main categories of Chinese wallpaper design had emerged. These included birds, insects, flowering trees and plants in

² This approach is modelled on that taken by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello in *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 7.

ornamental gardens, scenes of Chinese life and industry and a combination of both these themes (Figure 0-4, Figure 0-5 and Figure 0-6). Birds and flowers were the most prevalent type and they remain the most popular in present day markets for Chinese wallpaper.³

³ In their 2014 survey of Chinese wallpapers in National Trust Houses Helen Clifford, Emile de Bruijn and Andrews Bush record that 'Of the Chinese wallpapers in Britain and Ireland identified so far about 60 per cent was decorated with flowering trees, birds, insects and rocks (..)' see Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 5., Evans-Freke, Dominic. Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 9 October 2012.



Figure 0-4 Chinese wallpaper, one of ten panels from Eltham Lodge, Greater London with plant forms and birds; Guangzhou, China, 1750-75, Victoria and Albert Museum, Object number E.2084-1914. [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]



Figure 0-5 Detail, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co, London, late eighteenth century. [Source: Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]



Figure 0-6 Detail, Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese bedroom at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, late eighteenth century. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, August 2012, with the permission of English Heritage].

The designs were predominantly painted by hand, though some earlier examples, dating to the middle of the eighteenth century, exhibit printed outlines made using small woodblocks, with the rest of the design painted by hand.⁴

Research by paper conservator Pauline Webber has shown that Chinese wallpapers were made up from large sheets (average 56cm x 91cm) of thin and flexible paper, joined and laminated together with a starch-based adhesive.⁵ The paper itself was typically made from a variety of bast (inner bark) fibres including kozo, ramie and hemp.⁶ In some cases, Webber notes, the support paper on which the design was executed was coated with white pigment bound in animal glue and alum which was dusted or mixed with mica to create a shimmering appearance like silk, which further added to the aesthetic appeal and decorative effects of the wallpaper.⁷

While Chinese wallpapers drew their designs from established traditions of Chinese visual culture, it seems that they were never historically used in China, but were developed specifically for export markets in Europe. They were imported

⁴ Pauline Webber, 'Chinese Wallpapers in the British Galleries', *V&A Conservation Journal*, 2001 <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-39/chinese-wallpapers-in-the-british-galleries/>>; Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 4.

⁵ Pauline Webber, 'Chinese Wallpapers in the British Galleries', *V&A Conservation Journal*, 2001 <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-39/chinese-wallpapers-in-the-british-galleries/>>.

⁶ S Pessanha and others, 'Study of a XVIII Century Hand-Painted Chinese Wallpaper by Multianalytical Non-Destructive Techniques', *Spectrochimica Acta. Part B, Atomic Spectroscopy; Atomic Spectrometry; Salvador-Bahia*, 2008, 582–86 (p. 585).

⁷ Pauline Webber, 'Chinese Wallpapers in the British Galleries', *V&A Conservation Journal*, 2001 <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-39/chinese-wallpapers-in-the-british-galleries/>>.

to Europe from China by the European East India Companies along with official trade commodities, such as tea and silk, as well as other luxury items, including armorial porcelain, lacquer screens and furniture.⁸ Chinese wallpapers were part of the East India Company's private trade, that is, the allowance given to senior East India Company crew members to import a limited quantity of goods to sell for their own profit. These trade conditions ensured that Chinese wallpapers were never available in large quantities, nor was there a consistent supply, and thus they remained a rare and distinctive luxury, which added to their appeal and elite status.

Relative to other types of wallpaper available in eighteenth century Britain, Chinese wallpapers were exceptionally expensive and the specialist hanging that they required added further cost to their use.⁹ Chinese wallpapers were historically the preserve of the wealthy European elite and they featured prominently in the palaces and stately homes of European royalty and aristocracy. They often functioned as a central decorative focus in individual 'Chinese rooms' and were hung in a variety of creative ways, ranging from decorative panoramas to print room style installations. They remained a popular feature of elite interiors

⁸ Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Goods from the East 1600-1800*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–82 (p. 173).

⁹ In her 2018 book, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain*, Clare Taylor records that in 1782 upholsterer Thomas Bromwich supplied chintz, sprig and stucco patterns for Lord and Lady Shelburne's London house at a cost of 4d. per yard. See Clare Taylor, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 49. In comparison, Chinese wallpapers were much more expensive; the Chinese paper supplied by Thomas Chippendale for Nostell Priory, in Yorkshire, several years earlier, in 1771 cost 15s a sheet, which despite the high price was considered to be a cheap price for Chinese wallpaper. See Gill Saunders, 'Chinese Wallpapers and Chinoiserie Styles', in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), pp. 63–75 (p. 63).

throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these contexts, Chinese wallpaper imparted an element of exotic otherness, with rare images of Chinese landscapes and people, to European baroque, rococo and neo-classical interiors, where they created extraordinary visual experiences on a large scale. Tapestries and murals were used to create similar panoramic decorative effects in European interiors around the same time and earlier, however the subject matter and style of the painting and composition seen in Chinese wallpaper lent them the specific allure of cultural difference.

Despite the relatively small numbers in which they were imported, Chinese wallpapers exerted a significant influence on European decorative traditions. As historian Helen Clifford has commented, 'What was important about these goods was not their volume, but the impact they made, which was quite disproportionate to their number.'¹⁰ Chinese wallpapers continued to find popularity in Europe and north America throughout the twentieth century and there continues to be a growing global market for both antique and reproduction Chinese wallpapers throughout the world today.

¹⁰ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (p. 52) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

Research Approaches

Since their first introduction to Europe in the late seventeenth century, Chinese wallpapers have been repeatedly reinvented in a variety of different use contexts, bringing particular value and significance to each one within a framework of shifting social values, cultural experiences and changing fashions. With an extended global trajectory, now having been used to decorate interiors in Europe, North America, China, the Middle East and beyond, Chinese wallpaper offers a rich accumulation of values, meanings and associations which are selectively mined and deployed in order to convey specific ideas, such as heritage, history, luxury and contemporary design, not to mention Chinese culture, depending on what is desired by the consumer. This adaptability has facilitated their inclusion in a very wide range of decorative projects across time and space, including eighteenth century rococo and neo-classical interiors in Europe, fashionable, modern and historicist early twentieth century interiors in Europe and north America and luxury, twenty first century design projects throughout the world, from Germany to Australia and most recently in China, where Chinese wallpaper is now being used for the first time.

In his introduction to *The Social Lives of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, sociologist Arjun Appadurai argues that the value of an object is defined within specific cultural frameworks. Across these frameworks some values are shared, others are not. He explains:

'[...] we must bear in mind that some exchange situations, both inter and intracultural, are characterised by a shallower set of shared standards of value than others. I therefore prefer to use the term regimes of value which does not imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation, and from commodity to commodity. A regime of value in this sense is consistent with both very high and very low sharing of standards by the parties to a particular commodity exchange. [...] Such regimes of value account for the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities, where culture is understood as a bounded and localized system of meanings.'¹¹

With this account of exchange and value across cultural boundaries, Appadurai describes the mechanisms by which diverse meanings are created in objects. He argues that one specific type of object may be understood and valued according to a variety of cultural assumptions based on the specific context of their use and that the particular set of values attributed to an object may, or may not overlap from one cultural context to another. Appadurai's theory of 'regimes of value' provides a model which can usefully be applied to this investigation of Chinese wallpapers when describing their movement through contrasting cultural frameworks or regimes of value, across time and space, and in examining the variety of values that are ascribed to them.

As they have circulated through time and across the globe, Chinese wallpapers have absorbed local values from their specific use contexts, such that by the late nineteenth century the Chinese origins and exotic aesthetic of Chinese wallpaper

¹¹ *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 14.

represented just *some* of the values ascribed to them. In many cases values relating to their Chinese origin became subordinate to other more recently attributed local values, such as their associations with specific local people, places, events and lifestyles.

Closely related to the notion of value is the concept of singularization - the drawing out of specific *layers* of value in particular use contexts, as articulated by cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, who argues that the biography of an object is the story of the various singularizations of it:

In the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of various singularizations of it, of classifications and re-classifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context. As with persons, the drama here lies in the uncertainties of valuation and of identity.¹²

The concept of singularization is helpful in articulating the diverse roles and values attributed to Chinese wallpaper in both local and global contexts and is useful in understanding the mechanisms of those reciprocal influences. This thesis presents the biographies of several specific Chinese wallpapers in order to reveal the stories of their varied singularizations, and in doing so aims to make salient an object which has so often been overlooked. This study offers an account of the way in which, as Kopytoff writes, '[...] adopted, "alien" objects are culturally

¹² Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64–91 (p. 90).

redefined and put to use', in different cultural contexts, taking Chinese wallpaper as the central material focus.¹³

Research Methodologies

This investigation builds on research models applied in the interdisciplinary field of material culture studies; a discipline which takes both art and a broad range of other purposefully designed objects as its subjects and investigates their broad meanings and values in specific contexts and moments in time.

Chinese wallpapers represent a distinctive cultural expression of aesthetic ideals, social aspirations and global connections. The many diverse and contrasting cultural values it represents make it an ideal subject for an investigation which takes a material culture approach as this kind of object centred research places value - both intrinsic values and those values attached by the people who made and used them - at the centre of its investigative objectives.¹⁴ Each of the case studies presented in this thesis combines close material analysis of specific examples of Chinese wallpaper with detailed examination of the contexts of their production and use, drawing on documentary and visual sources as well as object

¹³ Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64–91 (p. 67).

¹⁴ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17.1 (1982), 1–19 (p. 3) <www.jstor.org/stable/1180761>. With thanks to Dr Christine Guth for bringing this article to my attention.

analysis in order to assess its broader social and cultural meanings and significance.

In 1982, art historian Jules David Prown laid out a comprehensive theoretical and methodological guide to the emerging discipline of material culture studies in his seminal essay 'Mind in Matter'.¹⁵ In this paper, Prown described the ways in which objects could provide; '[...] evidence of the beliefs - values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time.'¹⁶ Prown argued that the most obvious cultural belief associated with material objects has to do with value; intrinsic value of the physical material characteristics of an object but also, '[...] those values that have been attached by the people who originally made or used the object, by us today, or by people at any intervening moment.'¹⁷ He advocated a methodology which combines analysis and description of an object's physical, representational and formal qualities, with investigations of historical function, personal responses and contexts of use; thus drawing out the different values attributed to an object by a particular community or society at a given time, in a specific context.¹⁸

¹⁵ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17.1 (1982), 1–19 <www.jstor.org/stable/1180761>.

¹⁶ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17.1 (1982), 1–19 (p. 1) <www.jstor.org/stable/1180761>.

¹⁷ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17.1 (1982), 1–19 (p. 3) <www.jstor.org/stable/1180761>.

¹⁸ Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17.1 (1982), 1–19 (p. 7) <www.jstor.org/stable/1180761>.

Since Prown wrote this essay the discipline of material culture studies has burgeoned and its methods have been employed by a range of scholarly disciplines including anthropology, sociology, history, museology, design history and art history. While Prown's methods and ideas remain an important touchstone for the discipline, more recent scholarship has since criticized the prescriptive and singular nature of his approach and advocated the need for approaches to material culture to be more flexible, varying according to the available research materials and aims of the particular investigation.¹⁹

Scholars from a variety of disciplines continue to refine their ideas regarding the most suitable methodologies for material culture studies, where the need for flexibility is closely related to its interdisciplinary nature. In his 2011 essay, 'Towards a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies'²⁰ art historian, Michael Yonan revisits Prown's system for addressing objects as material culture with a view to reintegrating his ideas and concerns into art history's current methods. Yonan argues that analysis of art and objects must take account of their visual and physical properties and particularly in the case of art history, analysis should explicitly rather than implicitly acknowledge the importance of their physical, material qualities. He proposes that objects have a 'logic', which he

¹⁹ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 5; Michael Yonan, 'Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 18.2 (2011), 232–48

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662520?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>.

²⁰ Michael Yonan, 'Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 18.2 (2011), 232–48

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662520?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>.

defines as structural coherency on two levels. One level is material: how raw materials were amassed and altered to become a finished thing. He gives the example of a wooden bowl: its structural logic comes from the wood used to make it, some of its final qualities are naturally inherent such as weight and grain, other qualities are altered through processes like carving. Structural coherency, he argues, is both practical and objective. The second level of logic, he argues is semantic, 'The ways in which materials are combined or modified into things allocate to them meanings that are culturally determined, inflected by context, and mutable over time and space'²¹. With this theory of object logic or structural coherency, Yonan articulates the processes by which an object finds physical form as well as semantic meaning or value, through a process of facture – both physical and cultural - in diverse contexts across time and space.

The importance of contextual analysis across time, taking account of an object's historical trajectory and movement through different regimes of value, is given particular emphasis by Arjun Appadurai in his introduction to *The Social Lives of Things*, in which he writes:

To understand the historical circulation of things we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through

²¹ Michael Yonan, 'Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 18.2 (2011), 232–48 (p. 10) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662520?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>.

analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret human transactions and the calculations that enliven things.²²

Following on from studies presented in this volume, particularly those authored by Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff and Brian Spooner, this thesis presents case studies which expose and explore the historical trajectories of specific examples of Chinese wallpaper in order to better understand the values attributed to them and how those values and ideas were constructed in an ever broadening global material landscape, exploring their acquisition, display and interpretation.

A global approach to material culture and exchange is exemplified by the collected research projects published in *The Global Lives of Things* edited by historians, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello.²³ It offers a wide variety of global object stories including that of porcelain, shagreen, coral and coffee, which build on the theoretical approach to material culture offered by Appadurai and other contributors to the *Social Lives of Things*, examining the forms, uses and trajectories of objects in order to understand the construction of their social,

²² Arjun Appadurai, 'Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 3–63 (p. 5).

²³ *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016). In addition to this edited volume both Gerritsen and Riello have made several other significant contributions to global material culture studies, publishing extensively on a variety of objects and concepts relating directly to global material culture. See Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi, *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016); *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia*, ed. by Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108233880>>; Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowell, 'Global China: Material Culture and Connections in World History', *Journal of World History*, 23.1 (2012), 3–8.; Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley, *Global Design History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011).

cultural and historical meaning and value. In the introduction to this collection of essays, Gerritsen and Riello argue that objects which have been the subject of global trade should be seen, not just as things with social lives, but also as things with global trajectories.²⁴ Analysis of objects as they move along a trajectory, Gerritsen and Riello argue, 'allows scholars to reveal subtle movements of power at work'.²⁵ They point out that, 'objects are not stable. They take meaning in space and time, they change as human thoughts about them change, it is in the human-object relationship that history is written.'²⁶ In this way it can be argued that objects like Chinese wallpaper do not belong to a specific time but rather, as Gerritsen and Riello advocate, '...they are the result of layers of use, interpretation and restoration across time.'²⁷ Gerritsen and Riello make a convincing case for the use of material culture studies as a means to studying wider geographies and connections between different areas of the world.²⁸

A global approach to material culture is also reflected in the collected essays presented in, *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges Between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900*, published in 2010. In the introduction to this volume, Professor of Art and Archeology, Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann and Professor of Modern History,

²⁴ *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 3.

²⁵ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 7.

²⁶ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 7.

²⁷ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 8.

²⁸ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Michael North, 'Introduction', in *Artistic and Cultural Exchange between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Workshops, Markets and Collections*, ed. by Michael North (Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-8.

Michael North, argue that, when seen in a global context, artistic exchange in particular presents the critical issue of interpretation; that is, how objects are used and understood, and what values are ascribed to them. Beyond articulating the processes and effects of global exchanges, through specific object stories, the essays presented in this book also collectively highlight the subtle forces at work in the processes of global cultural exchange, identifying '[...] the synchronic tangle of political, economic, intellectual, artistic and human dynamics involved in the process of cultural exchange.'²⁹

The Leverhulme funded research project 'The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857', led by Professor of History, Margot Finn (University College London) between 2011-2014, similarly highlighted the subtle dynamics and impact of global trade and exchange, with specific focus on the activities of the British East India Company.³⁰ This project investigated the material legacy of the East India Company trade in the British Isles, specifically in the context of the country house, bringing global stories to life in these domestic contexts through case studies of specific objects and properties as well as biographical studies. The project culminated with a major publication, *The East India Company at Home*,³¹ which

²⁹ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Michael North, 'Introduction', in *Artistic and Cultural Exchange between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Workshops, Markets and Collections*, ed. by Michael North (Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–8.

³⁰ The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857 was a 3-year Leverhulme Trust-funded research project based in the Department of History at the University of Warwick (2011-2012) and University College London (2012-2014).

³¹ *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

drew together the research findings of the project's diverse research team to present a global picture of the East India Company's activities and its material legacy. In their introduction to *The East India Company at Home*, Finn and Smith argue that: 'Global lives are lived locally [...]. Understanding how the global worked at a local level is vital, and the glocal is repeatedly at issue in this volume.'³²

Building on these research models, this thesis similarly attempts to bring together local stories of Chinese wallpaper in diverse contexts across time in order to construct an account of its global impact and connections. It follows the social lives of Chinese wallpaper, their entangled relationships with people, places and other objects and explores how these connections affected their values and meanings.³³

The brief accounts of Chinese wallpaper that consistently appear in studies of Chinese export art and the China Trade, chinoiserie, historic houses and interior decoration support the idea that they have been an enduring and notable presence in the global material landscape since the late seventeenth century. In spite of this, Chinese wallpaper received relatively little scholarly attention as a subject of academic research in its own right until the late twentieth century,

³² *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), p. 13 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

³³ *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), p. 21 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

having been generally categorised as ephemeral decoration and regarded as an adjunct to broader studies of historic interiors, Chinese export art and the China Trade. Pioneering art historical research by Friederike Wappenschmidt in 1989,³⁴ and more recently by Helen Clifford, Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, Clare Taylor and Stacey Sloboda,³⁵ represents an important shift in scholarly attitudes towards Chinese wallpaper as it is increasingly afforded focused attention from scholars across a number of disciplines.

Chinese wallpaper was notably singled out for a case study by the East India Company at Home research project, as well as a chapter in the project publication, (both written by Helen Clifford), in recognition of the importance of Chinese wallpaper as part of the material legacy of the East India Company trade in Britain.

A Chinese wallpaper was also chosen as the cover image for the East India

³⁴ Friederike Wappenschmidt, 'Chinese Wallpaper in European Castles: Scenic Scrolls to Scenic Wallpapers', *Report of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, 1983, 16–19; Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten Für Europa: Vom Rollbild Zur Bildtapete* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1989); Friederike Wappenschmidt, 'A Friendly Rivalry: Chinese Wallpaper Paintings and Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs', in *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth Century Silk Designs*, ed. by Anna Jolly, Riggisberger Berichte (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007), pp. 187–96.

³⁵ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014); Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015]; Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>; Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017); Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63; Clare Taylor, 'Chinese Papers and English Imitations in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *New Discoveries, New Research: Papers from the International Wallpaper Conference at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2007*, ed. by Stavelow-Hidemark (Stockholm: The Nordiska Museet, 2009), pp. 36–53; Clare Taylor, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018).

Company at Home publication, reflecting the not only the rising prominence of Chinese wallpaper as a subject of research, but also the aesthetic appeal of Chinese wallpaper, its ability to capture attention and imaginations and more specifically to reductively convey the concept of the country house and its intimate global connections.³⁶

This recent upsurge in scholarly momentum in research on Chinese wallpapers was captured by a two-day conference in London, held at Coutts & Co. and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in 2016, 'Chinese Wallpapers: Trade, Taste and Technique', which I co-organised with Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush (National Trust) and Alexandra Loske (Curator at The Royal Pavilions, Brighton). The conference brought together a diverse group of scholars from the fields of Chinese art, global history, interior design and conservation studies as well as curators from historic houses and museums, wallpaper designers and manufacturers to discuss the historical and present day relevance of Chinese wallpaper. My research on the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. in London was presented at this conference and is also presented in chapter two of this thesis.

³⁶ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>; Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015]; *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

This thesis builds on this growing body of research with an investigation of the form, uses, values and meanings of Chinese wallpaper, not only in the historical contexts of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but importantly also in the present day, with an examination of modern day production of Chinese wallpapers in China and its recent adoption in contemporary Chinese interiors.

This study is not intended to be an historical survey of Chinese wallpaper but a focussed study which aims to provide original insight into the global trajectory and enduring appeal of Chinese wallpapers as a hybrid product of cross-cultural collaborative creation, one that has accumulated a richness of meaning that is pertinent and appealing in a wide range of 'regimes of value'.

Research Sources

This thesis uses cases studies and examples to explore the global trajectory of Chinese wallpaper across time in contrasting cultural and decorative contexts. Each of the cases studies and examples is examined using detailed material analysis as well as contextual analysis in order to provide insight into the way in which specific histories and values inherent in that example are constructed or singularized in the particular context of its use for the purposes of a specific narrative or agenda.

Research for this thesis was undertaken in the UK, Netherlands, United States of America, People's Republic of China and special administrative regions of Hong

Kong and Macau. UK museum collections and related acquisition files formed the initial basis of this research project and offered information of several kinds: object based material analysis, insight into collecting practices, curatorial practices, and scholarship on Chinese wallpaper. Museum acquisition files provided particular insight into collecting practices as well as important information about changing curatorial and display practices. They also provided information regarding provenance and the networks through which Chinese wallpapers were acquired, whether by purchase from architectural firms involved in the renovation or demolition of historic European houses, interior decorators and dealers in antique furnishings, auctions, wallpaper manufacturers and private gifts.

Europe

I began my research on Chinese wallpaper while I was a curatorial staff member at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London, between 2007-2012. In this capacity I was exceptionally fortunate to have full access to the large collections of Chinese wallpaper, export art, Chinese paintings and prints in storage, and these provided the basis of my first knowledge and initial sets of questions regarding Chinese wallpaper. The collection, display and storage practices relating to Chinese wallpapers at the V&A and other institutions all convey significant information regarding prevailing curatorial and scholarly attitudes towards Chinese wallpaper, with regard to their relative importance, the functions they perform and the stories they are used to tell within the museum's collections.

Period rooms in particular provide useful insight, not only into how Chinese wallpapers may have decoratively contextualized, but also into the mediating power of curatorial practices, a theme which is discussed in depth in chapter four of this thesis, using the Chinese wallpaper displayed in the Powell House room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as a key case study.

Visits to historic houses formed a complementary avenue of research, again allowing material observation, but often with the addition of greater historical and decorative contextualisation, curatorial input notwithstanding. I visited several houses with Chinese wallpaper on display in some format.³⁷ While historic house settings provide broader context, they should not be taken freely at face value.

Further background research is required to establish exactly how Chinese wallpapers came to be in particular houses and particular spaces within a house as their installations were very often constructed and curated long after the Chinese wallpapers were initially acquired. In the case of Marble Hill House in Twickenham, the Chinese wallpapers were specially commissioned by English Heritage in 2005 to replace lost historic examples.³⁸ Other examples provide evidence of the burgeoning interest in conserving extant historic Chinese wallpapers in historic houses (Oud Amelisweerd, Utrecht; Coutts Bank, London). Sometimes, as in the case as Harewood House in Leeds, Chinese wallpaper which

³⁷ In the UK, these included Newhailes in Edinburgh, Osterley Park in Isleworth, Marble Hill House in Twickenham, Longleat House in Somerset, Saltram House in Devon and Wrest Park in Bedfordshire

³⁸ "'Princely' Wallpaper Is Unveiled', *BBC News Online*, 2006
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/4880118.stm> [accessed 23 July 2018].

had once been part of an earlier interior decoration scheme which was later replaced, was discovered within the estate and became the subject of restoration and re-installation. Similarly, the Chinese wallpapers in the Chinese bedroom at Saltram House, were removed from one room following an outbreak of dry rot in the 1930s and stored away. They were not discovered again until the 1950s, after the house was acquired by the National Trust, at which time they were conserved and installed in another room which then became known as the 'Chinese room'.³⁹ These stories of exactly how Chinese wallpapers came to be displayed in the specific spaces they are shown in today are, in themselves, of great interest with regard to how important, or not, Chinese wallpapers were seen to be to the story of the house or the people who lived there at particular points in the history of the house.

While I was working at the V&A (2007-2012), I was invited to view the Chinese wallpapers which hang in the board room at Coutts & Co. bank in London. The illustrious, though unproven provenance of the wallpaper (reputed to have been a gift to Thomas Coutts (1735-1822) from Earl Macartney (1737-1806) in 1794 following his diplomatic embassy to China between 1792-1794, was immediately intriguing, along with the fact that the wallpaper had become such an important visual and material part of the history of the bank and an emblem of the bank in the twenty first century, making it an attractive prospect as a case study. The dearth of information and publications relating to this paper was similarly

³⁹ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), pp. 41–42.

intriguing. The bank's archives yielded little information about the provenance of the wallpaper, but did contain some historical photographs, records of the movement of the paper within the Coutts estate and details of practical conservation treatments.

Complementary research on the sources of the decorative motifs on the wallpapers at Coutts led me back to the V&A collections to examine Chinese export paintings and the Chinese album known as the *Gengzhi tu*, which provided a direct model for some of the images found on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co.

I consulted the East India Company archives at the British library to examine records of Macartney's embassy to China, including a list of items gifted to King George III (1738-1820) by the Qianlong emperor (1711-1799). While I was unable to locate any references to Chinese wallpaper, I found useful evidence relating to the specific objectives of the mission, in the form of correspondence between Macartney and East India Company directors, during the period of the embassy. This information emphasised the importance of the context in which the wallpaper was reputedly acquired and directed my research towards understanding the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. in the context of gathering 'useful knowledge' about China at a pivotal moment in Sino-British trade relations when British imperial ambitions and the desire for Chinese trade goods loomed large. Published accounts of the Macartney mission also provided useful sources of information for investigating where the Chinese wallpapers featured in the story of the late eighteenth century Sino-British cultural and political engagement.

Similarly, sketches and paintings produced by artist, William Alexander (1767-1816) during the embassy (some of which were published in the written accounts of the trip), provided further contextual information about the overall image of China in western material culture during the eighteenth century.

North America

Research in America was conducted in March 2016, on the East Coast, in Massachusetts, New York and Delaware, where I examined Chinese wallpaper in historic houses, museum galleries and stores and period rooms, as well as looking at archival information relating to the trade in Chinese wallpapers in America during the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. It was during the first half of the twentieth century that Chinese wallpapers, both newly produced and historic, appear to have flourished, perhaps to their greatest extent, leaving a lasting legacy within both historicist and flamboyant orientalist American interiors. Through this research I attempted to build a picture of the role of Chinese wallpaper in American interiors and decorative movements.

I visited Beauport House in Gloucester, Massachusetts, previously owned and decorated by renowned interior decorator Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934) and now administered by Historic New England. Among the preserved interiors is the China Trade Room installed by Sleeper in 1923, featuring a spectacular eighteenth century Chinese landscape wallpaper. Sleeper used this wallpaper to create a theatrical orientalist interior in his home, which featured dramatic chinoiserie

style architectural fittings including a pagoda roofed pavilion set into one of the walls, a minstrels' gallery with chinoiserie fret work balustrades and a unique tent shaped, plastered ceiling. As such, it represented a perfect example of the exaggerated orientalist interiors that emerged in America in the first half of the twentieth century; merging chinoiserie styles with modern exotic aesthetics.

Winterthur house in Delaware provided further context for the use of Chinese wallpapers in American interiors during the first half of the twentieth century, where art collector and philanthropist Henry Francis du Pont (1880-1969) installed three sets of 'antique' Chinese wallpaper in his parlour, main entrance hall and a guest bedroom respectively, in the years between 1928 and 1931. Du Pont's use of Chinese wallpaper in the parlour does not echo the theatrical aesthetic of Sleeper's China Trade room, but offers a contrasting historicist aesthetic featuring American made 'Chinese Chippendale' furniture, and a few select Chinese objects including a Chinese lacquer screen and a collection of Chinese export porcelain, displayed in a shell shaped moulded alcove. A similar historicist aesthetic is achieved in the Port Royal entrance hall and the Philadelphia bedroom where the other two papers are used.

In New York, I viewed Chinese wallpapers in the Powell House room, an eighteenth period room in the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and consulted related acquisition files in the museum's archive. Installed in 1924, this design scheme was a key example of the role of Chinese wallpapers in Colonial Revival interiors and is a lasting testament to the curatorial

practices of the early twentieth century, which created a somewhat misleading role for Chinese wallpaper in recreations of America's historic material culture. This period room installation forms a central case study in chapter four of this thesis.

I was able to conduct further visual research into early twentieth century American interiors, and the role of Chinese wallpapers within them, at the Mattie H. Hewitt photographic archives at the New York Historical Society. Hewitt's photographs of New York City residences record both the "machine age" interiors of the first decades of the twentieth century and the more classic, historicizing style that eventually eclipsed it. Of particular interest are the Hewitt photographs of interiors designed by Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950) and Rose Cumming (d.1968), both of whom applied baroque, rococo, and other period forms, including Chinese wallpapers, to modern settings. Several important Chinese wallpapers are documented in situ in this photographic archive including those which once hung in the ball room at the home of publishing magnate Condé Nast (1873-1942) in New York. The Hewitt archive also contained images of department store displays including ensembles in the Far Eastern Department at Macy's in New York, providing important information about how Chinese goods were marketed and sold during this period.

The Nancy McClelland archive at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum provided a complementary resource for researching the trade and supply of Chinese wallpapers in America in the first half of the twentieth century. Nancy

McClelland (1877-1959) was a pioneering figure in researching and publishing on the subject of Chinese wallpapers, as well as promoting their use through her wallpaper and interior design business. The archive contains much of the research material for her publications, her interior design business, store and wallpapers.

McClelland was a well-known supplier of antique Chinese wallpapers and she supplied the aforementioned Chinese wallpaper installed in the parlour at Winterthur for H.F. du Pont in 1928. Information regarding the provenance of that wallpaper and McClelland's further dealings with other Chinese wallpapers was found in this archive as well as in the archives at Winterthur.

In New York, I visited the showrooms of wallpaper purveyor Gracie Studio. Established in 1898 by Charles R. Gracie, Gracie have been importing and selling Chinese wallpapers in America since the beginning of twentieth century. Today, Gracie Studio continues to import Chinese wallpapers to America and possess archival documents which offer a rich source of information on the production, sale and use of Chinese wallpapers from the early twentieth century onwards. I was able to see documents relating to transactions with New York decorators in the early twentieth century such as Elsie de Wolfe, as well as correspondence with the company's agent, in China, in the early twentieth century and photographs of the studios in Hong Kong during the 1950s. I also spent time looking at designs now available to clients which include reproductions of the aforementioned wallpapers installed in Condé Nast's New York apartment by Elsie de Wolfe in 1924.

People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Macau

Research in China was carried out in March 2015, in museums, historic houses and other historic sites, including the Forbidden City in Beijing. Research was also carried out in a variety of contemporary spaces in which Chinese wallpaper is applied as decoration. In all of these contexts, I conducted personal interviews with curators, artisans, salespeople, interior designers and factory and hotel managers regarding historic precedents and contemporary markets for Chinese wallpaper.

I was incredibly fortunate to gain access to *Juanqinzhai*, the Emperor Qianlong's retirement pavilion, located in the Qianlong gardens at the Forbidden City in Beijing, a building which is generally closed to the public. The pavilion, completed in 1779, is characterised by exquisitely detailed decoration including a vast floor to ceiling trompe l'oeil mural depicting a detailed garden scene, as well as plainer block printed wallpapers with repeating patterns of stylized dragon and phoenix roundels. This kind of printed wallpaper was in evidence throughout the Forbidden City and I was able to see historic and modern reproduction woodblocks used to make this kind of wallpaper during a visit to the Palace museum conservation studios. These contributed to my knowledge of decorative precedents for Chinese wallpaper in China and elite decorative practices in general.

While in Beijing, I visited the China Club, a private members club, hotel and restaurant designed by the late Sir David Tang (1954-2017), to examine the interiors in detail and to interview the manager, Tony Chiu, about the use of Chinese export style wallpapers in the China Club's interiors. The China Club is housed in an historic building dating to the seventeenth century, which was once the home of Prince Xun, a Chinese prince descended from the Kangxi emperor (1662-1722), and it is one of Beijing's few surviving princely mansions. The use of Chinese export type wallpapers in this traditional historical architectural context caught my interest early on in my research and I planned that it would be a central case study in my thesis which would represent a new context in which to understand the decorative language of Chinese wallpaper. The wealth of information I found in China meant that it actually became one of several studies in a chapter which examines the use of Chinese wallpapers in China, each of which conveys information about the values ascribed to Chinese wallpapers in contemporary Chinese settings.

In addition to the China Club in Beijing, I also visited the China Club in Hong Kong and casinos in Macau, restaurants, luxury clothing and lifestyle boutiques, as well as hotels in Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai and Beijing, which enabled me to form a broad impression of the varied use contexts of export style Chinese wallpapers in China today. The decorative effects achieved varied widely, displaying a range of cultural inflections and evocations.

I interviewed interior designers in Hong Kong and visited two showrooms owned by London based wallpaper purveyor de Gournay, in Shanghai and Beijing, to find out more about what drives the market for Chinese wallpapers in China today. At the showrooms I interviewed sales staff about client preferences and perceptions of Chinese wallpaper and I was also able to gain insight into their use in residential projects which were otherwise difficult to access or learn about.

There is very little information to be found in China today, relating to the historical trade and manufacture of Chinese wallpaper, largely because it seems that the manufacture of goods for export markets was not recorded in the same meticulous way that goods for domestic Chinese consumption were, specifically those intended for the imperial court. As a result, the focus of my research shifted from a search for historical evidence of production to an examination of modern and contemporary practices of production, design and consumption.

Consequently, the narrative presented in this part of my thesis is richer in material relating to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries rather than the historical period in which Chinese wallpaper was first developed, where there still exists a significant gap in knowledge. The decision to focus on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in America and China was also driven by the fact that the use of Chinese wallpapers in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has received far less academic attention.

Visits to two workshops currently making Chinese export style wallpaper in China provided significant new research material for this thesis. These site visits, in

March 2015, enabled first hand observation of production processes and materials as well as an important opportunity to interview staff about the product and find out about the specific terminology used to talk about the wallpapers and the associated materials and processes, which made certain parallels with Chinese painting traditions clear. During these visits I was able to conduct interviews with the craftsmen at work and also with the product managers on site and to engage with the materiality of Chinese wallpaper in depth.

Despite several attempts, I was unable to secure an interview with David Tang before he died in August 2017. As a Chinese designer who had used Chinese export style wallpapers extensively in his design projects throughout the world and over a relatively long period of time, I had hoped to add his voice and opinions to my research. In lieu of an interview with him I gathered information about his design approach from those who worked directly with him, through personal interviews (Tim Butcher, founder and artistic director at wallpaper design company Fromental and Tony Chiu, manager of the China Club Beijing) as well as through articles in the media relating to interior design in China and Hong Kong and referencing designers and others who could express professional opinions about his projects and design approach.

Collectively my research efforts yielded so much information that it was initially difficult to decide which examples to use as case studies and which stories to tell. I had initially planned to structure my thesis around three main case studies, but latterly it seemed that to do so would be to cut out a vast amount of new and

highly relevant information. While I uncovered a wealth of information, at the same time, some key information was missing, as already described above. I decided to use examples which illustrated the broadest global reach of Chinese wallpaper and which represented the greatest diversity of values and cultural narratives across time and space. As such this thesis represents just some of the many stories which Chinese wallpaper can tell and there are many more avenues for further research which are outlined in the conclusion to this thesis.

Other Sources

Over and above the research described above, a virtual global network of scholars from the fields of Chinese art, global history, interior design and conservation studies as well as curators from historic houses and museums, wallpaper designers and manufacturers, brought together by Emile de Bruijn, researcher and registrar at the UK's National Trust, through a shared interest in Chinese wallpaper, have made an inestimable contribution to the research presented in this thesis as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas. Many generous participants in this group have shared information, suggested sources or facilitated access to collections, archives, workshops and people.

In addition to the significant amount of primary research carried out for this thesis, I also consulted a significant body of secondary source materials that provided a rich context for this study. This literature covered a broad range of topics some of which is described in detail in chapter one. It includes, but is not

limited to, the subjects of Chinese painting, prints and visual culture, ceramics, export art, the European and American China trades, wallpaper history, chinoiserie, Chinese traditions of interior decoration, the Macartney mission, the early modern Sino-European encounter, British and European interior decoration, the country house, the birth of interior decorating, Art Deco, Arts and Crafts, the Colonial Revival and the period room.

Chapter Content

Chapter one examines how the scholarship of Chinese wallpaper has evolved since the beginning of the twentieth century and in what scholarly disciplines has it been a subject of particular interest. It provides background context introducing some of the key themes which relate to the development, production and consumption of Chinese wallpaper in the past and in the present day including the gendered consumption and display of Chinese goods, luxury, chinoiserie and orientalism. This chapter argues that, despite the fact that Chinese wallpaper has been a notable presence in the global material landscape since the late seventeenth century and is a material that is rich in its many histories, it is only very recently that they have become the subject of serious scholarly attention and enquiry.

Chapter two investigates Chinese wallpapers which feature designs of Chinese life and industry to give focussed attention to the origins of these designs, interpretations of these designs and the narratives and agendas that they

contributed to in both China and Great Britain. The Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co. in London forms the central case study in this chapter. It describes the history and significance of Chinese wallpaper as a hybrid product, reflecting both Chinese and European visual and material culture, making clear the close relationship between Chinese export art and Chinese art for the domestic Chinese market. Chinese wallpaper had reached the height of its popularity in Europe by the late eighteenth century and London in particular was an important locus in the history of Chinese wallpaper; as a global trading hub and centre for the sale of all kinds of luxury imported goods, as well as a specific centre for the trade in wallpaper. With its supposed links to the Macartney embassy, the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co records a pivotal moment in Sino-British political relations and is a useful device through which to consider the role of decorative goods in communicating knowledge about Chinese art, culture, landscape and people in an era before photography, mass communication and international travel, for more than a privileged few. This chapter explores the Chinese wallpaper as a source of useful knowledge but also, simultaneously as a site of fantasy and imagined ideals, relating to both China and Britain and their respective imperial and trade ambitions.

Beyond this global significance, this chapter also describes the evolving set of local values that have been absorbed by the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., examining the history of the wallpaper in its local context and investigating how it evolved into a powerful identifying symbol for Coutts & Co. In this way this study

describes how myths grow up around objects and lend value to them, exemplifying the merging of object and person biography.

Chapter three explores the use of Chinese wallpaper in North America from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, and examines the contrasting values ascribed to them at a time when their use was mediated by a variety of modern forces including, museum curators, interior decorators, the international art market, department stores and the media. Specific examples demonstrate that Chinese wallpapers variously represented history, heritage, European culture, decorative refinement, exoticism and modernity, dovetailing with global style movements including Arts and Crafts and Art Deco, in modern American domestic interiors and museum period rooms.

This chapter also describes the cumulative values which have sustained the appeal of Chinese wallpaper in the twenty-first century. The Chinese wallpaper used by Condé Nast in his New York apartment, (installed in 1924), acts as a key case study in this chapter and demonstrates the fact that the appeal of Chinese wallpaper in twenty-first century America is predicated on their use by influential early twentieth century celebrities and public figures just as much, if not more than, the many other histories and values attributed to Chinese wallpaper.

Chapter four addresses the production and use of Chinese wallpaper in twenty first century China. It describes their value and appeal in emerging local Chinese markets and also investigates historic precedents for applied, pictorial wall

decoration in Chinese interiors. The use of Chinese wallpaper in present day China raises questions regarding how it is perceived and understood, especially as it was historically designed and intended for export markets and has a long historical association with European decorative contexts. This chapter examines what concepts and ideas are driving new markets for Chinese wallpaper in China and what messages they convey in Chinese contexts.

Using interviews with interior designers and wallpaper manufacturers as well as first-hand accounts of spaces in which Chinese export style wallpaper is being used in China today, this chapter argues that the growing market for Chinese export style wallpaper is predicated on the recognition of a culturally specific symbolic decorative language which is inherent in the motifs depicted; these motifs themselves were drawn from established traditions of Chinese visual culture. Based on this idea, I argue that the 'made in China' narrative attributable to Chinese wallpaper finds its strongest articulation in Chinese cultural settings.

Final remarks

There have been numerous insightful scholarly histories written about objects and commodities, such as tea, silk and porcelain, that have connected China with the world and contributed to the image of China in broader global consciousness.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Erika Diane Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton University Press, 2017); *Threads of Global Desire: Silk in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. by Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello, and Luca Molà (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2018).

While Chinese wallpaper has also made a significant contribution to the image and idea of China, it has featured primarily as a peripheral object and an adjunct to studies of larger concepts and contexts, most commonly in the subject areas of the European and American China trades, Chinese export art and historic houses.

At this moment, when the social, cultural and material impact of Chinese wallpaper is increasingly being recognised and probed by researchers from a broad range of academic disciplines, it is a timely to assess and consider how scholarship of this subject has evolved and where it can usefully be taken.

Chapter 1 An Historiography of Chinese wallpaper

Chinese wallpaper has been an exciting visual and material presence in the Western material landscape since the late seventeenth century. It transformed elite interiors with its striking large scale designs throughout the eighteenth century. By the late nineteenth century Chinese wallpaper was sought after as an historic object, as a decorative symbol of aristocratic taste, as well as for its exotic and luxury aesthetic. Today, it continues to be sought after as a form of luxury interior decoration and as a cipher for history, Chinese and European culture. In spite of its long lived popularity and its significant visual and material impact in the western material landscape, Chinese wallpaper did not become a subject of scholarly study until the first decades of the twentieth century. Initial scholarly interests in this material in the first decades of the twentieth century reflected a revival of interest in Chinese wallpaper as a decorative wall treatment and saw them integrated into fashionable early twentieth century interiors in both Britain and North America.

Historically regarded as decoration and a subordinate category of artistic production within the field of Chinese art history, scholarship of Chinese wallpaper initially developed in the contexts of research on historic interiors, wallpaper studies and museum collections, which collectively addressed the development, materials, trade, application and decorative impact of this material. Such studies provide essential context for understanding where and how Chinese

wallpapers were used, and by whom, as well as providing insight into how they compared to available European alternatives. These studies were often enriched with historical commentary and opinion on Chinese wallpaper taken from diary excerpts and correspondence. Insightful information regarding price, terminology and taxonomy were discussed in detail, particularly in wallpaper history studies such as those by Sugden and Edmondson.¹ Another key theme which is brought to the fore in wallpaper studies is the extent to which Chinese wallpaper influenced wallpaper design and production in Europe and America; stimulating the design of imitative products. These studies make clear the extent to which products developed in disparate local markets, even those separated by thousands of miles, played off the products created in other local markets and how they developed around and in response to one another. While this is generally not explicitly acknowledged in early twentieth century studies of wallpaper, descriptions of these mutually influencing products clearly demonstrate the fact that Chinese wallpaper was a global product; their production was stimulated by global connections and they were brought to people through global trade networks.

Studies carried out in these contexts of the historic house, wallpaper studies and museum collections provided basic descriptions of Chinese wallpaper designs, their materials and their hanging methods. These details quickly became standardised and much repeated among different articles, catalogues and books

¹ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926)
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

published in the first decades of the twentieth century. The descriptions were very general and most research did not probe very deeply with regard to the origins of the designs on Chinese wallpaper, how these were read and understood in Europe and China and how Chinese wallpaper functioned more generally in European interiors. In short, they did not research the broader social and cultural impact of Chinese wallpaper, though its presence was clearly regarded as remarkable or at least noteworthy.

As descriptions of the designs, materials and techniques of manufacture for Chinese wallpaper quickly became standardised and repeated, with very little new research being generated in the first half of the twentieth century, a propensity for myths and misinformation to be generated and repeated was also established, particularly with regard to the provenance of specific papers, such as those at the London bank Coutts & Co. Myths and misinformation also developed around how Chinese wallpapers were obtained more generally, when they were initially developed in the late seventeenth century. An often repeated but unsubstantiated idea was that sets of Chinese wallpaper were gifted to European merchants by Chinese *Hong* merchants upon the conclusion of trade deals.²

Where gaps in knowledge existed, the myths that were generated and the

² Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 89; Gill Saunders, 'Chinese Wallpapers and Chinoiserie Styles', in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), pp. 63–75 (p. 64); Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (p. 57) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

conjecture that was offered indicated both the difficulty of finding evidence relating to the early history of Chinese wallpaper and the fact that these myths made Chinese wallpaper seem more exotic, more intriguing and more desirable.

Research on the subject of Chinese wallpaper was, until very recently, heavily biased towards addressing the European consumption of Chinese wallpaper. Information regarding the local contexts of their production in China have seldom been addressed. Additionally, the relationship between Chinese export wallpapers and decorative products made for domestic Chinese markets has also received relatively little scholarly attention.

Since the 1980s, knowledge and scholarship of this intercultural, hybrid product has been slowly accumulating, and has been mirrored by an increasing presence in the collections and displays of museums of art and design across the world including, most recently, in China where export art is a growing area of collecting practice. The growing interest in export art in China is described in more detail in chapter four of this thesis. Chinese export art has been one of the main fields of research in which Chinese wallpapers have been investigated, along with historic interiors. However, when compared to Chinese porcelain, silk and lacquer, Chinese wallpapers have been afforded much less attention and have generally been only of peripheral interest and concern, often being grouped together with other 'miscellaneous' object types and described only in brief. This lack of focussed attention meant that, while Chinese wallpapers, as a decorative material, were known to many people and basic details about them were

circulated in a variety of publication types, there had in fact been very few scholarly attempts to investigate and describe the full extent of their social, cultural and material impact, until much more recently.

Chinese wallpapers sit uncomfortably between traditional academic disciplines; historically being seen as outside the scope of Chinese art history and more commonly regarded as a part of European interiors rather than as a product of China. Even in the context of western interiors they defy neat categorisation, being neither an example of chinoiserie nor Chinese fine art or Chinese decorative art, but a cultural and material hybrid developed specifically for export, which puts them in an unusual category of their own.

While Chinese wallpaper is not an example of chinoiserie it played a part in some chinoiserie interiors and was subject to many of the same cultural attitudes and commentary relating to exoticism, fantasy, and excess. Consequently, studies of chinoiserie are an important and complementary field of research. Studies on the subject of chinoiserie have flourished in recent decades. Among the main contributors to new research on this subject are David Porter, Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins and Stacey Sloboda, who challenge traditional readings of the chinoiserie style movement as something that was characterised by frivolity and excess with creative approaches ranging from literary theory to material culture studies, which purport to 'take decoration seriously'.³ These authors probe the social and

³ Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 8.

cultural impact of chinoiserie with particular emphasis on the opportunities that the chinoiserie style offered for specific modes of self-reflection and self-presentation vis a vis a distinct and distant culture. These studies provide important context for understanding how Chinese wallpapers have functioned in the western world, but very few studies of chinoiserie have given any significant and focussed attention to Chinese wallpaper specifically, thus Chinese wallpapers have remained a peripheral subject in these studies of a closely related cultural phenomenon.

Art historian, Friederike Wappenschmidt provided the first in depth and singularly focussed, art historical investigation of Chinese wallpaper with her book *Chinesische Tapeten Für Europa: Von Rollbild zur Bildtapete*, in which she surveyed a large number of Chinese wallpapers across Europe and documented their individual histories in great detail.⁴ Using this information, Wappenschmidt constructed a broad, yet detailed, account of the spread and impact of Chinese wallpaper in Europe. Wappenschmidt importantly also addresses the relationship between native Chinese artistic traditions and how they directly affected the development of Chinese wallpaper in the late seventeenth century. Art historian Emile de Bruijn, historian Helen Clifford, paper conservator Andrew Bush and design historian Clare Taylor have made some of the most significant contributions to scholarship on the subject of Chinese wallpaper since

⁴ Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten Für Europa: Vom Rollbild Zur Bildtapete* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1989).

Wappenschmidt's 1989 study.⁵ Through their research they have advanced understanding of Chinese wallpaper to a new level of complexity, acknowledging the far reaching impact of Chinese wallpaper and its material and cultural complexities, as its status has evolved from that of luxury decorative import to valuable antique. Studies conducted by these authors also importantly recognise Chinese wallpaper as an object that belongs to a specific category of material and cultural hybrid, that was produced as a direct response to the Sino-European cultural encounter during the early modern period. Scholarship is only now beginning to acknowledge the fact that Chinese wallpaper is a continuing tradition, one that evokes historical use contexts and connections, but one which also exists in its own right as contemporary design, subject to a variety of interpretations and readings.⁶ This important new research by the aforementioned authors is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

⁵ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014); Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017); Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015]; Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>; Clare Taylor, 'Chinese Papers and English Imitations in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *New Discoveries, New Research: Papers from the International Wallpaper Conference at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2007*, ed. by Stavelow-Hidemark (Stockholm: The Nordiska Museet, 2009), pp. 36–53; Clare Taylor, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018); Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63.

⁶ Emile de Bruijn, 'A Living Tradition', in *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), pp. 225–44; Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and

A review of the large body of literature in which information on Chinese wallpaper is published provides important context for this thesis. The literature describes the development of research on Chinese wallpapers and charts changing attitudes towards it. Today, its status has evolved from mere decoration to an object of recognised social, cultural and historical interest and importance. A review of this literature makes clear how information on Chinese wallpaper has been gathered and where gaps in knowledge remain; in particular, around the various ways in which Chinese wallpaper has been used to construct specific and diverse cultural narratives, the continued production of Chinese wallpaper in the twenty-first century, its production and use in present day China and recognition of its status as a global product; as a product of and a producer of global connections.

The Beginnings of Scholarship on the Subject of Chinese Wallpaper

Before Chinese wallpapers became the subject of any scholarly surveys or catalogues information about them was published in magazines for collectors of antiques and art and for those with an interest in historic houses and interior design such as *The Connoisseur* and *Country Life*.⁷ The nature of these publications, as magazines, was such that the information regarding Chinese

Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (p. 66) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

⁷ Anon., 'The Chinese Wall-Papers of Georgian England', *Vogue*, September 1916, 64, 124 <<https://search.proquest.com/vogue/docview/879147004/204D31C4ACBC460FPQ/1?accountid=28521>>; Anon., 'Moor Park - I', *Country Life*, January (1912), 18–25; E. A. Entwisle, 'Chinese Painted Wallpapers', *The Connoisseur*, XCIII (1934), 367–74; Margaret Jourdain, 'Chinese Paper-Hangings', *Country Life*, 1948, 684–85.

wallpaper was minimal and relatively basic, the focus of the articles being generally concerned with providing an account of a whole house and its interiors or acting as a very general and broad introduction to Chinese wallpaper. What these accounts do provide is valuable contextual information about the use of Chinese wallpapers in the past, providing specific context about the period, architecture, interiors and the owners' own histories, their tastes, professional connections and personal interests that led them to acquire Chinese wallpapers.

It was not until the mid-1920s that more substantial and focussed studies of Chinese wallpaper began to be published. Among these early studies was research conducted by Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959), an American scholar and writer on the subject of wallpaper, furniture and interior decorating in general, but also a practising wallpaper designer and interior decorator. McClelland's first book *Historic Wall-papers: From their inception to the introduction of machinery*, written in 1924, has a broad remit and offers a general history of wallpaper across Europe and America within the temporal parameters stated in the title.⁸ It includes one chapter on Chinese wallpapers and English and French chinoiserie wallpapers.⁹ It was an important contribution to knowledge at the time of its publication and it remains an important reference on the subject of wallpaper in the present day, not least because of the large number of photographs that are

⁸ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924).

⁹ Nancy Vincent McClelland, 'Chinese, Anglo-Chinese And Franco-Chinese Papers', in *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), pp. 89–111.

reproduced in it which form a valuable record of specific wallpapers and often their locations and provenance too. With regard to Chinese wallpapers, the majority of the examples discussed are located in America and in this way the author provides useful insight into the American market for Chinese wallpaper. Historical attitudes to Chinese wallpapers are not discussed in any great detail and neither are their broader contextualisation within specific interior design schemes. McClelland suggests that Chinese wallpapers were brought to Europe as early as the middle of the sixteenth century by Portuguese and Dutch merchants but provides no evidence to support this claim for such early importation.¹⁰ Later publications almost unanimously agree that Chinese wallpaper proper, as a fully developed decorative product, rather than Chinese paintings which were used as applied decoration, first began to be imported in the late seventeenth century, based on documentary evidence such as stationer's trade cards and advertisements.¹¹

Like many other writers on this subject McClelland argues that Chinese wallpapers of the type known in Europe were never used by Chinese people who preferred to decorate their homes with paintings on silk. McClelland also goes on to suggest

¹⁰ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 89.

¹¹ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926) <<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>. Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: A History and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Sotheby's Publications, 1982). Gill Saunders, 'Chinese Wallpapers and Chinoiserie Styles', in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), pp. 63–75.

that wallpapers were not initially developed as commercial products but were given to merchants as gifts by *Hong* merchants on the conclusion of trade deals and that the positive reception of these in Europe led to their commercial development.¹² Whilst this sounds plausible no evidence is offered to suggest that the papers were in fact given as trade gifts, nevertheless this idea is echoed by many subsequent publications on the subject of wallpaper, but without any specific evidence to corroborate this claim.¹³ The lack of documentation and other forms of evidence relating to the development and early trade of Chinese wallpaper has meant that there has been a tendency for myth and misinformation to develop around these gaps in knowledge. Indeed, this myth making relates not only to the origins of Chinese wallpaper but also to interpretations of their decorative subjects, as has been seen with other Chinese objects, including porcelain. The story of the Willow Pattern was extrapolated from the figural images that were used to decorate some blue and white porcelain exported to Europe and it became a powerful myth which sold hundreds of thousands of pieces of porcelain.

¹² Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 89.

¹³ Gill Saunders, 'Chinese Wallpapers and Chinoiserie Styles', in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), pp. 63–75 (p. 62); Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (pp. 57–61) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

Many bold statements were made by McClelland with regard to Chinese wallpaper in her 1924 book which were not supported by evidence.¹⁴ In spite of this, McClelland's book represents a valuable research effort and marked the beginning of a period in which there was a surge of interest in Chinese wallpaper, not only in the field of interior decoration but also in museum collecting practices too.¹⁵ Between 1914 and 1920 the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired forty pieces of Chinese wallpaper in a conscious effort to expand the museums holdings.¹⁶ This interest was reflected in increased scholarship on the subject within the field of wallpaper studies and museum collections.

In 1926, two years after McClelland's book was published, British wallpaper historians Alan Sugden and John Edmondson published their authoritative survey, *A History of English Wallpaper 1509-1914*, which, despite the parameters

¹⁴ McClelland claims that the popularity of Chinese wallpapers led to the importation of Chinese artists, writing; 'Chinese artists were then imported into England and under their guidance, with some direction as to English preferences, imitations were painted in the spot'. See Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), pp. 95–96. McClelland offers no references to support this claim which has great implications for our understanding, not only of Chinese wallpapers but also the international trade in craft skills and Sino-European contact at this time. Chinese people were a rarity in eighteenth century Europe and it is surprising that the author makes no mention of contemporary evidence to support this bold claim.

¹⁵ McClelland published a second book in 1926: Nancy Vincent McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926)., this time from the perspective of a practical decorator and in it she offers insight in to the ways in which Chinese wallpaper and Chinese styles more generally were finding favour in American homes during the first decades of the twentieth century. The book represents important evidence for the various ways in which Chinese wallpapers were applied in modern interiors.

¹⁶ A note in the acquisition file for a panel of Chinese wallpaper from a brewery house in Watford (E.252-1924) acquired by the V&A in 1924 suggests there was a conscious effort at this time to grow the collection of Chinese wallpaper. In the note on file curator Martin Hardie writes: '(The acquisition) [...] will allow us to add a particularly fine specimen to our growing collection of Chinese wallpapers'. 'V&A Museum Registered File. MA/1/S1070 Harold Sedgwick.' (V&A Archive of Art and Design).

suggested by the title, provides a far broader account of wallpaper history including French and Chinese wallpapers, as well as English.¹⁷ The book is heavily illustrated and comprises ten chapters which chart the evolution of English wallpaper production and design as well as describing, in great detail, the use of wallpaper from various sources in British interiors, from the beginning of the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. References and information relating to Chinese wallpaper are scattered throughout the early chapters of the book, but are the main focus of chapter five 'Chinese paper and English Imitations'.¹⁸ This chapter provides a richly evidenced account of the importation and trade of Chinese wallpapers, using eighteenth century trade cards and advertisements as well as historical accounts from eighteenth century diarists, to provide insight into how Chinese wallpapers were received and perceived in eighteenth century Britain.

Chinese Wallpaper and the Issue of Nomenclature

With extensive use of historic sources throughout their chapter on Chinese wallpaper, Sugden and Edmondson draw attention to the important issue of nomenclature. When Chinese wallpapers were first introduced to Britain they

¹⁷ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926)
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

¹⁸ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, 'Chinese Paper and English Imitations', in *A History of English Wallpaper 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), pp. 97–108
<<https://archive.org/details/historyofenglish00sugd>>.

were subject to a variety of descriptive names. Historical sources, including newspaper advertisements, trade cards, private correspondence and diaries, show that Chinese wallpapers were variously referred to as ‘India hangings’, ‘India papers’, ‘Japan hangings’, ‘Japan papers’, ‘Papers of Pekin’ and ‘Paper hangings, of India and Japan figures.’¹⁹ Sugden and Edmondson provide numerous quotes to support this idea, including references from a variety of eighteenth century sources, such as diary entries and letters including some written by English artist and Bluestocking, Mrs. Mary Delany (1700-1788), who made numerous references in her letters to the decorations of the various houses in which she stayed in.²⁰

Sugden and Edmondson provide further evidence of the variety of terms used to refer to Chinese wallpaper by citing historic advertisements for wallpaper (Figure 1-1). They wrote; ‘Before the end of the seventeenth century we begin to find “Japan and Indian figured paper-hangings” (meaning Chinese) included in contemporary advertisements, along with others of English manufacture quite as a matter of course.’²¹ These early sources offer valuable insight into the availability of Chinese wallpaper and the trade channels through which it was sold. They also offer insight into the terms used to describe them, which in turn can tell

¹⁹ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), pp. 38–40, 100
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

²⁰ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), p. 100
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

²¹ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), p. 38
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

us much about how they were regarded; seemingly as somewhat culturally indistinct, exotic products, valued not for their specific origin but for their exotic aesthetic.²²



Figure 1-1 Stationer, George Minnikin's trade card advertising "Japan" and other paper hangings. Ca. 1690 [Source: Bagford Collection, The British Museum, reproduced in Sugden and Edmondson (1926) plate 32, p.38]

²² Anon., 'The Chinese Wall-Papers of Georgian England', *Vogue*, September 1916, 64, 124 <<https://search.proquest.com/vogue/docview/879147004/204D31C4ACBC460FPQ/1?accountid=28521>>. This article is one of the earliest uses of the term 'Chinese wall-papers', prior to this the term 'paper hangings' was more common.

The true origin of Chinese wallpapers was made ambiguous not only by the sheer variety of terms in use, but also by the proliferation of imitative products.

Advertisements and trade cards cited by Sugden and Edmondson provide evidence of the fact that Chinese wallpapers were being widely copied as early as the 1690s, with some referring to 'true sorts' and others as 'new invented', which imitated and embellished the motifs found on imported Chinese wallpapers (Figure 1-2).²³

²³ Quoting an advert from the Blue Paper warehouse in Aldermanbury in the Bagford collection at the British Museum in London, Sugden and Edmondson write: 'At the Blue-Paper Warehouse in Aldermanbury, London, are sold the True Sorts of Japan and Indian Figured Hangings, in pieces of Twelve Yards long and Half and Ell Broad, at 2/6 by the piece.' The advert is from the period of William and Mary (1688-1792) as evidenced by an interlaced cypher and the Royal Arms on the Blue paper warehouse advertisement (illustrated in plate 33), which was thought to have been opened in 1691. See Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), p. 39
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.



Figure 1-2 An advertisement for the Blew Paper Warehouse in Aldermanbury, London, advertising 'true sorts of Figured Paper Hangings'. Late seventeenth century. [Source: Bagford Collection, The British Museum, reproduced in Sugden and Edmondson (1926) plate 33, p.39]

Sugden and Edmondson notably enlisted an expert in Chinese art, John Hilditch F.R.G.S, to provide some insight into the origins of Chinese wallpaper within native Chinese traditions of fine and decorative art. However, Hilditch offers only vague reference to the use of paper on the mud walls of houses in the Han period (206 BC- 220 AD) around 206 AD and goes on to describe the use of wallpaper in China, primarily in funeral rites, rather than providing details of any comparable or related modes of interior decoration. He wrote, 'Copies (of paper with designs) were put upon the walls in memory of the dead, and this custom, dating back

2000 years, gave birth to the use of wallpaper for decorative purposes.’²⁴ Sugden and Edmondson attempted to relate Hilditch’s descriptions of funerary customs to the historical accounts of Chinese interiors given by William Chambers (1723-1796) in his book *Designs of Chinese Buildings* (1757), in which he describes having seen, ‘(...) walls neatly covered with white, crimson or gilt papers’.²⁵

Hilditch’s contribution did little to enhance understanding the Chinese artistic traditions or the particular circumstances that led to the development of pictorial Chinese wallpaper for export. He does not describe Chinese painting traditions or offer explanations of Chinese interior decorating practices. It is however noteworthy that the connection between this export product and Chinese traditions of interior decoration were at least beginning to be considered by scholars in the 1920s.

While Sugden and Edmondson offer an insightful account of Chinese wallpaper with detailed descriptions and rich, well evidenced historical contextual analysis, a clearer sense of the circumstances in which they were developed and the artistic traditions from which they grew is lacking, as well as any indication of their

²⁴ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), pp. 98–99
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

²⁵ William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils: To Which Is Annexed a Description of Their Temples, Houses, Gardens, &c* (London: Published by the author and sold by him next door to Tom’s Coffee House, Russell Street, Covent Garden, 1757), p. 8. quoted in Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), p. 99
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

relationship with other forms of export art. Additionally, written at a time when Chinese wallpaper was enjoying a resurgence of popularity in fashionable British and American interiors the authors offer no acknowledgement of their appeal in this contemporary decorative context, describing them instead, as ‘prized antiques’.²⁶

Several other publications offer a general introduction to Chinese wallpapers using known examples in British, Irish and American houses and public collections to illustrate observations and claims about their history and methods of display. These include work by V&A museum curator Charles Oman²⁷, wallpaper historian Eric Entwisle²⁸ and Irish historian Ada Longfield, whose contributions are discussed in detail later in this chapter.²⁹ The valuable information presented in these papers clearly informed later studies, where much of the same information and many of the same sources are cited. These studies by Oman, Entwisle and Longfield, identify many of the key characteristics of Chinese wallpaper and discuss the possible origins of the Chinese wallpaper tradition. However, they provide very little information about the details of production and initial trade

²⁶ Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper: 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1926), p. 97
<<https://archive.org/stream/historyofenglish00sugd#page/n151/mode/2up>>.

²⁷ Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: A History and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Sotheby's Publications, 1982).

²⁸ E. A. Entwisle, *The Book of Wallpaper: A History and An Appreciation* (London: Batsford, 1960).

²⁹ Ada Longfield, ‘Old Wallpapers in Ireland: Some 18th and 19th Century Chinese, French and English Examples’, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 78.2 (1948), 157–69.

which brought Chinese wallpapers from China to Europe, focussing more specifically on local European trade networks and their entry into European, and particularly British, homes.

Collecting Chinese Wallpaper

An important source of scholarship on Chinese wallpapers was generated in the context of the museum. By 1929 the V&A museum had acquired sixty-five individual pieces of Chinese wallpaper and in the same year the museum published the first catalogue of the museum's broader wallpaper collections of English, French, Chinese and Japanese examples. This unillustrated catalogue was authored by Charles Oman, former keeper of the V&A's metalwork department and offers a history of wallpapers from these regions, from the fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, supplemented by brief catalogue entries.³⁰ Oman provides a short and basic introduction to the V&A's collection of Chinese wallpaper, describing the material characteristics, manufacturing techniques and key design categories, using illustrative examples from the collections.

With regard to dating Oman suggests that the earliest papers can be identified by their simplicity of design and argues that due to a lack of documentary evidence relating to the provenance and trade in Chinese wallpapers, dating must be based on stylistic analysis. He argues that the inspiration for Chinese wallpapers was

³⁰ Charles C. Oman, *Catalogue of Wallpapers* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, Published under the authority of the Board of Education, 1929).

Chinese silk hangings used in homes of wealthy Chinese, but offers no further discussion of the topic. The question of whether or not Chinese wallpapers of the type known in Europe were used in China is raised and, citing literary accounts written by Europeans with personal experience of eighteenth century China (French Jesuit, Louis Le Comte (1655-1728), William Chambers (1723-1796), George Leonard Staunton (1737-1801)), Oman argues that it is unlikely they were used in China, but no further discussion of this critical issue is offered. The period 1740-1790 is identified as the height of the fashion for Chinese wallpaper and the author acknowledges the central role of architects of the day (Robert Adams (1728-1792), William Chambers etc.) in introducing Chinese wallpapers into Britain's great houses.

Very few of these early publications on Chinese wallpaper, dating to the 1920s and 30s, offer any detailed discussion of the spaces in which Chinese wallpapers were used in terms of their broader social functions and effect. This information provides critical insight into the social and decorative function of the papers as well as contemporary attitudes towards them. Neither do they offer contextualization within the wider collection or trade in Chinese goods in Europe. No description or discussion of the relationship between Chinese wallpaper and native traditions of Chinese art is attempted and the scope is limited to acknowledging the physical characteristics and provenance of Chinese wallpapers in the V&A collection. The focus is primarily on their general presence in a specific house or collection and the material and techniques of their manufacture.

By 1982 the V&A's wallpaper collection had increased six-fold, an expansion which precipitated the production of a completely revised catalogue, including descriptions of over 2,000 wallpapers and designs with 827 monochrome and 75 colour illustrations.³¹ The catalogue covers the period, 1509-1978, and provides a substantial section on English papers followed by sections on other European countries, the United States, Japan, and on Chinese papers imported into Britain. One of the most significant contributions of this volume is the many black and white and colour illustrations which provide useful visual record and reference for the individual examples of Chinese wallpapers in the V&A collection, recording their designs, materials and provenance. Like the studies which precede it, this catalogue offers a general overview of Chinese wallpapers and whilst it lacks in-depth analysis of specific papers and broader interpretations of Chinese wallpapers in socio-cultural contexts it acts as an excellent reference. While the descriptions of European wallpaper in Oman's text document production up to 1978, the account of Chinese wallpaper stops in the second decade of the nineteenth century, with no account of the continued production of Chinese wallpapers after this period or the trade in 'antique' examples, for use in fashionable and historicist early twentieth century interiors.

Catherine Lynn, American wallpaper historian and curator at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, published a complementary survey of

³¹ Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: A History and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Sotheby's Publications, 1982).

wallpaper in America in 1980, which offered an investigation of the most distinctive styles in wallpaper and ways in which it was used in the USA from the seventeenth century to the beginning of World War I.³² With this early twentieth century cut-off date, like the publications already described above, this survey does not take account of the continued presence and appeal of Chinese wallpapers during the 1920s, 30s and 40s, which was especially relevant in America, where Chinese wallpaper found particular popularity in the first half of the twentieth century.

What Lynn does offer is an account of the important position that 'Oriental' papers, as well as English and French, occupied in the history of American interiors, noting that as carriers of fashion they dictated style in the USA from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century. Lynn dedicates one chapter to 'Oriental wallpapers'.³³ Like the surveys published before this, Lynn gives an account of the various types of design of Chinese wallpaper. She cites extant examples in America to illustrate her commentary and offers insightful historical sources regarding the market for Chinese wallpaper which describe their availability and the regard in which they were held, including advertisements and private correspondence.

³² Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton Inc, 1980).

³³ Catherine Lynn, 'Oriental Wallpapers', in *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Catherine Lynn, 1980), pp. 99–106.

Lynn describes Chinese wallpaper as the subject of global trade and as a product which could be usefully compared to other contemporaneous global export products such as Chintz, which has a particularly close design relationship with Chinese wallpaper, importantly highlighting the mutually influencing relationships between global products for export in the early modern period and identifying a valuable subject for further research.

Gill Saunders, curator of prints and drawings at the Victoria and Albert museum built on the research published by Oman and Hamilton in 1989 to make further important contributions to the study of Chinese wallpaper, specifically drawing on the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. She has authored several book chapters and papers on the subject, which place it in the broader context of the development and consumption of decorative wallpapers in the west.³⁴ Saunders' publications focus on use of Chinese wallpapers in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European interiors, using a wealth of primary sources to support her specific observations. Saunders' research draws together many of the important contributions of early publications on the subject of Chinese wallpaper, but offers few new insights and perhaps most notably neglects to address the continued relevance and production of Chinese wallpaper in the twentieth century. In addition, the brevity of her studies does not allow for deeper analysis and

³⁴ Gill Saunders, 'Painted Paper of Peking: Chinese Wallpapers in England', *V&A Album*, 1983, 306–11; Gill Saunders, 'The China Trade: Oriental Painted Panels', in *The Papered Wall: History, Pattern, Technique*, ed. by Lesley Hoskins (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 63–74; Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002).

reflection on the broader social and cultural significance of Chinese wallpapers in the periods discussed.

In 2014, UK-based conservation charity, The National Trust, published a catalogue of the large number of Chinese wallpapers held in National Trust properties, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, jointly authored by historians Helen Clifford and Emile de Bruijn and paper conservator Andrew Bush.³⁵ This short catalogue offered a timely collation of catalogue information relating to the largest single national collection of Chinese wallpapers in the world, in the contexts of conservation, historic interiors and global history. The catalogue set the Trust's collection of Chinese wallpaper in the wider context of elite domestic histories and provided a unique picture of their distribution across the UK. This survey has documented where Chinese wallpapers were used, usefully making it possible to map and visualise how they were distributed. By placing Chinese wallpapers in the context of the histories of specific houses the authors were able to apply tentative and sometimes definitive dates, at least with regard to the installation of Chinese wallpapers, using day work books, paperhanger's invoices, correspondence and diary entries as evidence and providing useful local context for this global commodity. This publication brings together a substantial body of information concerning this important collection of Chinese wallpapers, the vast majority of which have never been published before, allowing readers to map

³⁵ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014).

their presence in the UK and understand more about their individual histories. The contributions of paper conservator, Andrew Bush also adds insightful material analysis to the historical context, providing important information about production techniques, including providing evidence of the use of printing techniques, which were used in combination with painted designs on Chinese wallpapers dating to the early eighteenth century.³⁶ This catalogue represents an important survey of Chinese wallpapers held by the National Trust, enriched with well researched interpretative content. While it covers many important issues, including the hybrid nature of Chinese wallpaper, its spread, methods of application, spaces of use and its cultural impact, it is tantalisingly brief and limited to descriptions of Chinese wallpaper in Great Britain. Nevertheless, it has set the scene and established a bench mark for further research, both within and beyond the contexts of the UK and the country house.

This catalogue project was at the centre of a recent upsurge of academic interest in Chinese wallpaper and fostered the development of an interdisciplinary group of researchers under the leadership of Emile de Bruijn, which resulted in the 2014 Chinese wallpaper conference, already described in the introduction to this thesis,

³⁶ Several other studies conducted by paper conservators provide great insight into the materials and techniques used in the production of Chinese wallpaper, making a significant contribution to scholarship on the subject. See, Pauline Webber, 'Chinese Wallpapers in the British Galleries', *V&A Conservation Journal*, 2001 <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-39/chinese-wallpapers-in-the-british-galleries/>>; S Pessanha and others, 'Study of a XVIII Century Hand-Painted Chinese Wallpaper by Multianalytical Non-Destructive Techniques', *Spectrochimica Acta. Part B, Atomic Spectroscopy; Atomic Spectrometry; Salvador-Bahia*, 2008, 582–86; L Lambert, 'An Eighteenth-Century Chinese Wallpaper: Historical Context and Conservation', *International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works*, 2002, 122–28.

‘Chinese Wallpaper: Trade, Technique and Taste’. This conference marked an important progression and a milestone in studies of Chinese wallpaper. It made clear that increasing numbers of scholars and researchers were interested in Chinese wallpaper and were investigating the history and significance of Chinese wallpapers as both an historical and contemporary object of social, cultural and historical significance.

Wallpaper Studies

Design historian, Clare Taylor has written extensively on the subject of the wallpaper trade and wallpaper design in eighteenth-century Britain and has made important contributions to knowledge of Chinese wallpaper in this context.³⁷ In her most recent publication, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain*, Taylor includes a whole chapter on Chinese wallpapers and their imitations, examining their trade and installation in Britain and their impact on British wallpaper design and production.³⁸ Through close

³⁷ Clare Taylor, ‘The Division of the Wall: The Use of Wallpapers in Decorative Schemes 1870-1910’, *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, 12 (1988), 18–25; Clare Taylor, ‘Reading the Cards: Trade Cards as Sources for Studying the British Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper Trade’, *The Wallpaper History Review*, 2008, 29–32; Clare Taylor, ‘Chinese Papers and English Imitations in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, in *New Discoveries, New Research: Papers from the International Wallpaper Conference at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2007*, ed. by Stavelow-Hidemark (Stockholm: The Nordiska Museet, 2009), pp. 36–53; Clare Taylor, ‘“Painted Paper of Peking”: The Taste For Eighteenth-Century Chinese Papers In Britain, c.1918-c.1945’, in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. by Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 44–64; Clare Taylor, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018).

³⁸ Clare Taylor, ‘Imitation and the Cross-Cultural Encounter: “India” and “Mock India” Papers, Pictures and Prints’, in *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 63–87.

material examination and use of primary source material, Taylor builds a picture of the social and decorative significance of spaces decorated with Chinese paper during the eighteenth century. Taylor also offers a valuable comparative study of Chinese wallpapers and English imitations in eighteenth-century Britain, content which is also reflected in her 2007 paper 'Chinese Paper and English Imitations in Eighteenth-Century Britain', presented at an international wallpaper conference held at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm.³⁹ In both pieces of writing, Taylor challenges the idea that English papers in the Chinese taste were inferior and imitative, arguing that they were a valuable decorative product in their own right. She goes on to argue that both English papers in the Chinese taste and Chinese wallpapers were highly responsive to consumer tastes and that demand for Chinese papers was closely bound up with skills developed by the English trade, highlighting the mutually influencing effects of wallpapers from around the world upon one another during the eighteenth century. Taylor is one of the few scholars to have addressed more recent history of Chinese wallpaper with a book chapter focussing on the revival of Chinese wallpaper in early twentieth century Britain; exploring the link between European attitudes to Chinese papers in the eighteenth century and that which developed in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁰ This work

³⁹ Clare Taylor, 'Chinese Papers and English Imitations in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *New Discoveries, New Research: Papers from the International Wallpaper Conference at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2007*, ed. by Stavelow-Hidemark (Stockholm: The Nordiska Museet, 2009), pp. 36–53.

⁴⁰ Clare Taylor, "'Painted Paper of Peking": The Taste For Eighteenth-Century Chinese Papers In Britain, c.1918-c.1945', in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. by Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 44–64.

represents an important development in research on Chinese wallpaper in terms of recognising its influence beyond the nineteenth century and it will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Research on the China Trade and Chinese Export Art

Scholarship on the trade between China and Europe from the sixteenth century onwards provides essential context for an understanding of the markets and channels through which Chinese wallpaper came to Europe and the kinds of hybrid objects with which they were jointly categorised. However, Chinese wallpaper is seldom afforded much focussed attention within these studies and is more often mentioned only in brief, as a minor trade product.

In their 1950 publication *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century*, Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns provided an informative account of the China Trade, with a particular focus on the trade to Britain during the eighteenth century.

Wallpapers are addressed in a chapter on 'Paper hangings, Prints and Paintings'.⁴¹

While these object types were addressed separately within the chapter their grouping together indicated that the relationship between these products was increasingly being given consideration.⁴² This chapter introduces basic information

⁴¹ Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns, 'Paperhangings Prints and Paintings', in *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Country Life Ltd, 1950), pp. 25–33.

⁴² V&A curator Ming Wilson notes that the term 'export painting' only came into use after 1949, coined by art historians for convenience. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europeans made no distinction between Chinese paintings for export and those for domestic consumption though Chinese artisans were aware that their products were for foreign markets.

about the physical characteristics, design varieties, uses and methods of hanging Chinese wallpapers in Britain with brief mention of the market in America, though little discussion of the impact that they had in wider Europe is offered.

Jourdain and Jenyns speculate about whether or not Chinese wallpapers of the type exported to Europe were ever used in China and draw in primary research material including an often quoted excerpt from renowned nineteenth century plant collector, Robert Fortune's (1812-1880) account of his travels in China, in which he records a visit to a Chinese home. He describes walls '[...] hung with pictures of flowers and birds and scenes of Chinese life [...] I observed a series of pictures which told a long tale as distinctly as if it had been written in roman characters'.⁴³ This quote is seen as possible evidence for the use of Chinese export style wallpaper in China, but it most likely refers to Chinese paintings and is perhaps better used as evidence of the close relationship between the subjects of Chinese wallpaper and Chinese painting and the appeal of these subjects to both Chinese and European markets.

Despite its brevity, Jourdain and Jenyns' account of Chinese wallpapers is both detailed and clearly evidenced, demonstrating the extensive research that was carried out in order to produce the chapter. Although it forms only one small part of a larger study of Chinese export goods it offers one of the most detailed and

Ming Wilson and Liu Zhiwei, *Souvenir from Canton: Chinese Export Paintings from the V&A*, ed. by Ming Wilson (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2003), p. 10.

⁴³ Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Country Life Ltd, 1950), p. 25.

useful introductions to Chinese wallpaper, identifying key issues such as origins, hanging methods, contemporary attitudes and consumption in Britain, achieving much within limited parameters. What is lacking however, is an explicit comparison between Chinese wallpaper and other export products, including watercolour paintings and porcelain, which shared many of the same decorative motifs. Also missing is any acknowledgement of the continued popularity of Chinese wallpapers through the first half of the twentieth century.

The V&A publication, *Chinese Export Art and Design*, which accompanied the museum's Chinese export art gallery displays, provided an updated but similarly brief account of Chinese wallpaper in the context of the historic Chinese export trade, with a short essay authored by then V&A curators, Craig Clunas and Verity Wilson.⁴⁴ It provided basic information about the material and decorative characteristics of Chinese wallpapers and the context in which they were developed and brought to Europe.⁴⁵ Decisively moving away from the vague historical quotes cited by earlier authors as possible evidence for the use of export type wallpapers in China, Clunas and Wilson argue that decorative wallpapers were not used in China and that their production arose out of the tradition of papering walls with plain coloured papers and the painting tradition of producing large panels for hanging scrolls or mounting onto screens used in reception rooms

⁴⁴ *Chinese Export Art and Design*, ed. by Craig Clunas (London: V&A Publications, 1987).

⁴⁵ Craig Clunas and Verity Wilson, 'Wallpaper', in *Chinese Export Art and Design*, ed. by Craig Clunas (London: V & A Publishing, 1987), pp. 88–89.

in Chinese homes, offering a clear and logical account of their development. A brief history of the trade of Chinese wallpapers is provided and the authors make the important point that the extent of the trade in Chinese wallpaper represented just a tiny fraction of the whole export economy.

Clunas and Wilson conjecture that close similarities in the designs seen on some eighteenth and nineteenth century Chinese wallpapers suggests that there were one or two workshops in Canton that might have been responsible for producing wallpapers for export. However, it seems equally, if not more likely that there were standardised design templates that were copied by competing workshops. Clunas and Wilson identify a close relationship between the design and execution of Chinese wallpapers and painted Chinese silks for export suggesting that these products were very likely made in the same workshops, though no evidence is provided other than these observed likenesses to confirm this inference. This relationship between Chinese painted silks and Chinese wallpapers is discussed in more detail by Verity Wilson her 2005 book, *Chinese Textiles* but has yet to be thoroughly investigated within a study on Chinese wallpaper.⁴⁶ A comparative study of the two media could reveal important information about the development, production and design of Chinese wallpapers and the markets for both commodities. Clunas and Wilson's essay is one of the few publications to make useful comparison between different products for export and to make links

⁴⁶ Verity Wilson, *Chinese Textiles* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2005), p. 30.

between them in a way that highlights how products influenced one another and might even be used interchangeably for the same purpose – i.e. wallcovering.

In addition to providing historical context around the production, trade and consumption of Chinese wallpaper Clunas and Wilson also acknowledge the lasting decorative impact of Chinese wallpapers writing that their decorative impact '(...) has ensured that they, more forcefully than any other type of export artefact, have remained a live presence in interior design to this day'.⁴⁷

Importantly, they also explicitly note that early examples of Chinese wallpapers are still being installed in new settings as well as being copied and used as sources of interior decoration by manufacturers of wallpapers and fabrics and other kinds of product in the present day. They also go on to highlight the fact that the long standing presence of Chinese wallpaper in Europe means that they are no longer regarded solely as imported exotica, arguing that Chinese wallpapers also bring with them coveted associations of an idealized country house way of life. With these comments the authors identify new layers of meaning, that have no direct association with China, that have come to be attributed to Chinese wallpaper. Further investigation of these broader associations, ideas and narratives that Chinese wallpaper has contributed to is one of the key contributions of this thesis.

In his book, *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities*, Carl Crossman addresses the subject of Chinese export art from an American

⁴⁷ Craig Clunas and Verity Wilson, 'Wallpaper', in *Chinese Export Art and Design*, ed. by Craig Clunas (London: V & A Publishing, 1987), pp. 88–89 (p. 89).

perspective, focusing on the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ He dedicated one chapter to 'Decorative painted wallpapers up to 1850'. Crossman provided numerous references to American retailers selling 'India Paper hangings' from 1782 onwards, quoting many of the same sources as Catherine Lynn. Through these sources Crossman builds a picture of the trade and consumption of Chinese wallpapers in America; including an account of their initial importation to America via England. Referencing archival sources, in particular commercial advertisements, Crossman demonstrates the scarcity of supply of 'India papers' in America throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Describing the various ways in which Chinese wallpapers were hung Crossman notes that wallpaper was sometimes used on folding screens, bringing attention to the fact that there is a clear relationship between these two formats, which also saw the use of Chinese lacquer screens as wall coverings in European and American interiors. While Crossman acknowledged the continued use of Chinese wallpapers in the twentieth century, this is mentioned only very briefly when he warns that some papers were created for lavish interiors in the first decades of the twentieth century in the style of the early English market papers and that these can easily be mistaken for originals. There is a clear need for further studies of the twentieth century production and markets for Chinese wallpaper in North America so that

⁴⁸ Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (London: Antique Collector's Club, 1991).

the way in which Chinese wallpapers have been persistently re-invented and applied in different design contexts and periods may be better understood.

Chinese Wallpapers and Studies of Global Trade Networks

As already noted in the introduction to this thesis, cultural historian Helen Clifford has made significant contributions to knowledge of Chinese wallpaper in the context of the East India Company trade, as part of the research she conducted during the East India Company at Home project (2011-2014). In a case study for the East India Company at Home project website, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', Clifford described Chinese wallpaper as a mysterious, often overlooked, yet important element of the EIC's private trade and elite British interiors.⁴⁹ She also acknowledged the wide variety of contexts and scholarly debates in which Chinese wallpaper is relevant, arguing that it can be seen '[...] as part of the wider phenomenon of chinoiserie; of gender-related constructs within the home; as part of the luxury debate and the consumer revolution; of the development of the China trade; and the wider evolution of wallpaper, and even as an influence on garden and textile design.'⁵⁰, thereby

⁴⁹ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015].

⁵⁰ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 (p. 3) <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015].

highlighting the relevance of Chinese wallpaper for a broad range of interdisciplinary studies.

Clifford also contributed a chapter, 'Chinese wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House' to the recent publication, *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, which was one of the major research outcomes of the East India Company at Home project.⁵¹ In this chapter Clifford describes the trade mechanisms through which Chinese wallpapers were traded and maps the evolution of Chinese wallpaper, drawing directly on research carried out during the East India at Home project, particularly as it relates to the homes and Chinese wallpapers owned by East India Company families, as well as research carried out for the aforementioned collaborative publication *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*.⁵² Clifford acknowledges the hybrid nature of Chinese wallpaper and describes its unique qualities, but the main contribution of her chapter is to set Chinese wallpaper in the context of the history of the East India Company with which it is so intimately entwined. She demonstrates the ways in which it was enmeshed in the global and local networks which characterised the operations of the British East India Company and she makes clear the significant impact of

⁵¹ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

⁵² Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014).

Chinese wallpaper as a material legacy of the East India Company Trade, drawing in many examples and detailed family histories.

Clifford's important contributions, many of which arose out of the aforementioned East India Company at Home research project, are part of a broader growing scholarship of the global connections and trade relationships which fostered and inspired local decorative trends and influenced local industries in Europe and beyond.

Another influential research project within this interdisciplinary field of global history studies, and more particularly global material culture studies, is Maxine Berg's edited volume, *Goods from the East, 1600-1800*, a major research outcome of the European Research Council funded project, 'Europe's Asian Centuries: Trading Eurasia 1600-1830' conducted at Warwick University's Global History and Culture Centre between 2010 and 2014. The research project and the subsequent publication chart the history of the first global economic shift during the period 1600 to 1830. Challenging the long divide between Europe and Asia in history writing, it investigates the trade in products: how they were made, marketed and distributed between Asia and Europe, in a global context and raises questions related to issues of fine manufacturing and luxury goods in the current age of globalisation.⁵³

⁵³ *Goods from the East, 1600-1800 Trading Eurasia*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.

While Chinese wallpapers do not form a specific subject focus of this research project they are mentioned as a part of the EIC private trade in a chapter by historian Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe'.⁵⁴ In this chapter Von Brescius highlights the power and agency of the European East India company's merchant seamen, commanders, officers and supercargoes, with regard to which Chinese goods became the subjects of private trade with particular focus on the Scottish merchants who worked for the Swedish East India Company and their broader trade networks during the eighteenth century. Through her meticulous research of East India Company trade records and related correspondence Von Brescius demonstrates the sheer variety of goods that were the subjects of private trade and how the experimental nature of the choices made by East India company commanders and supercargoes resulted in the growth of new trends and markets for such goods in Europe as well a diverse consumer base for company auctions.⁵⁵

Von Brescius suggests that 'China traders - of all European East India Companies - did not normally specialize in any particular good, but traded in everything from

⁵⁴ Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Goods from the East 1600-1800*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–82.

⁵⁵ Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Goods from the East 1600-1800*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–82 (p. 173).

golden snuff boxes and hand-painted wallpaper to rhubarb and gun powder.⁵⁶

Many of the goods that were imported exclusively through private trade channels, including Chinese wallpaper, were luxury items and often specially commissioned: they included rosewood furniture, mirror paintings, armorial porcelain and the most expensive types of black and green tea.⁵⁷

Von Brescius' research is tantalising in terms of the new information that it brings to our understanding of the way on which specific categories of Chinese export goods were traded and it significantly advances knowledge of the way in which Chinese wallpaper was traded with its account of the way in which private trade worked. However, as yet it seems there is still very little concrete information relating to Chinese wallpaper in particular as part of this private trade.

Chinese Wallpapers and Scholarship on the Early Modern Sino-European Encounter

From the late twentieth century academic studies of the Sino European cultural encounter during the early modern period created a richer context in which to appreciate the complexities and significance of Chinese export products. Scholars have sought to map the ways in which encounters between Europe and Asia manifested in fields of philosophy, science, art, design, print culture and theatre.

⁵⁶ Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Goods from the East 1600-1800*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–82 (p. 173).

⁵⁷ Meike Von Brescius, 'Worlds Apart? Merchants, Mariners and the Organization of the Private Trade in Chinese Export Wares in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in *Goods from the East 1600-1800*, ed. by Maxine Berg and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–82 (p. 173).

The study of this cultural encounter is exemplified by Thomas H.C Lee's edited collection of papers, *China and Europe: Images and Influences in sixteenth to eighteenth centuries*, published following a symposium of the same name at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1987.⁵⁸ The collected papers map the Sino-European encounter through philosophical and political thought as well as through scientific exchange and a mutual sharing of visual culture and artistic influences.⁵⁹ Chinese wallpaper is not discussed in Lee's volume, but it highlights the need to integrate research on Chinese wallpaper into this scholarly context of studies of Sino-European exchange.

In 2004, the V&A museum's major exhibition *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800* mapped the broader cultural, political, philosophical and religious encounter between Asia and Europe specifically through objects. These included diplomatic gifts, religious regalia, practical trade goods, decorative goods, personal luxuries and visual culture; the printed word and image and painting. Among the objects exhibited were several examples of so called export art, including a sixteenth century Japanese *Namban* screen, Chinese export porcelain and a large and unusual set of Chinese wallpapers depicting the 'hongs'

⁵⁸ *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ See in particular Mayching Kao, 'European Influences in Chinese Art, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), pp. 221–50; Lothar Ledderose, 'Chinese Influence on European Art, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), pp. 221–50.

or foreign factories at Canton (Guangzhou). This set of wallpapers, dated to around 1790, was brought from Canton by James Drummond, 8th Viscount Strathallan (1767– 1851) who held a number of important positions within the East India Company.⁶⁰ The inclusion of Chinese wallpapers in this exhibition marks an important turning point at which Chinese wallpapers began to be included in studies of the Asian and European cultural encounter, where they were considered alongside other export goods as well as goods intended for domestic Chinese markets. Chinese wallpapers were also afforded specific focus in a recent compilation of essays entitled, *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, edited by Michelle Huang, in which design historian Clare Taylor’s essay “‘Painted Paper of Peking’: The Taste for Eighteenth-Century Chinese Papers in Britain, c.1918-c.1945’, is published.⁶¹ With this essay Taylor not only introduced Chinese wallpaper into dialogues surrounding the Chinese and European encounter, but she also offered research which focused on a much less published aspect of Chinese wallpaper history; its revival in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. In this way Taylor’s essay makes a significant contribution to the existing body of work on Chinese wallpaper and sets the scene for further research in this

⁶⁰ Helen Clifford, ‘Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House’, in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (pp. 53–54) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

⁶¹ Michelle Ying-ling Huang, *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); Clare Taylor, “‘Painted Paper of Peking’: The Taste For Eighteenth-Century Chinese Papers In Britain, c.1918-c.1945’, in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. by Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 44–64.

specific area, particularly with regard to the American market for Chinese wallpaper in the first half of the twentieth century.

Another key text in which Chinese wallpaper features is *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West*, one quarter of which is devoted to the topics of 'Chinoiserie, Européenerie, Hybridity', all of which are relevant to studies of Chinese wallpaper.⁶² In an essay entitled 'Surface Contact: Decoration in the Chinese Taste', art historian Stacey Sloboda argues that decorative objects played a crucial role in providing meaningful instances of cultural contact and knowledge production in the context of early modern Sino-European contact and she uses Chinese wallpapers as one of her key examples.⁶³ The chapter explores the ways in which decorative objects, produced in eighteenth century China, acted as connective devices that mediated the experience of cross cultural encounter:

The decorative objects that circulated between China and Europe in the Qing period should be understood not only as products of commercial and diplomatic exchange but also as sites of contact where meaning was mutually created by producers, consumers, and the material and visual presence of the objects themselves. In other words, the material culture generated by the China trade did not simply reflect the experiences and conditions of that trade but was an agent

⁶² *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Getty Publications, 2015).

⁶³ Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63.

within it that shaped both Chinese and European audiences' experiences of cross cultural contact.⁶⁴

Here, Sloboda crucially identifies the way in which cross cultural experience was mediated by multiple forces in such a way that meaning and value were created mutually and collaboratively, articulating the way in which different meanings and values could be generated by the same material in different contexts. This thesis builds directly on Sloboda's research model to show how the values associated specifically with Chinese wallpaper have been constructed, mutually and collaboratively, by multiple forces in a variety of cultural and temporal contexts.

This experience of cross cultural encounter she argues, was achieved by means of surface decoration, drawing on the concept of meaningful object interactions facilitated specifically by the experience of object surfaces, put forward by art historian Jonathan Hay in his book *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China*.⁶⁵ With this close attention to surface decoration and its experiential potential, Sloboda takes a specifically material culture approach to her analysis of this cultural encounter and examines how Chinese objects were experienced as they were integrated into the European landscape. Sloboda argues that decorative objects from China were '[...] not simply an illustration of cultural difference, decoration was a strategy of engagement for producers and

⁶⁴ Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63 (pp. 248–49).

⁶⁵ Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010).

consumers of objects known in the eighteenth century to be “in the Chinese taste”.⁶⁶ Using the Chinese wallpapers at Saltram House in Devon (hung in four separate rooms) as specific examples Sloboda argues that the repetitive forms seen in the wallpaper in the dressing room in particular – a scheme that was created through a process of cutting and pasting various Chinese prints - serve to provide a distorted and fragmented material experience. She argues that by cutting, pasting and repeating specific images on the wall the Chinese wallpaper loses its status as image bearer and becomes a fully material presence in the room, as wallpaper/material object rather than as meaningful image. As such, she argues that the wallpaper presents not a pictorial illusion as many other examples of Chinese wallpaper arguably have and do, but rather a fragmented material trace of what Sloboda describes as ‘an ambivalent cross-cultural encounter.’

Sloboda is one of the first scholars to engage with the materiality of Chinese wallpaper and to really probe the ways in which it mediated a cultural encounter in a very physical way. While her conclusion regarding the effects of the Chinese wallpaper in the dressing room in Saltram seems to underplay the purposeful sense of engagement represented by this set of wallpaper decorations, describing the encounter as ‘ambivalent’, I would argue that, rather than ambivalence, it represents a confident and purposeful engagement with new cultural, visual and material forms.

⁶⁶ Stacey Sloboda, ‘Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste’, in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63 (p. 249).

In an earlier article, *Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room*, Sloboda again offers a fresh scholarly perspective on Chinese wallpaper, this time assessing their broader social function and putting forward exciting ideas about how Chinese wallpapers were used and read in eighteenth century Britain, particularly as they related to women.⁶⁷ In 1748, writer and literary critic Elizabeth Montagu transformed the dressing room of her London house into what she called her 'Chinese room' using Chinese wallpapers as well as Chinese and European objects and decorative chinoiserie objects. Sloboda argues that Montagu's Chinese room, '[...] was one of the earliest fully articulated chinoiserie interiors in England [...].'⁶⁸, highlighting her significance as a leading taste-maker. In a letter to her sister in 1749 Montagu confesses her conformity in adopting the fashion for chinoiserie while mocking the gaudy character of the style.

During the eighteenth century, Chinese wallpapers and the collection and display of other Chinese goods such as porcelain and lacquer in so called 'Chinese rooms' and chinoiserie interiors were framed as essentially feminine in nature, though in reality these objects and activities also appealed to, and were practised by, men.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Stacey Sloboda, 'Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room', in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. by Meredith S Martin and Denise Amy Baxter (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶⁸ Stacey Sloboda, 'Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room', in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, ed. by Meredith S Martin and Denise Amy Baxter (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2010), p. 130.

⁶⁹ For an excellent essay on the gendered consumption of Chinese goods in the eighteenth century see Craig Clunas, 'Dreams of the Dragon: Visions of Japan and China' (University of Essex, 1994); and David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge

In her article, Stacey Sloboda argues convincingly that Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese room not only identified her as a taste-maker in fashionable London society, but importantly offered her the opportunity or agency, by means of a decorative mask of femininity, to engage in what were at the time the ostensibly masculine prerogatives of social, intellectual engagement and debate, which characterised the 'Bluestocking' salons she hosted in her Chinese room.

Chapter two in this thesis describes the Chinese wallpaper which belonged to eighteenth century banker, Thomas Coutts and relates a complementary account of male consumption and interactions with Chinese wallpaper in the contexts of trade, commerce, gift giving and diplomacy.

Chinese Wallpapers and Studies of Chinoiserie

Stacey Sloboda's specific interest in Chinese wallpaper as an important decorative product is also reflected in her recent publication, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth Century England*.⁷⁰ This book offers a critical reassessment of chinoiserie as a decorative style that was both admired and derided for its flamboyant aesthetic and its perceived triviality and excess. Using analyses of ceramics, wallpaper, furniture, garden architecture and other

University Press, 2010). For an investigation of this theme in the twentieth century see Sarah Cheang, 'The Ownership and Collection of Chinese Material Culture by Women in Britain, c. 1890-1935' (University of Sussex, 2004); Sarah Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, 20.1 (2007), 1–16.

⁷⁰ Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

examples of British and Chinese design, Sloboda takes an object-focused approach to investigating the cultural phenomenon of the 'Chinese taste' in eighteenth-century Britain. Through these objects Sloboda demonstrates the way in which the ornamental language of chinoiserie was mutually developed by Chinese and European artists, designers, craftspeople and merchants, and argues against the notion that it was the product of European fantasy and ignorance about Chinese culture. Sloboda's book acknowledges the fact that chinoiserie was a product of cross-cultural exchange and of European and Chinese responses to expanding commercial markets and changing ideas about design during the eighteenth centuries. Chinese objects and chinoiserie styles offered consumers opportunities for new kinds of aesthetic experience, and as in the examples of Elizabeth Montagu's 'Chinese room', described above, a new kind of agency, particularly for women. With regard to Chinese wallpaper, in particular those schemes that were subject to further enhancements and personalisation such as decoupage, on arrival in Europe, Sloboda writes, 'Such decorative schemes were hugely expensive and time-consuming. They were frequently created in tandem with professional decorative schemes, and were frequently commented on by visitors to country houses alongside other artworks and interiors; all of which suggests that they were taken seriously by their makers and contemporary viewers and deserve critical historical analysis.'⁷¹

⁷¹ Stacey Sloboda, 'Commerce in the Bedroom: Sex, Gender and Social Status', in *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 108–58 (p. 131).

The relationship between Chinese wallpaper and chinoiserie has not always been clear. As a hybrid object, created specifically for European markets using traditional Chinese materials, techniques and decorative motifs, it sits somewhat uncomfortably between the categories of Chinese export art and chinoiserie. As Sloboda notes in her book, 'while chinoiserie was part of the eighteenth-century Chinese taste, not all objects in the Chinese taste are chinoiserie'⁷² and indeed, Chinese wallpapers, while they may have been perceived as being 'in the Chinese taste' and contributing to chinoiserie interiors, were not chinoiserie objects, in so much as they were not designed or manufactured by European craftsmen.

From the late seventeenth century onwards Europeans fed on Chinese art, absorbed it and changed its meanings through degrees of re-contextualisation and reinterpretation. Chinese wallpaper tells the story of a long running European engagement with Chinese art and design which resulted in the creation of products which were characterised by a unique cultural hybridity and aesthetic reciprocity. While Chinese wallpapers were used in interior design schemes in which many Chinese and Asian objects were displayed together, often in combination with chinoiserie style furniture and other furnishings they were also used in many other kinds of interior governed by more conventional decorative styles including, baroque, rococo and neo-classical. They reflected an interest in China and Chinese goods, not necessarily an interest in chinoiserie or fantasies

⁷² Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63 (p. 249).

around the idea of China. While they sometimes contributed to chinoiserie interiors they were not in themselves a form of chinoiserie.

The late Oliver Impey, formerly curator for Japanese art at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford sums up these complexities succinctly in his book *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* which despite being published over forty years ago is still a relevant and useful reference on this topic, he writes:

Chinoiserie schemes could not avoid being mixed with rococo, neo-classicism or gothick (sic). Chinese wallpapers were hung in ordinary European rooms, lacquer panels were set in rococo gilded wood work, singeries might be painted on a pale coloured neo-classical panelling. The complete chinoiserie interior was a rarity, and because of fluctuating fashions is an even greater rarity today. The Chinese house at Drottingholm, outside Stockholm is one of these survivors as are the chinoiserie interiors at the Royal Pavilions in Brighton.⁷³

Numerous publications offer historical overviews of chinoiserie as an important European decorative movement, in particular those authored by Hugh Honour, Madeleine Jarry and Dawn Jacobson.⁷⁴ These publications trace the evolution of this distinctive style from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. While Jacobson provides limited description of chinoiserie in twentieth century contexts,

⁷³ Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 172.

⁷⁴ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: John Murray, 1961); Madeleine Jarry, *Chinoiserie: Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art, 17th and 18th Centuries* (London and New York.: Vendome Press; Published for Sotheby's Publications by P. Wilson, 1981); Dawn Jacobson, *Chinoiserie* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007).

the particular focus in each of these publications is on the eighteenth century, when Chinese styles were at the very height of their popularity. These publications highlight the various means by which Chinese aesthetics were evoked and brought together in interior design, garden design and architecture during this period, particularly within the homes of the wealthiest sectors of society, offering analysis of architecture, furniture, textiles, ceramics and wallcoverings. Impey offers a particularly comprehensive and far-reaching account of chinoiserie, outlining an historical context of early contacts between Europe and China from as early as the thirteenth century.

Studies of chinoiserie have undergone significant advancement in recent years as scholars re-assess its meaning and function in the context of post-colonial scholarship, challenging Saidian, Orientalist readings of the style with many arguing that chinoiserie functions as more than a mere facilitator of fantasy arguing that it actually represented a self-reflective and critical cross-cultural engagement between European and Asian cultures. Several sophisticated analyses of this important decorative movement have appeared in the last fifteen years - from the fields of literary studies and more recently material culture studies, as exemplified by the research carried out by Stacey Sloboda, described above. Sloboda has also more recently made an additional scholarly contribution to studies of chinoiserie, this time taking an explicitly global approach to the

subject.⁷⁵ Sloboda's essay, published in 2018 in the *Encyclopedia of Asian Design*, surveys the development of chinoiserie, which Sloboda defines as objects and images emulating or responding to Chinese art and culture, in the early modern era. While most scholarship on the subject of chinoiserie discusses the style as a European phenomenon, this essay considers the style in a global context. This important research by Sloboda complements the global approach to Chinese wallpaper taken in my own thesis; recognising the complex global network of influences which contributed to the creation of chinoiserie styles and objects and recognising chinoiserie as a style of mutual and collaborative cross cultural creation.

Other academics across a broad range of disciplines have also made novel contributions to the study of chinoiserie, providing fresh scholarly perspectives on this subject. In her book, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism*, Associate Professor of English, Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, argues that chinoiserie played an integral role in the formation of modern English subjectivity, more simply understood as the fashioning of the self.⁷⁶ Tracing a shift in the relationship between English selves and 'Chinese things' from the middle of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, Zuroski analyzes chinoiserie from the perspective of English literature and philosophy and describes it as an

⁷⁵ Stacey Sloboda, 'Chinoiserie: A Global Style', in *Encyclopedia of Asian Design*, ed. by Christine Guth (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), pp. 143–54
<<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350066021-EAD-4-SECT5-002>>.

⁷⁶ Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

essentially European style movement; dissociated from its Chinese origins, despite its intrinsic Chinese qualities. She argues that it was valued more as a generic, exotic reference point than as a specific reference to Chinese art and culture and that it made specific contributions to the development of concepts of subjectivity and taste in eighteenth-century Britain. Zuroski's work follows on from Professor of English literature, David Porter's important contributions to research on this subject in several books and papers.

In his first book, *Ideographia*, published in 2001, Porter explored the various patterns that seemed to shape European responses to Chinese cultural achievements in language, religion, the arts, and trade between 1600 and 1800.⁷⁷ His second book, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, published in 2010, focused more specifically on the assimilation of Chinese aesthetic ideas within English literature, gardening, and decorative arts, with special attention to the gendered dimensions of this response.⁷⁸ Porter discusses chinoiserie as a unique cultural phenomenon and offers a close reading of the function and significance of Chinese and Chinese style products in the context of an increasingly globalised Britain, during the eighteenth century.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁷⁹ Many ideas from a preceding article 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste' are incorporated into this book in a chapter of the same name. See, David Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the

Porter argues that chinoiserie represented much more than a mere whimsical fashion, prompted by a quest for novelty and exoticism or a lust for empire. He suggests that the array of meanings engendered by and affixed to the chinoiserie style were of considerably greater depth, richness and complexity than is commonly supposed by many other cultural commentators past and present. Within each chapter the author explores and reflects on this complexity from multiple perspectives. Porter clearly articulates the idea that chinoiserie occupies a mediating position between two cultural poles and argues that it '[...] seems consistently to have troubled this boundary between cultivated and vulgar taste, fine art and the fripperies of fashion'.⁸⁰ Porter argues that this dual status of chinoiserie as both legitimate art and fashionable commodity sets it apart from other classes of luxury goods and challenges traditional concepts of aesthetic value.⁸¹ Porter's book offers an assessment of chinoiserie in Britain from multiple viewpoints with a particular emphasis on the attitudes and consumer activities of notable personalities of the period including key literary and artistic figures, as well as assessing prevailing philosophical thought vis-à-vis chinoiserie and the consumption of Chinese goods.

Chinese Taste', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35.3 (2002), 395–411
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30054206>>.

⁸⁰ David Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35.3 (2002), 395–411 (p. 400)
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30054206>>.

⁸¹ David Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35.3 (2002), 395–411 (p. 400)
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30054206>>.

Although the research on chinoiserie described above does not offer especially detailed accounts of Chinese wallpaper it provides essential context for understanding the way in which Chinese objects interfaced with European systems of design and ornament and became integrated into the European material landscape.

The continued relevance of chinoiserie as a decorative movement was described by design historian Sarah Cheang in her 2008 essay, 'What's in a Chinese Room? Twentieth century Chinoiserie, Modernity and Femininity'.⁸² In this essay Cheang acknowledged the continued social and cultural significance of the 'Chinese Room' and the objects within it in the twentieth century, drawing in discourses surrounding Orientalism and gender, though Cheang paid no specific attention to the role of Chinese wallpaper in this context.

The role of Chinese wallpaper in modern chinoiserie interiors is described in research by art historian Noel Fahden Briceño, who made a study of the chinoiserie revival in early twentieth century America in her 2008 MA thesis.⁸³ Briceño examines the revival of chinoiserie interiors with specific focus on American theatre design and domestic interiors and she describes the market for Chinese wallpaper in this period. She describes the trade in antique Chinese

⁸² Sarah Cheang, 'What's in a Chinese Room? 20th Century Chinoiserie, Modernity and Femininity', in *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain 1650-1930*, ed. by David Beevers (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove, 2008), pp. 75–81.

⁸³ Noel Fahden Briceño, 'The Chinoiserie Revival in Early Twentieth-Century American Interiors' (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 2008).

wallpaper and the use of Chinese wallpaper proper, rather than chinoiserie papers, in domestic interiors offering specific case studies of the Chinese wallpapers at Winterthur, home of American philanthropist and collector H.F. du Pont, in Delaware, installed in the 1930s and the Chinese wallpaper used by publishing magnate Condé Nast at his glamorous New York apartment, installed in 1924, which is also discussed in my own thesis. Briceño highlights the influence of social networks, interior decorators and the popular media in stimulating a revival for chinoiserie styles and Chinese wallpaper in early twentieth century America. Briceño provides a richly evidenced account of the market for Chinese wallpapers in America specifically in the context of what she terms 'chinoiserie interiors', though what Briceño seems to consider examples of chinoiserie are broadly different and perhaps mis-categorised as such, when they could be more to be accurately categorised as historicist, Colonial Revival or 'Chinese rooms'.

This thesis takes a different approach to investigating the use of Chinese wallpaper in twentieth century America, focussing not on chinoiserie but the wider variety of cultural narratives to which Chinese wallpaper contributed in this specific temporal and cultural context, describing how Chinese wallpapers were integrated into Orientalist, historicist, Colonial Revival and eclectic, modern interior design schemes on America's East and West coasts during the first half of the twentieth century. My research also addresses how the early twentieth century revival of Chinese wallpaper in America specifically influenced the continued popularity of Chinese wallpaper in twenty first century America, functioning as a specific layer of value and association.

Chinese Wallpaper in Chinese Art History

There is currently relatively little research available which addresses Chinese wallpaper in the context of Chinese art, as a local product of China, as opposed to part of a European decorative style. The designs which have been used to decorate Chinese wallpaper have been re-contextualised and reinterpreted many times since their first appearance in the western material landscape, but the core motifs, subjects and aesthetic have changed very little and continue to reflect an ornamental language that is rooted in Chinese artistic traditions stemming back as far as the tenth century.

Art historian, Jessica Rawson is one of the few scholars to attempt a comparison of established systems of design and ornament in China and in Europe; which represents a thoroughly insightful and valuable project, particularly as a context in which to reflect on the material and visual characteristics of Chinese wallpaper and its uses.⁸⁴ Although many writers have argued that pictorial Chinese wallpapers were exclusively used in the West it seems apparent that they retained and continued to utilise a visual language that was rooted in Chinese artistic traditions and contained a combination of design elements that would have had particular symbolic meaning, immediately recognisable to those with knowledge of Chinese art and visual culture. This idea is addressed in depth in chapter four of this thesis which explores the appeal of Chinese export style wallpapers in present

⁸⁴ Jessica Rawson, 'Ornament As System: Chinese Bird and Flower Design', *The Burlington Magazine*, 148.1239 (2006), 380–89.

day markets in China, a subject which has yet to be addressed in depth by any other scholarly studies of Chinese wallpaper.

Rawson argues that in contrast to decorative traditions in Europe, in China, the structural components of a building played little or no role in generating systems of ornament (although it is interesting to note that chinoiserie decorative schemes did adopt key elements of Chinese architectural styles into their ornamental language). Rawson argues that one of the most dominant ornamental systems in China is that which comprises images of birds, flowers, plants and animals. The conventions of their arrangement were ultimately guided by the specific auspicious meanings that each motif carried. Rawson suggests that those who imported and adapted Chinese motifs were generally ignorant of the strong literary and linguistic significance attached to these symbols, but which were knowingly deployed by their creators.

Rawson argues that the specific genre of bird and flower painting provided direct models for Chinese wallpaper designs; an important connection which is rarely explicitly acknowledged in research on Chinese wallpaper, but which does much to explain the development of Chinese wallpaper in the context of cultural exchange and the transmission of visual culture across the globe.⁸⁵ Pictures of

⁸⁵ Both Emile de Bruijn and Friederike Wappenschmidt are among the few scholars in addition to Rawson who describe and discuss this relationship explicitly, Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten Für Europa: Vom Rollbild Zur Bildtapete* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1989); Friederike Wappenschmidt, 'A Friendly Rivalry: Chinese Wallpaper Paintings and Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs', in *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth Century Silk Designs*, ed. by Anna Jolly, Riggisberger Berichte (Riggisberg: Abegg-

many kinds were integral to the interior decoration of Chinese palaces and mansions and from the earliest times paintings were part of the ornament of rooms and tombs and were used as both wall decorations and on screens, reflecting the social and political status of the occupant. There is clearly an important relationship between wall decorations, including panoramic scroll sets and the decoration used on screens, which seem to have fulfilled similar functions, as observed by former V&A curator, Yueh Siang Chang in a paper on the subject of Chinese wallpaper, published in the *Wallpaper History Society Review* in 2008.⁸⁶

The Burgeoning Field of Chinese Wallpaper Studies

This thesis builds on a small body of research which has specifically focused on the subject of Chinese wallpaper. German art historian, Friederike Wappenschmidt has authored one of the foremost studies of Chinese wallpaper to date with her detailed survey of Chinese wallpapers in Europe from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, *Chinesische Tapeten für Europa: Vom Rollbild zur Bildtapete*, published in Berlin in 1989.⁸⁷ Despite the importance of this publication, the lack

Stiftung, 2007), pp. 187–96; Emile de Bruijn, ‘Auspicious Gardens’, in *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017).

⁸⁶ Yueh Siang Chang, ‘Imperial Designs and Enlightened Tastes: Motifs From Nature on Chinese Export Wallpapers’, *The Wallpaper History Review*, 2008, 23–28.

⁸⁷ Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten Für Europa: Vom Rollbild Zur Bildtapete* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1989). Few subsequent studies of Chinese wallpaper make reference to this work despite the wealth of important information contained within it and its status as one of the foremost contributions to scholarship on this subject.

of an English translation has meant that Wappenschmidt's scholarly contribution has not been recognised as much as it might have. Nevertheless, some of the most important arguments put forward in her book, regarding the development of Chinese wallpaper, were also presented during a colloquium, 'A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early 18th century Silk Designs', held at the Abegg-Stiftung textile museum and research centre in 2002, the proceedings of which were later published in English, in 2007.⁸⁸ The central argument of Wappenschmidt's conference paper identifies Chinese paintings in early European collections as the starting point for the development of Chinese wallpaper. Wappenschmidt argues that from about 1720 the creative application of Chinese paintings and prints from China, pasted onto the walls of the Pagodenburg (built between 1716 and 1719 by Joseph Effner) at Schloss Nymphenburg (Figure 1-3) and Schloss Favourite in Rastatt in Germany (built between 1710 and 1730) as well as in houses in England (though she does not give examples), inspired the development of Chinese wallpapers in a more standardized form to cover extensive areas of wall.

⁸⁸ 'A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs', ed. by Anna Jolly (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007); Friederike Wappenschmidt, 'A Friendly Rivalry: Chinese Wallpaper Paintings and Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs', in *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth Century Silk Designs*, ed. by Anna Jolly, Riggisberger Berichte (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007), pp. 187–96.



Figure 1-3 The Chinese Salon at the Pagodenburg, Schloss Nymphenburg, Germany, designed by Joseph Effner between 1716 and 1719. [Source: <http://www.schloss-nymphenburg.de/englisch/palaces/pagodен.htm>]

Wappenschmidt asserts that, at this time, Chinese paintings were used as an alternative to chinoiserie painted silk hangings and argues that by 1720 East India Company agents were being instructed to procure “hanging scrolls”, painted to ‘[...] present a progressive decorative entity along the walls [...]’,⁸⁹ though she does not cite specific evidence to substantiate this claim. Based on this information Wappenschmidt concludes that ‘[...] the evolution from scenic scroll to wallpaper, which could cover broad expanses of a wall with a continuous tableau displaying scenes from everyday life or panoramas from Chinese gardens, was complete.’⁹⁰ She goes on to argue that the fashion for Chinese wallpapers fuelled a demand for European silk wall coverings decorated with bizarre and

⁸⁹ Friederike Wappenschmidt, ‘A Friendly Rivalry: Chinese Wallpaper Paintings and Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs’, in *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth Century Silk Designs*, ed. by Anna Jolly, Riggisberger Berichte (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007), pp. 187–96 (p. 195).

⁹⁰ Friederike Wappenschmidt, ‘A Friendly Rivalry: Chinese Wallpaper Paintings and Early Eighteenth-Century Silk Designs’, in *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early Eighteenth Century Silk Designs*, ed. by Anna Jolly, Riggisberger Berichte (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2007), pp. 187–96 (p. 195).

exotic chinoiserie designs, known as *Pequins* and thus a competition continued to develop between the two products which created similar effects, but were characterized by very different decorative vocabulary.

Wappenschmidt's 1989 book presents a broad historical survey of Chinese wallpaper in Europe from the late seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to her arguments regarding the development of Chinese wallpaper Wappenschmidt offers information regarding the historic manufacture of Chinese wallpaper as well as details of the commercial trade in Chinese wallpaper, providing specific information about its distribution through various markets in Europe. She offers detailed descriptions of examples of Chinese wallpaper from right across Europe, recording their use in a variety of European interiors and importantly describing the different ways in which they were integrated in to those interiors; as collages, in wainscot panels, as continuous panoramas or as part of print room style decorations. With this broad survey Wappenschmidt has collated a valuable record of examples of Chinese wallpaper in Europe which acts as an excellent reference. This information is further augmented by an illustrated appendix which catalogues a large sample of Chinese wallpapers across Britain, Ireland and continental Europe, offering an even more comprehensive survey of Chinese wallpaper than that which is presented in the main text.

In chapter three of her book, Wappenschmidt provides in depth analysis of Chinese wallpaper designs. With this analysis Wappenschmidt does much to

advance understanding of the relationship between Chinese export art and native traditions of Chinese painting and print making by making close material comparisons. In this way Wappenschmidt makes a significant contribution to the study of Chinese wallpaper and export art more generally, bridging the traditional scholarly gap between studies of Chinese painting and studies of Chinese export art.

In a very short final chapter, Wappenschmidt opens up ideas about how Chinese wallpapers were used and understood in Europe; considering them as exclusive luxuries, exotic pleasures, as a form of informative ethnographic material and as models for makers of chinoiserie decorations respectively. The overarching narrative of Wappenschmidt's study is one of historical development, offering a chronology of Chinese wallpaper and typological analysis. This final chapter just begins to address the broader social and cultural significance of Chinese wallpapers as a global product.

No other studies of Chinese wallpaper had achieved a comparable depth of material and cultural analysis and historic contextualisation of this product, as that achieved by Wappenschmidt, until much more recently. Research by Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush and Helen Clifford represents a recent surge of scholarly interest in Chinese wallpaper, in particular their aforementioned catalogue, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses* and Clifford's insightful essay and book chapter. De Bruijn's recent publication, *Chinese wallpaper in Britain and Ireland*, adds further important information to that already presented in the

National Trust catalogue by bringing in examples from outside the collections of the National Trust to build a broader picture of the history of Chinese wallpaper in Britain and Ireland, and even beyond these stated parameters to describe a small number of examples in North America and China as well.⁹¹ He offers detailed descriptions of the various decorative types, charting their development from the application of Chinese prints and paintings to a fully developed decorative product, illustrated with numerous photographs, to create a broad survey of types.

De Bruijn articulately explores key issues relating to the development of Chinese wallpapers, including their relationship with Chinese prints and paintings, their gendered consumption, the specific spaces in which they were used and methods of their application, as well as their role in successive design movements. Offering detailed historical background information for each of the examples he describes, de Bruijn brings together the history of Chinese wallpaper with the histories of specific houses and illustrious families, constructing a social history as well as a design history of Chinese wallpaper. A broader comparative material history of Chinese wallpaper is also offered with brief but useful insight regarding the relationship between Chinese wallpapers and other materials including textiles and lacquer.

⁹¹ Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017).

De Bruijn also offers some intriguing hypotheses where gaps in knowledge exist. For instance, the exact moment of the emergence of Chinese wallpaper as a fully developed decorative product (i.e. not just Chinese paintings and prints applied in a decorative manner) is not known, nor is it known exactly how it came about. As Wappenschmidt has shown in her research, Chinese paintings and prints were used as applied decoration in European decorative contexts before Chinese wallpaper proper was developed. Rather than assuming that Chinese merchants and artisans developed Chinese wallpapers in response to this new decorating trend, as many have done, de Bruijn suggests that English chinoiserie wallpapers may have been developed first and provided the initial impetus for the production of Chinese wallpaper proper in China.⁹² In support of this argument de Bruijn cites an English chinoiserie wallpaper in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, originally installed at Burgage House, Wootton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire around 1740.⁹³ The wallpaper is confidently painted with a design of a flowering tree, ornamental rock and a pair of pheasants and was initially acquired by the museum as Chinese.⁹⁴ De Bruijn argues that if the rough attribution date of 1740 is correct and no pre-1750 Chinese wallpapers come to

⁹² Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 30.

⁹³ Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 30.

⁹⁴ Clare Taylor, *The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 157–58.

light, '[...] then this may in fact be a paradoxical case of an imitation preceding the original.'⁹⁵

De Bruijn's book has made the biggest single contribution to the study of Chinese wallpaper since Wappenschmidt's 1989 study, indeed his research usefully complements Wappenschmidt's study, which draws heavily on European examples, with its UK and Ireland specific remit. De Bruijn draws out the significance of Chinese wallpaper as a decorative product and a mainstay of the material culture of country houses in the British Isles, but also as a global product and despite the implied limitations of the title, de Bruijn has also acknowledged the impact of Chinese wallpaper beyond Britain and Ireland and importantly beyond the nineteenth century, to recognise it as 'a living tradition' and a current product of China in a short final chapter.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Among existing surveys of wallpaper in Europe and America, Chinese wallpapers have been addressed primarily as subjects of European interiors, which of course they were, but there is a lack of research directed towards understanding their origins within Chinese traditions of visual and material cultural and within the

⁹⁵ Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 30.

⁹⁶ Emile de Bruijn, 'A Living Tradition', in *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), pp. 225–44.

context of Sino European trade, as a hybrid product of that trade. Scholarship to date has been strongly biased towards assessing the ways in which Chinese objects were acquired and assimilated within the Western material landscape and there has been no comparable depth of research into the significance of export art within local Chinese contexts which represents a significant gap in knowledge. What is also made clear by these surveys is that a significant amount of information relating to Chinese wallpapers was recycled in each subsequent survey with little new scholarship being generated until the late twentieth century. The most significant advances have been made only very recently with the publication of studies which are engaging with the complexities of Chinese wallpapers as a global, hybrid products with a history rooted in Chinese visual culture, and a current decorative and design tradition. To date, Chinese wallpaper has been addressed in a fairly disparate fashion within the contexts of broader wallpaper studies, historic houses, chinoiserie and export art, comparatively few attempts have been made to penetrate and explore Chinese wallpapers and their singular impact and significance specifically. Of all the manifestations of China and the 'Orient' evident in the material landscape of Europe and America today Chinese wallpapers are arguably among the most striking. The fact of their continued manufacture and use through the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries makes them especially fascinating, as they have found new meanings and new contexts whilst changing very little in terms of their own designs, yet have remained highly valued and highly desirable. These gaps in knowledge are specifically addressed in this thesis, which addresses the use of

Chinese wallpaper as an historic object and as a contemporary design product, in the UK, North America and China during a period spanning the late eighteenth century to the present day. In this way it complements earlier studies of Chinese wallpaper which have focussed on eighteenth and nineteenth century examples within the context of broader surveys.

Chapter two of this thesis describes the 'career' of the eighteenth century Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co. in London. It was purportedly a gift and it became a treasured object within the Coutts estate and part of the material history of the bank. Its intimate historical associations with British diplomacy and imperial ambitions, the early modern China trade, the East India company, Thomas Coutts and the present day global banking industry represent the characteristically unique story of many Chinese wallpapers and they provide a rich source of information regarding how value, meaning and specific cultural narratives are constructed through this multivalent, cultural hybrid.

Chapter 2 Intercultural Perspectives: Chinese Wallpaper, Useful Knowledge and Aesthetic Ideals in Britain and China

In 1792 George, Earl Macartney (1737-1806) led the first British embassy to China under the auspices of King George III (1738-1820) and the English East India Company. The key objective of the mission was to secure improved trade conditions for Britain in China, including the establishment of a permanent embassy in Beijing, additional trading ports and reduced duties on imports and exports.¹ The British mission also sought to gather as much information as possible about Chinese life and industry in order to establish how the Chinese market could be opened up to British manufactures and thereby redress the growing trade imbalance brought about by increasing demands for tea in Britain.² The mission ultimately failed; Earl Macartney was unable to persuade the Qianlong Emperor (r.1735-1796) to make any trade concessions and the gifts and

¹ For a detailed account of the conditions of the British East India company trade with China during this period see Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China, 1635-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926); Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia 1600-1834* (London: British Library Publishing, 2002).

² Maxine Berg, 'Britain, Industry and Perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, "Useful Knowledge" and The Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94', *Journal of Global History*, 2006, 269–88 (pp. 271–72). Frances Wood, 'Closely Observed China: From William Alexander's Sketches to His Published Work', *The British Library Journal*, 24.Spring (1998), 98–121 (p. 98).

British trade goods presented to the Chinese court aroused little or no interest, with some gifts even being rejected outright and returned to the embassy.³

On his return to Britain in 1794, Earl Macartney reputedly gifted a large set of hand painted Chinese wallpapers depicting Chinese landscapes and industries to his close friend and personal banker, Thomas Coutts (1735-1822), senior partner at the exclusive London bank, now known as Coutts & Co.⁴

The wallpapers depict the production of tea, porcelain, rice and silk, as well as merchants selling their wares and people going about their daily business. These activities are shown against the backdrop of a verdant landscape comprising paddy fields, gardens, houses and pavilions to create a vibrant panorama (Figure 2-1). The imagery represents three of the most sought after and lucrative Chinese

³ Aeneas Anderson, *Accurate Account of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China; Carefully Abridged from The Original Work*; (London: Vernor and Hood, 1797), p. 95 <<https://archive.org/details/accurateaccount00ande>>. (...) "two camera obscura were however, returned, as being suited only to the amusement of children." As cited by Maxine Berg, 'Macartney's Things. Were They Useful? Knowledge and the Trade to China in the Eighteenth Century', in *GEHN Conference 4 Useful Knowledge* (Leiden: London School of Economics, 2004), p. 33 <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Assets/Documents/Research/GEHN/GEHNConferences/conf4/Conf4-MBerg.pdf>>.

⁴ In 1761 Thomas Coutts joined his brother as a business partner in a Strand-based goldsmith-bank firm, which at that time came to be named 'James & Thomas Coutts'. In 1775 Thomas Coutts took sole charge of the bank, renaming it 'Thomas Coutts & Company'. After Thomas Coutts death in 1822 the bank was named 'Coutts & Co.' See 'Thomas Coutts', *Royal Bank of Scotland*, 2018 <<https://www.rbs.com/heritage/people/thomas-coutts.html>> [accessed 12 August 2018]; Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker* (London: John Lane Company, 1920).

The close friendship between Coutts and Macartney is evidenced by their correspondence: Letter XVIII Macartney to Coutts, Jan 3rd, 1791, from which the following excerpt is taken: 'Your letter of the 13th past was of very high gratification to me at this place, which is so distant from my friends, that I scarcely ever hear from them. I am very happy to find that Mrs Coutts and you and your young ladies are now all well and that we are likely to see them so soon. Lady Macartney desires me to say a thousand things for her to you and to them, as she has the most sincere regard and friendship for you all.' Quoted in Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker* (London: John Lane Company, 1920), pp. 290–93.

trade commodities; silk, porcelain and tea. As such, these images not only reflect the significant demand for Chinese luxury goods in Britain during the late eighteenth century, but also represent the main impetus behind the Macartney mission, which was to establish a controlling British influence in China and secure improved trading conditions.

Today, the wallpapers still hang in the board room at Coutts & Co. head office on the Strand in London where they function as a spectacular decorative statement and an iconic marketing device. They bring to life the subjects of eighteenth century Sino-British trade and cultural exchange, the Macartney mission and the history of Coutts bank itself. They also exemplify the *products* of intercultural exchange that emerged during the early modern period and provide evidence of their lasting impact.

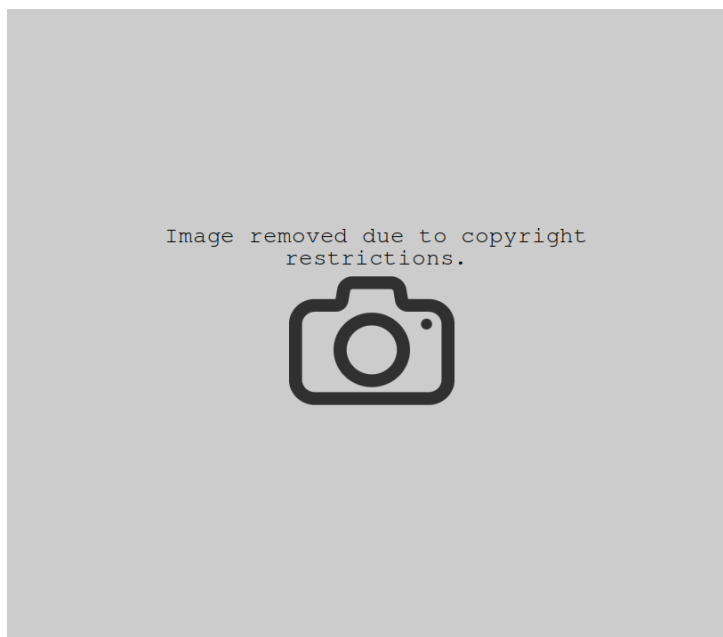


Figure 2-1 Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co., 440 Strand, London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

This chapter focuses on Chinese wallpaper decorated with themes of industry, taking the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. in London as a specific case study. In particular, this investigation provides a close study of the specific designs presented on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. and identifies their origins within longstanding traditions of Chinese visual culture. With this analysis, this chapter clearly demonstrates the close relationship between Chinese export art and Chinese art for the domestic Chinese market and describes the way in which the same sets of images were subject to different interpretations as they moved through different regimes of value and local contexts. It also highlights the hybrid character of Chinese wallpaper, as a product which reflected both Chinese and European visual and material culture in its subjects, materials, techniques and format.

With its supposed links to the Macartney embassy the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co record a pivotal moment in Sino-British political relations and they offer a useful contextual framework through which to examine the role of Chinese wallpaper in communicating knowledge about Chinese art, culture, landscape, industry and people in an era before photography, mass communication and international travel, for more than a privileged few. This chapter explores the value of Chinese wallpaper as a source of useful knowledge but also, simultaneously, as a source of fantasy and imagined ideals relating to both China and Britain, based on their variable interpretations.

This chapter builds on recent scholarship in the field of material culture studies taking particular inspiration from art historian Stacey Sloboda's scholarly focus on Chinese decorative objects and their often overlooked ability to communicate useful knowledge.⁵ Following in the footsteps of Arjun Appadurai, Alfred Gell and Bruno Latour, whose collective body of works recognizes the agency of objects as actors in specific networks and thereby their value and social significance, Sloboda argues that decorative objects played a significant role in providing meaningful instances of cultural contact and knowledge production, especially in the context of encounters between Qing dynasty China and eighteenth-century Europe.⁶ She suggests that decorative objects played an even greater role in knowledge production than the scholarly writings of the Jesuits and those involved in more formal programmes of knowledge exchange because decorative objects, such as Chinese porcelain, reached so many more people.⁷

Beyond this global significance, this chapter also describes the evolving set of local values that have been constructed around the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co.

⁵ This argument is put forward in a number of Sloboda's publications including, Stacey Sloboda, 'Picturing China: William Alexander and the Visual Language of Chinoiserie', *British Art Journal*, 9.2 (2008), 28–36. pp. 28-36, Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63., Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

⁶ *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63 (p. 248).

It examines the history of the wallpaper in its local use context in London and investigates how it evolved into a powerful identifying symbol for Coutts & Co., tracing their history in this location and the evolving set of values ascribed to them.

An Intercultural Landscape: Chinese Industry Themed Wallpapers

It is not known exactly when Chinese wallpapers with decorative themes of Chinese industries and landscape were first produced, but written records and extant examples attest to the fact that they were already well established in Europe and North America during the second half of the eighteenth century (Figure 2-2 to Figure 2-9). While Chinese wallpapers with bird and flower motifs were more prevalent at this time, industry themed wallpapers represent an important and influential category of design. Although they were relatively short lived, their production petering out by the end of the eighteenth-century, they had a lasting impact and a significant role in terms of communicating useful knowledge about China, its people, economy and landscape in eighteenth century Europe and North America.

A survey of Chinese wallpapers in Britain and Ireland, conducted in 2015, by Emile de Bruijn, Helen Clifford and Andrew Bush, shows that wallpapers decorated with ‘figural subjects in landscape settings engaged in agriculture, manufacturing and other activities’, account for only 15 per cent of the total sample group of Chinese

wallpapers with known locations.⁸ Relative to designs featuring birds, flowers and garden landscapes, which accounted for 60 per cent of those catalogued, wallpapers with industry themes were significantly less common.⁹

Throughout Britain and Europe there are numerous extant examples of Chinese wallpaper decorated with industry themes that are comparable to those at Coutts & Co. They can be seen in the Chinese bedroom at Saltram House (Figure 2-2) near Plymouth in Devon (ca. 1760), at Harewood House near Leeds (Figure 2-3 and Figure 2-4), installed by Thomas Chippendale in 1769¹⁰, at Blickling Hall in Norfolk (Figure 2-5 and Figure 2-6), in the collection of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAK) in Vienna,¹¹ at Schloss Dyck in Germany (Figure 2-7), previously hung at Schloss Halbturn in Austria (ca. 1765)¹², the Dutch royal

⁸ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 5. Included in this figure of 15% are papers which depict figural subjects but not necessarily manufacturing industries. For example, the Chinese wallpapers at Blickling hall in Norfolk, which though similar in style to the papers at Coutts depict general street activity and people at leisure in the landscape, not agriculture or manufacturing. Therefore, those that do depict manufacturing industries account for an even smaller proportion of known examples of figural wallpapers.

⁹ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 5.

¹⁰ Melissa Gallimore, *The Chinese Wallpaper: Harewood House* (Leeds: Harewood House Trust, 2008). Some of the Harewood papers, used to decorate an adjoining dressing room, also depict industry scenes. These are now in the collection of the Guangdong Provincial museum in China.

¹¹ National trust researcher Emile de Bruijn has suggested that this set may originally have hung at Schloss Hof, a hunting lodge in Lower Austria, purchased by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria in 1755. Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 80.

¹² Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116
<http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>. With thanks to Emile de Bruijn for drawing my attention to this article.

residence, Palace Huis ten Bosch in the Haag (Figure 2-8), dated to the late eighteenth century¹³ and Hotel des Ribbe in Aix-en-Provence, France (Figure 2-9).¹⁴



Figure 2-2 The Chinese Bedroom, Saltram House, near Plymouth, Devon, with a landscape wallpaper painted on silk ca. 1760 [Source: ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel]

¹³ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 40.

¹⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive but is intended to provide some evidence of the presence of industry type Chinese wallpapers in Europe during this period. There are many more examples not listed here.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-3 Figure. 3. East Bedroom looking west, Harewood House, Leeds. Installed in 1769 [Source: Reproduced by the kind permission of the Trustees of the 7th Earl of Harewood Will Trust and the Trustees of the Harewood House Trust.]

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-4 Chinese wallpapers at Harewood House, Leeds. Installed in 1769 [Source: Reproduced by the kind permission of the Trustees of the 7th Earl of Harewood Will Trust and the Trustees of the Harewood House Trust.]



Figure 2-5 The Chinese Bedroom at Blickling hall, Norfolk, installed about 1760 [Source: ©National Trust Images/Chris Lacey]



Figure 2-6 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper at Blickling hall, Norfolk, installed about 1760 [Source: National Trust]



Figure 2-7 Chinesische Zimmer, Schloss Dyck, Germany, previously Schloss Halbturn, Austria (ca. 1765) [Source: Stiftung Schloss Dyck]



Figure 2-8 The Chinese room, Palace Huis ten Bosch, The Haig, Netherlands, Late eighteenth century. [Source: Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands Image bank. Photograph by A.J.M. Steinmetz, 1914]



Figure 2-9 Chinese wallpapers painted on silk at Hotel de Ribbe, Aix-en-Provence, installed in 1771 [Source: Newsletter produced by Friends of French Art, California, taken from the Peabody Essex museum curatorial research file, 'Chinese wallpaper'.]

Some of the same pictorial themes can also be seen in small scale Chinese paintings, which were sometimes used as print room style wall decoration, like those found at Erddig, near Wrexham in England, which depict rice, silk and tea production (ca. 1750 to 1770) (Figure 2-10 and Figure 2-11) and at Carton house, Country Kildare, Ireland, ca. 1759 (Figure 2-13, Figure 2-16 and Figure 2-18).

Beyond Europe, Chinese wallpapers with industry themes were also used in North America during the eighteenth century. Among the extant examples are the

wallpapers in the parlor at the Samuel Dexter House in Dedham, Massachusetts (ca.1760), and at Beauport House in Gloucester, Massachusetts, once home to interior decorator Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934) (Figure 2-12). This latter set, which has been dated to 1784, was so large that it was used in two residences. The other half is now in the collection of the Peabody Essex museum in Salem, Massachusetts, but was formerly hung in the ballroom at the Bruce E. Merriman House in Providence, Rhode Island around 1925.



Figure 2-10 Chinese paintings depicting rice, silk and tea production used as applied wall decoration at Erddig, near Wrexham, England, ca. 1770 [Source: ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel]



Figure 2-11 Chinese painting depicting rice production used as applied wall decoration at Erddig, near Wrexham, England, ca. 1770 [Source: ©National Trust Images/John Hammond]



Figure 2-12 Detail from the Chinese wallpapers at Beauport, Gloucester, Massachusetts, ca. 1785 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, April 2016]

Close comparison of these wallpapers listed above brings to light the existence of some identical design elements. Matches are evident in the wallpapers at Carton

House and Coutts & Co. (Figure 2-13, Figure 2-14, Figure 2-15, Figure 2-16, Figure 2-17, Figure 2-18) and also at Schloss Dyck and Saltram House (Figure 2-19, Figure 2-20, Figure 2-21 and Figure 2-22), which suggests that they may have been made in the same workshops or at least based on a common model or template. The very different style of the industry themed Chinese wallpaper at Harewood house (Figure 2-3 and Figure 2-4) suggests they were probably the product of a different workshop, which possibly also produced the Beauport/Merriman wallpapers (Figure 2-12) in North America which have a similar aesthetic. While the identification of identical compositional elements in these aforementioned examples suggests that they were produced in the same workshops or were based in common models it is clear that the artisans who created them also attempted to make each example appear unique with the use of subtle variations and additions to the main template, such as the addition of figures, animals or plants on or around a design template and the use of mirror images.

These images of Chinese life and industry provided eighteenth century viewers with a window onto China's 'exotic' and unfamiliar cultural landscape as well as allowing them to visualise the origins of tea, porcelain and silk, which were coveted luxuries. The Chinese wallpaper itself was also a luxury good and its display importantly signified the wealth and global connections of its owners.



Figure 2-13 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Carton House, County Kildare, Ireland, ca. [Source: Reproduced in Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, p.84]

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-14 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., London, ca. 1790s [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

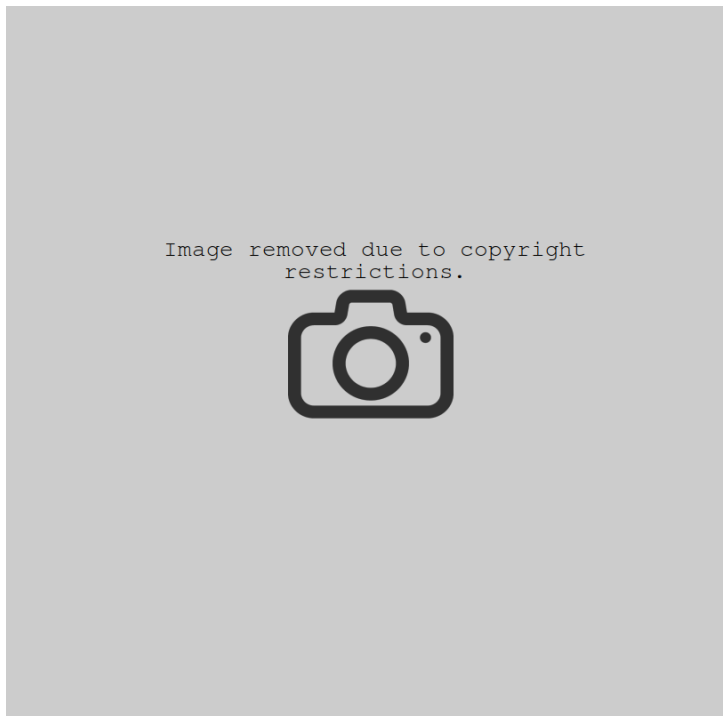


Figure 2-15 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., London, ca. 1790s [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012 Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

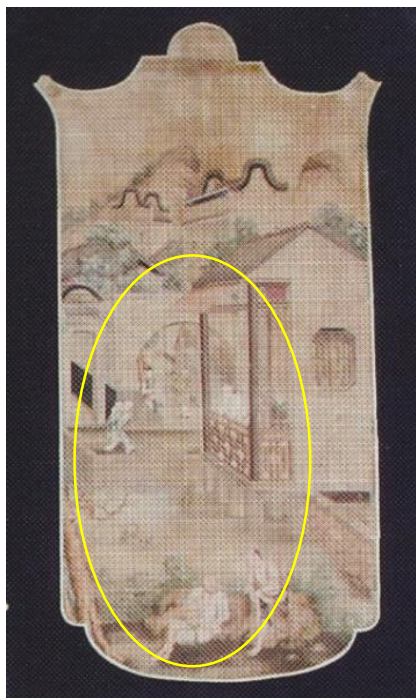


Figure 2-16 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Carton House, County Kildare, Ireland, ca. [Source: Reproduced in Emile de Bruijn, Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses, p.83]

Image removed due to copyright
restrictions.



Figure 2-17 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., London, ca. 1790s [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

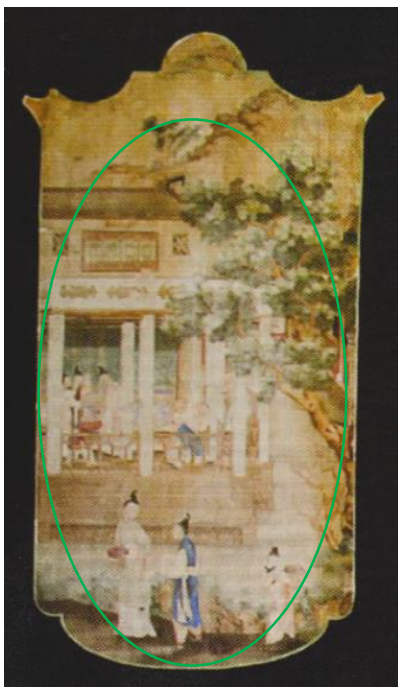


Figure 2-18 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Carton House, County Kildare, Ireland, ca. [Source: Reproduced in Emile de Bruijn, Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses, p.82]



*Figure 2-19 Detail from the Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese room at Schloss Dyck, Germany
[Source: Stiftung Schloss Dyck]*



*Figure 2-20 Detail from the Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese Bedroom, Saltram House, Devon.
[Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, August 2014]*



Figure 2-21 Detail from the Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese room at Schloss Dyck, Germany
[Source: Stiftung Schloss Dyck]



Figure 2-22 Detail from the Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese Bedroom, Saltram House, Devon.
[Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, August 2014]

A Brief History: The Chinese Wallpapers at Coutts & Co., 59 and 440 Strand, London, ca. 1794

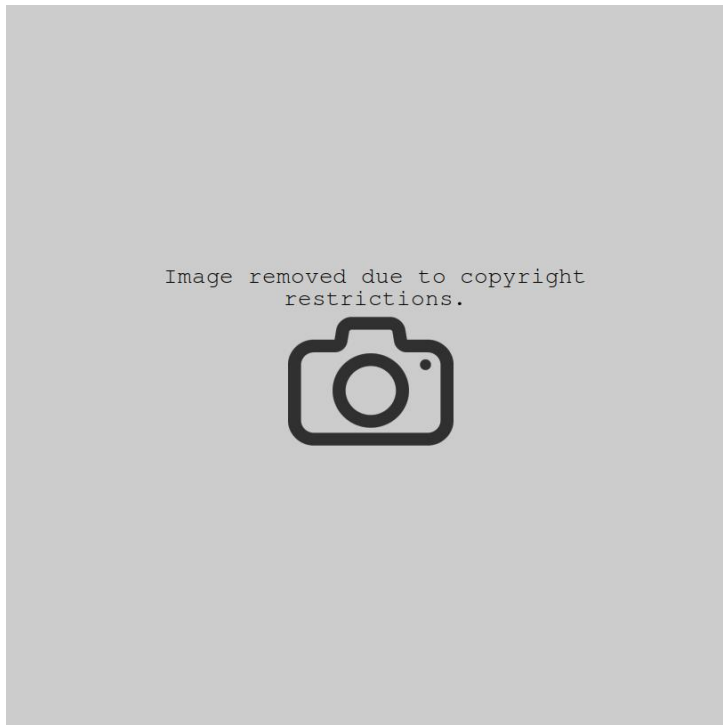
Today, the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. are hung above a chair rail on all four walls of the neo-classical board room, overlooking the church of St Martin in the Fields and Adelaide Street. Below the chair rail, the walls are painted a rich imperial yellow. In the middle of the room there is a large, round, polished wood table surrounded by twelve delicate Georgian chairs and above it, a sparkling chandelier (Figure 2-1). The wallpapers are painted with ink and colours on Chinese paper; while some Chinese wallpapers dating to this period are painted on silk the use of silk seems to have been a relatively short-lived vogue in the second half of the eighteenth century after which time they were more commonly painted on paper.¹⁵

The wallpapers at Coutts & Co. present a detailed, non-repeating design which offers a panoramic view of Chinese society. It is characterised by figural and architectural subject matter and includes depictions of key Chinese industries; including the production of rice, silk, porcelain and tea, against the backdrop of a monumental mountain landscape (Figure 2-23). They represent Chinese

¹⁵ Silk was a typical surface material for Chinese painting until around 1300 at which point paper became more widespread as a painting surface. Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), pp. 32–34. While most Chinese wallpapers painted after the eighteenth century were painted on paper the majority of high end Chinese wallpapers produced in the present day have witnessed a revival of painting on silk.

wallpapers at the peak of their popularity in Europe where they satisfied a demand for Chinese decorative goods and images of China.

The wallpapers use of images drawn from a variety of Chinese sources and they reflect both western and Chinese artistic conventions, materials and formats. As such, the wallpapers provide a detailed record of the intricate cultural exchanges that took place between China and Europe during the eighteenth century and exemplify the novel, hybrid products that were generated by them.



*Figure 2-23 Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co. 440 Strand, London. Ca. 1790
[Source: Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]*

The wallpapers were originally hung in Thomas Coutts' private apartments above the bank's offices at 59 Strand (presumably at some point shortly after 1794, when the papers were reputedly received, though possibly later). They remained in this location until 1904, when they were moved to the board room of the

bank's new premises at 440 Strand. In both these locations the wallpapers did not contribute to a chinoiserie style interior, but were part of a comparatively restrained neo-classical decorative scheme with very little decorative art on display.

While Thomas Coutts was possessed of significant wealth he was not a connoisseur or collector of art and he was reputedly rather restrained in his spending on art and personal effects.¹⁶ According to the memoirs of his second wife, actress Harriot Mellon (1777-1837), '(...) his clothes, always ill-fitting, bore that appearance of being rubbed at the seams'.¹⁷ The idea that the luxurious Chinese wallpaper was a gift may explain how such an expensive and flamboyant decorative scheme came into the Coutts household.¹⁸

The earliest visual record of the wallpapers in situ in their original location at 59 Strand is a watercolour by an unknown artist dating to around 1822 (Figure 2-24),

¹⁶ Ernst Coleridge writes, 'Coutts was not a buyer of pictures other than portraits, or a patron of art [...]'. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker* (London: John Lane Company, 1920), p. 390. He was, however, very enthusiastic about the theatre and was a generous patron of the stage. He owned a private box at Covent Garden as well as at Drury Lane. See Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker* (London: John Lane Company, 1920), p. 282.

¹⁷ Mrs. Baron-Wilson, Cornwell, *Memoirs of Miss Mellon, Afterwards Duchess of St. Albans* (London: Remington and Co., 1886), p. 309
<<https://archive.org/details/memoirsofmissmel01baro>>. Cited in David Wilcox, 'The Clothing of a Georgian Banker, Thomas Coutts: A Story of Museum Dispersal', *Costume*, 46.1 (2012), 17–54
<<https://doi.org/10.1179/174963012X13192178400074>>.

¹⁸ There are no records of the wallpapers entering the Coutts household in the Coutts & Co. archives in London and as yet no documentary evidence of Thomas Coutts' own thoughts or opinions regarding the wallpapers has come to light. As such, we must look to their physical history to provide information about their value and make inferences based on Coutts own private and professional interests and those of his close friends and family.

and the first photographic record dates to around 1903, (Figure 2-25) just before the bank moved premises.¹⁹

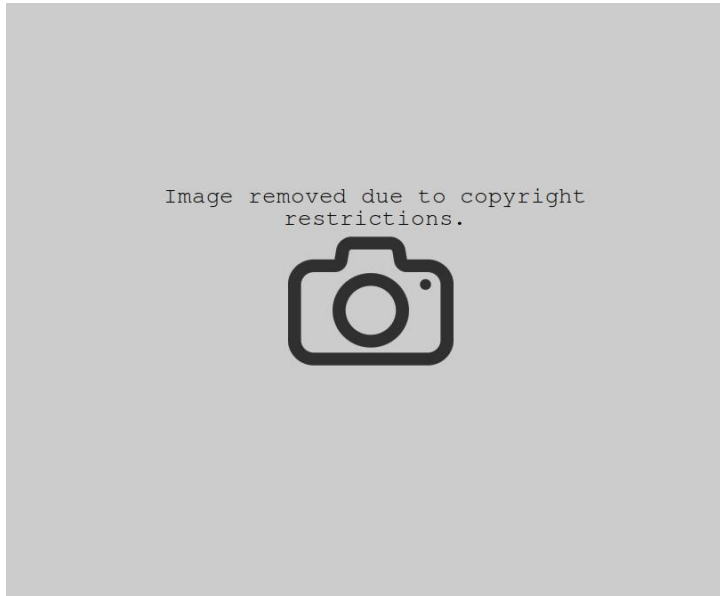


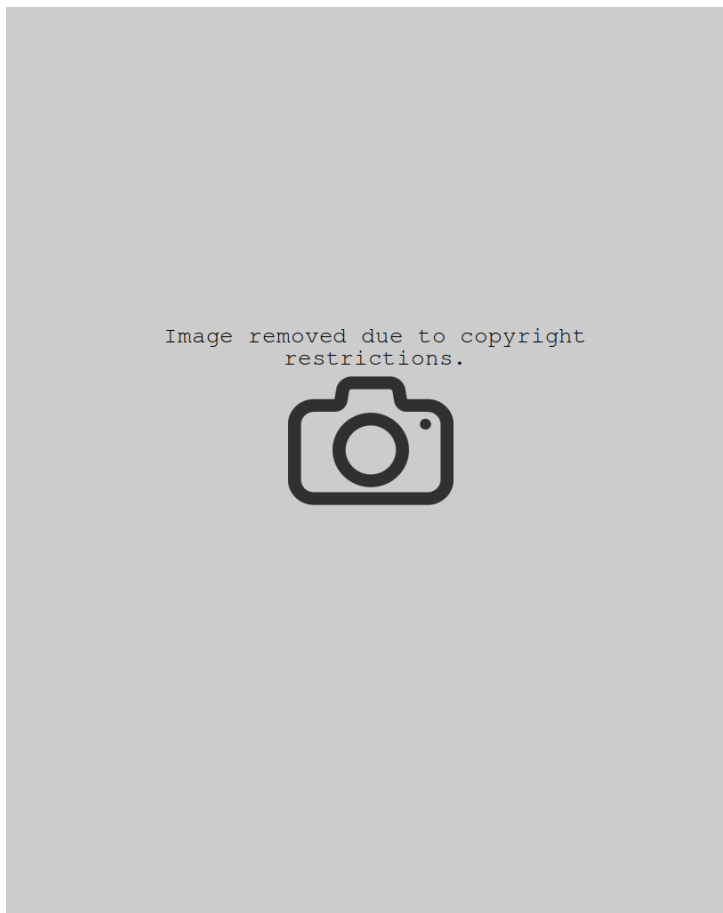
Figure 2-24 Watercolour depicting private room at 59 Strand ca. 1850, Artist Unknown. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

Further photographic records (Figure 2-26), dating to around 1904 show the wallpaper shortly after it was moved to 440 Strand.²⁰ The paper was moved again when the bank's premises at 440 underwent redevelopment in 1974 and the board room was relocated to a different part of the building. By this time the importance of the wallpaper was such that the new board room was specifically designed to accommodate it and to recreate the appearance of the old board room as closely as possible. The act of foregrounding the wallpapers in this way

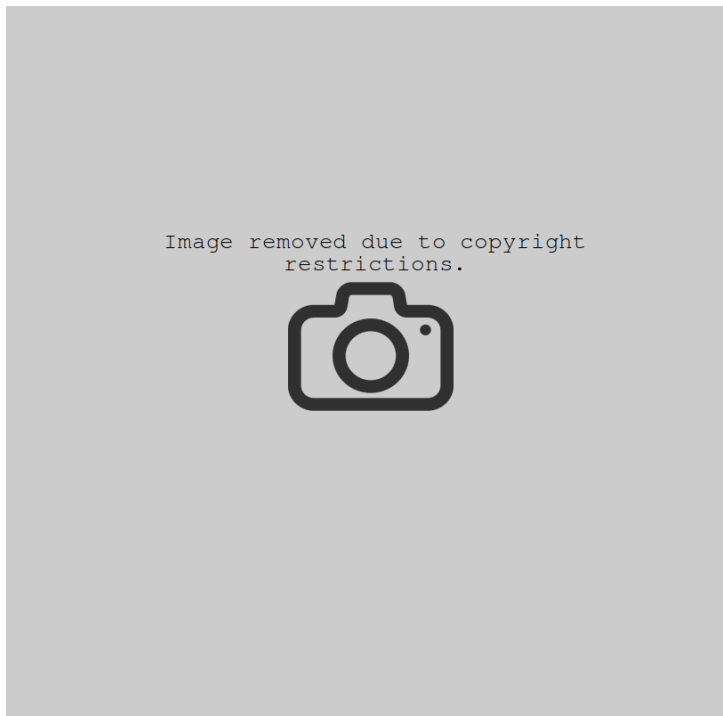
¹⁹ Tracey Earl. Coutts & Co. Archivist, London. Personal interview. 14 July 2014.

²⁰ All of these images are held in the archives at Coutts & Co., London. With thanks to Tracey Earl, archivist at Coutts & Co. for allowing access to this archive and for her advice and information relating to the Chinese wallpapers. 'Coutts & Co. Archive (Photographs & Paintings)' (London).

represents an unusual inversion of the typical dynamic between architectural space and decorative scheme, where the decoration is made to fit the space rather than vice versa. The fact that the 1974 board room was designed according to the dimensions of the wallpaper is evidence of the significant value that was attributed to the wallpaper by those who inherited it at Coutts & Co.



*Figure 2-25 Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co., 59 Strand, London. Ca. 1903
[Source: Coutts & Co. Archive, London. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]*



*Figure 2-26 Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co., 440 Strand, London. Ca. 1904
[Source: Coutts & Co. Archive, London. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]*

Other decorative elements were moved along with the wallpaper when it was relocated from 59 to 440 Strand in 1904, including the original doors and Robert Adam (1728-1792) designed fireplace (Figure 2-25 and Figure 2-27). These were also re-installed in the new board room at 440 Strand in 1974, maintaining a sense of historical continuity in terms of aesthetic, as well as acting as a tangible material link to Thomas Coutts himself.

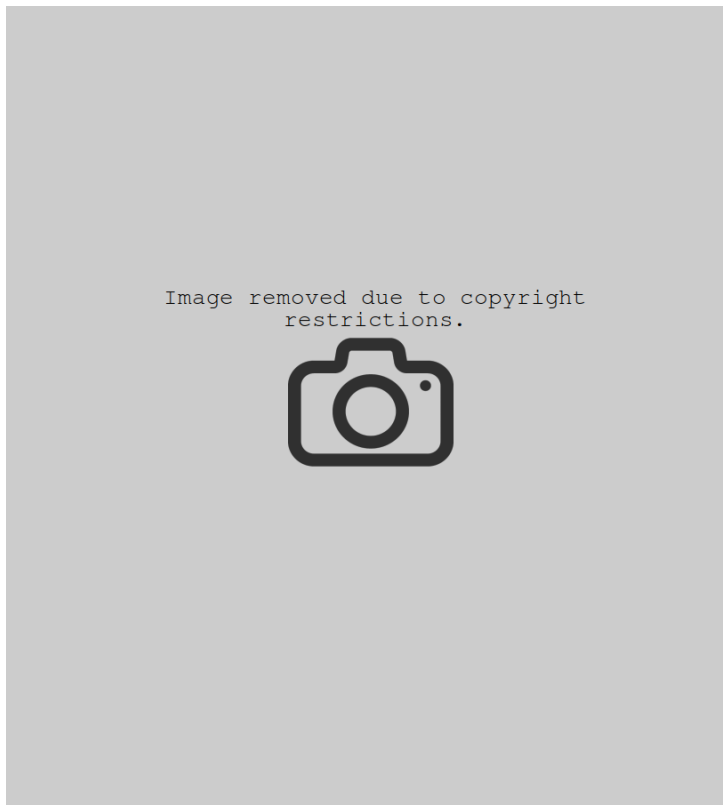


Figure 2-27 Chinese wallpaper in the board room at Coutts & Co., 440 Strand, London. Ca. 1950 [Source: Coutts & Co. Archive, London. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

Today the wallpapers have darkened considerably from their original bright colours, largely as a result of several misguided attempts to conserve the wallpaper over the years.²¹ The early twentieth-century photographs of the wallpaper discussed above also show that the wallpaper was trimmed at the top at some point around 1903, presumably when it was moved to 440 Strand, as the

²¹ When the wallpaper was moved in 1904 the original lining was removed and it was re-lined with thick brown paper and varnished with egg white which led to significant discolouration. In 1925 and 1947 there were further attempts to restore and protect the wallpapers and a wax coating was applied which further worsened their appearance. 'Coutts & Co. Archive Record of Chinese Wallpaper Conservation Treatments, 1947-1968' (London); Tracey Earl. Coutts & Co. Archivist, London. Personal interview. 14 July 2014. Reproductions of this and other wallpaper designs by present day wallpaper producers purposefully recreate this sepia effect, often referred to as 'antiquing' as a preferred aesthetic that conveys age and heritage.

tops of the mountain peaks which are visible in the 1903 photograph (Figure 2-25) are not visible in later photographs of the original board room at 440 Strand (Figure 2-27).

While the wallpapers ultimately suffered as a result of well-meaning attempts at conservation these activities provide useful evidence of the esteem in which the wallpapers were held and the extent to which they were seen as a valuable part of Coutts & Co.'s material history. More recently, in 2012, the wallpapers underwent extensive conservation treatment by British paper conservator Allyson McDermott to ensure their continued stability in a working environment attesting to their continued importance and value as part of the material history and fabric of the bank.

Despite the darkening of the original colours the images depicted on the wallpapers have been preserved with excellent clarity of detail and they relate a wealth of information regarding Chinese life and industry, as well as information relating to cultural exchange between China and Europe during the eighteenth century.

Reading the Chinese Wallpapers at Coutts & Co.

The Chinese wallpapers are the dominant decorative feature of the board room at Coutts & Co. Covering all four walls and stretching from the chair rail to the ceiling they immediately offer an impression of energy and purpose. Waterways, boats,

shops, traders, manual labourers, women, children, soldiers, officials and animals are dispersed throughout the full height of the scene in three main registers, engaged in a wide variety of activities. Some are engaged in leisurely pursuits such as watching a theatre performance, boating and participating in social gatherings in garden landscapes. Others are shown hard at work, engaged in the production of rice, silk, tea and porcelain; from cultivation and transportation of raw materials through processing, packing, transportation and sale of the finished products. On initial inspection the images present an intriguing and aesthetically pleasing, though somewhat confusing scene. The vast scale of the composition and the great detail with which individual elements are depicted forces the viewer to move and process around the space in order to take it all in. The individual scenes and subjects run seamlessly together to form a continuous panorama. Consequently, the wallpaper, as a whole, demands concentration and perseverance from the viewer to decipher the many different activities that are shown and to determine how the images relate to one another.

On the west wall (Figure 2-28) small clusters of men and young boys are depicted next to picturesque waterways. In the register above them groups of women and children are pictured in a garden landscape, in and around ornate pavilions and a secluded, walled garden. One group on the right hand side appear to be tending trays of silk cocoons housed in an open sided building. The ladies are dressed in long, elegant, layered robes, worn with contrasting coloured sashes, emphasising their tall, willowy figures. Some of the ladies wear their hair in tall, looped top-knot styles, decorated with delicate ornaments, typically seen on mid-eighteenth

century wallpapers, (including those at Carton House in Ireland, Harewood House near Leeds and Blickling Hall in Norfolk, (Figure 2-18 and Figure 2-6)).²²

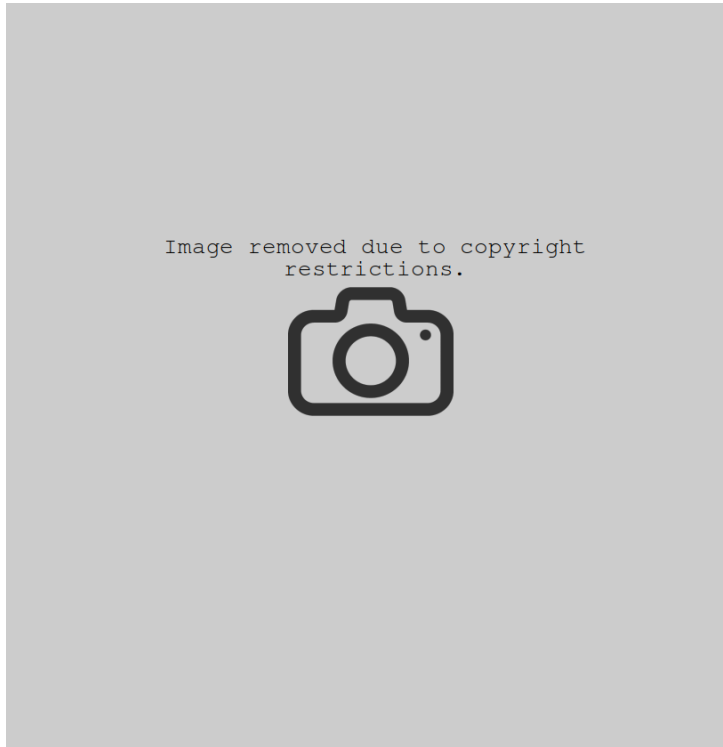


Figure 2-28 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the west wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

Others have a hairstyle that is worn close to the head and fastened at the nape of the neck, a style more commonly seen in early nineteenth century wallpapers (such as the Chinese wallpapers hung in the Adelaide corridor at the Royal Pavilions at Brighton and the Strathallan wallpapers now at the Peabody Essex museum in Salem, Massachusetts).²³ These variances in hairstyle may represent a

²² Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 101.

²³ Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 104.

moment of changing fashion or may be an indicator of social class, signaling lady and maid servant. What these details demonstrate unequivocally is the depth of information presented on Chinese wallpapers; they offered important details of social life and dress even if their specific meaning was not easy to decipher. Above the ladies in garden pavilions men work in rice paddies; a plough is pulled by an ox preparing the paddies for planting. In adjacent paddies, men stoop to plant rice seedlings.

On the south wall scenes of rice cultivation are continued (Figure 2-29). In the two upper registers men transplant rice seedlings to the flooded paddies and a woman with a child alongside her and a baby on her back walk amongst the activity. On the path, pictured above her, a man carries rice seedlings in open baskets balanced on a bamboo yoke, making his way towards the planters.

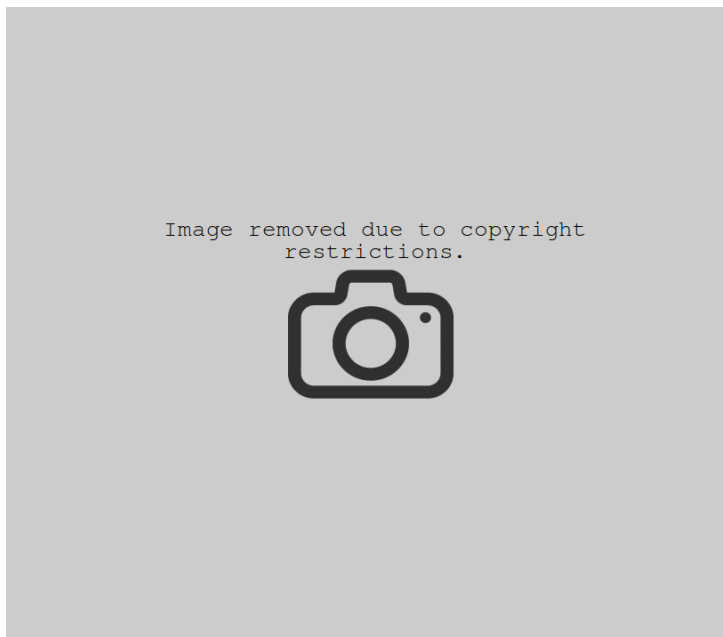


Figure 2-29 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the south wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

As the scene progresses leftwards, as is traditional for the reading of East Asian paintings and books, the processing of the harvested rice is shown and rice straw is seen being bundled and piled into a tall stack. Above these scenes rice terraces stretch into the distance, right up to the ceiling. In the lower register a formal procession of men, on foot and horseback, move towards an altar laden with offerings of meat, fruit and wine (Figure 2-29).

The left side of the south wall depicts the first stages of sericulture (Figure 2-30); men are pictured climbing mulberry trees to collect leaves for the silk worms to eat, while ladies tend the cocoons laid out on trays in a small workshop.

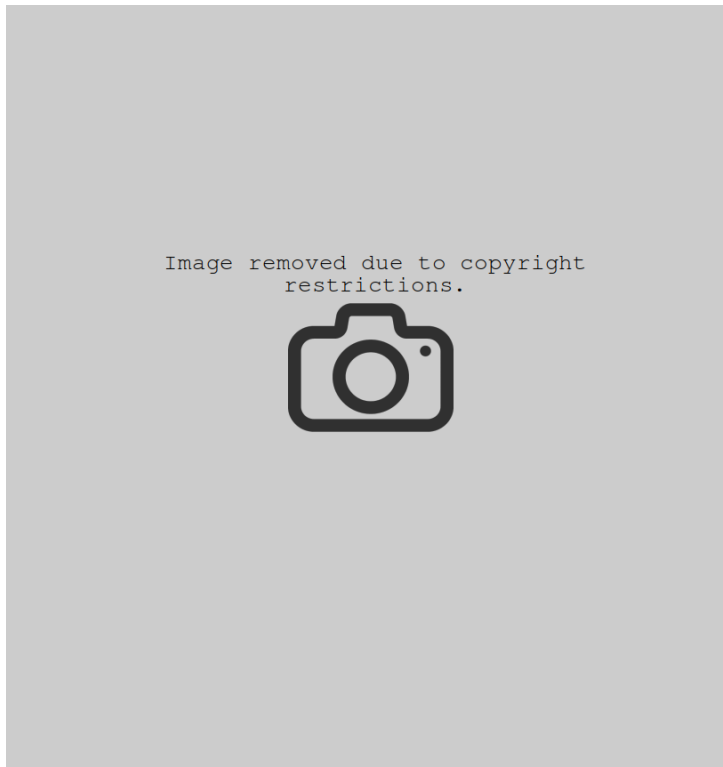


Figure 2-30 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the south wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

In the next scene a lady is shown extracting silk filaments from the silk worm cocoons - boiling them in water over a stove, tended by a young girl. In the upper register the silk thread is washed and dyed in vats by a group of men and the finished red skeins of new silk are seen being passed in neat loops to a woman sitting at a loom. Beneath this scene the finished silk fabric is shown being checked by a group of women while children play beneath the fine fabric (Figure 2-31).

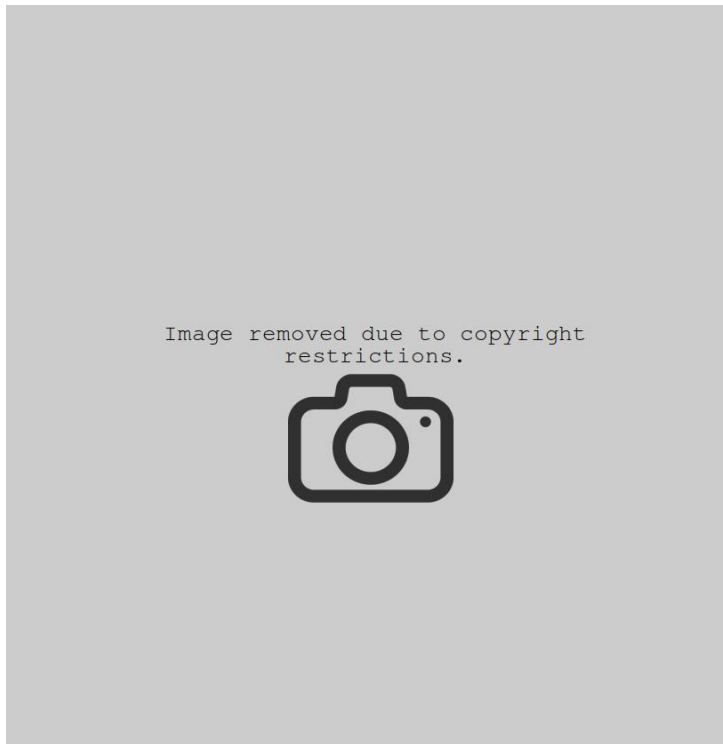


Figure 2-31 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the south wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

The east wall shows the growing, picking and processing of tea in the upper registers (Figure 2-32). Women pick leaves from the tea bushes at ground level and men are seen scaling tall ladders to reach the tea bushes growing in the rocky outcrops above. The leaves of the tea bushes are depicted in a manner identical to

that used to depict the foliage of the mulberry trees, demonstrating the limitations of these representations in terms of botanical accuracy.

In the middle register tea processing is depicted; the leaves are dried in large woks over stoves before they are sorted and packed, by a process of trampling under foot in baskets. In the lower registers, baskets are woven and merchants sell tea from their shops. A shop sign written in Chinese characters reads, 'All kinds of famous tea' (Figure 2-32). Although the majority of western viewers would have been unable to decipher the meaning of the Chinese characters, this kind of detail would have lent an aura of authenticity to the painting. In front of the tea shop, boats are loaded with baskets of tea.

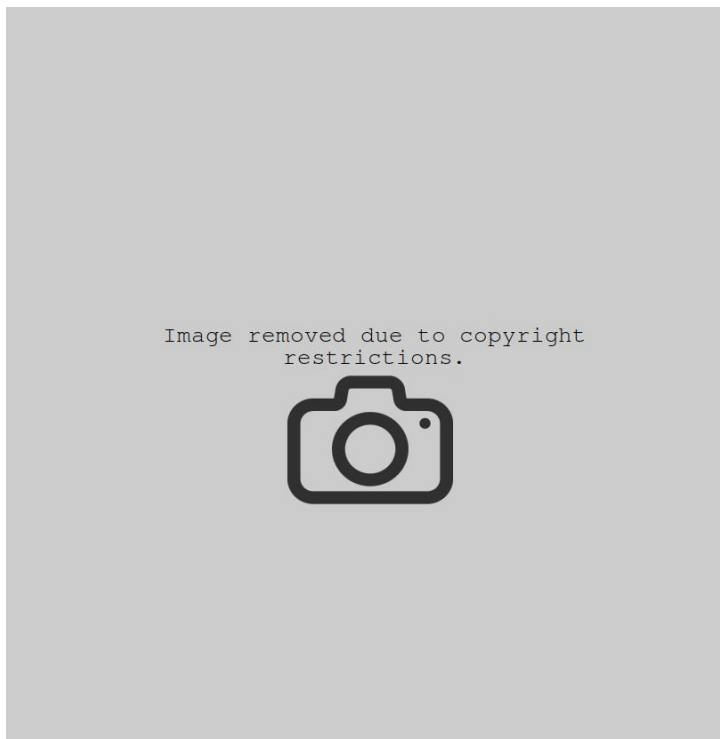


Figure 2-32 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the east wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

To the left of these scenes of tea processing the city gates are depicted.

Unsaddled horses are shown galloping through the gates and men with spears appear to be rounding them up (Figure 2-32). Some horses are shown on their backs in a confusing vignette which serves to break up the scenes of industry.

The north wall shows scenes of porcelain production (Figure 2-33). In the foreground idle groups of men talk and smoke while watching porcelain stone being unloaded from boats. In the upper register a water powered trip hammer is being used to smash the china stone.

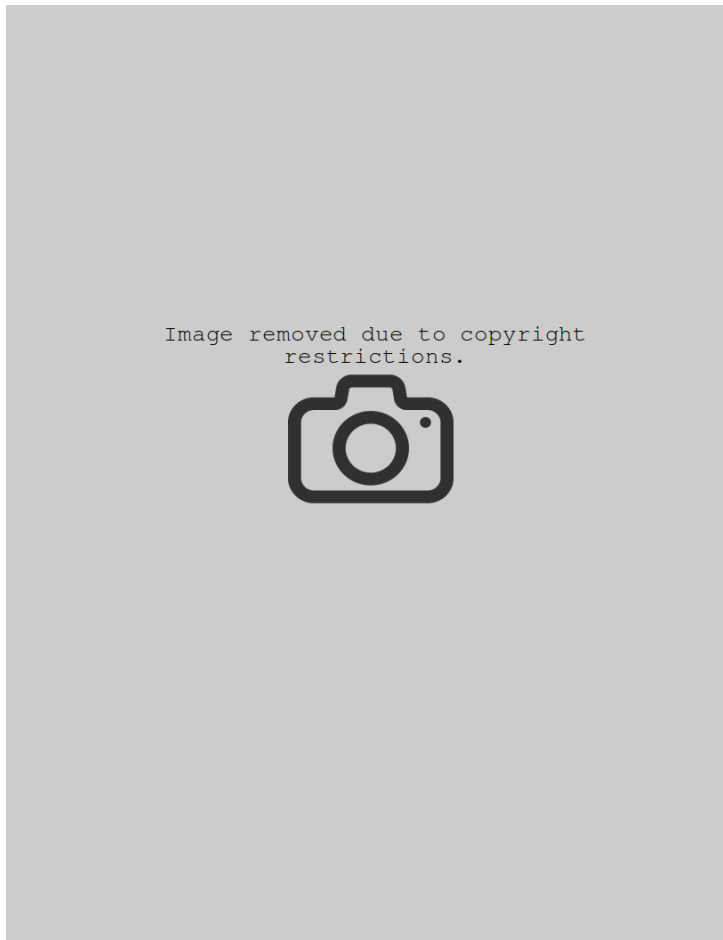


Figure 2-33 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the north wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

Men carrying the heavy china stone in baskets, balanced on bamboo yokes are seen processing with their loads towards the waterwheel. Beneath this, the crushed stone is washed and steeped in pools before it is turned into workable clay. To the left of these images, open sided pottery workshops are depicted where the clay is thrown on wheels and transformed into vases, cups and bowls, which are then placed to dry on long, narrow planks of wood. These planks are also used to carry the leather dry pieces to the next workers on the production line. The men shown at the front of the workshop are painting the leather hard forms with decorative patterns before firing. In the middle of the wall a row of kilns, erroneously depicted as tall and narrow, individual firing chambers with domed tops, which never actually had existence in China, are shown attended by men who are unloading the recently fired porcelains into baskets (Figure 2-34). An official, distinguished by his blue robe and red tasseled hat is seen inspecting the finished wares.

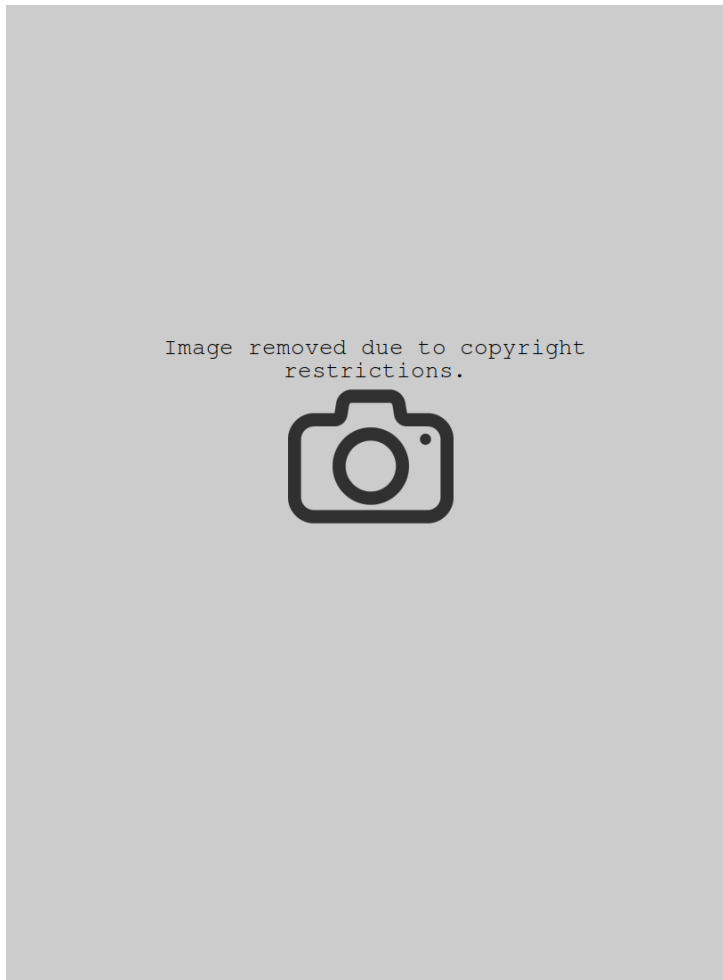


Figure 2-34 Detail of the Chinese wallpaper on the north wall of the board room at Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

In spite of the detail depicted the production processes are not described in their entirety and are not arranged in any clear sequential order, leading to a disorientating visual experience. So, while the images presented had the potential to convey information about Chinese industrial processes, extracting this information is challenging. Many of those who saw this set of wallpapers at Coutts & Co. would undoubtedly have appreciated them as an attractive and exciting display of cultural difference, with their unfamiliar aesthetic and subject matter presented on a large scale.

Records of viewer's reactions to other Chinese wallpapers at around this time, in the second half of the eighteenth century, can give some indication of the effects that may have been felt by those who saw the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. In 1766 Lady Mary Coke remarked that the Chinese wallpaper in the Great Room at His Majesty's lodge in Richmond Park, 'looks just like Japan'²⁴ and in 1772 Lady Beauchamp Proctor described the transporting effects of the decoration in lodging rooms at Osterley Park: 'furnished with the finest Chintzes, painted Taffaty's, Indian paper and decker work, and such a profusion of rich China and Japan, that I could almost fancy myself in Pekin.'²⁵ While these unfamiliar images of rice, silk and porcelain production transported eighteenth century western viewers to China, those same images held specific cultural significance and would have been widely recognised by eighteenth century Chinese viewers, on the basis of a time-honoured tradition of illustrating these subjects of industry in China.

Transposing Pictures of Tilling and Weaving from China to the West

Depictions of industry have a long standing tradition of illustration and national significance in China. It has been demonstrated by scholars Berger, Métaillé and Watabe that the scenes of rice and silk production seen on the aforementioned Chinese wallpapers at Schloss Dyck in Germany (Figure 2-7, Figure 2-19 and Figure

²⁴ Mary Coke, *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, 1857*, ed. by James Home, Kingsmead Reprints (Bath: Kingsmead Bookshops, 1970). Cited in E. A. Entwisle, *A Literary History of Wallpaper* (London: Batsford, 1960), p. 38.

²⁵ Cited in John Cornforth, 'A Role for Chinoiserie?', *Country Life*, CLXXXIII (1989), 147 (p. 151).

2-21) are based on illustrations found in a Chinese album known as 御製耕織圖 *Yuzhi Gengzhi tu*.²⁶ It is clear that the industry designs seen on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. are also modelled directly on this same source.

Yuzhi Gengzhi tu, translated as ‘Imperially commissioned Illustrations of Agriculture and Sericulture,’ is an illustrated album whose origin dates back to twelfth-century China, when a collection of poems known as the *Gengzhi shi* (*Poems on Agriculture and Sericulture*) was composed for the Southern Song (1127-1279) court by a county magistrate, Lou Shou, around 1145.²⁷ A seminal, illustrated edition of these poems was published in 1237, with woodblock illustrations by Wang Gang, a military officer from Jiangxi.²⁸ While no copies of this original illustrated edition of the album survive today, art historian Philip Hu has argued that it was preserved by means of repeated recopying and reprinting throughout the Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) periods, testifying to its continued popularity, relevance and appeal for both Chinese rulers and the general public of these respective periods.²⁹

²⁶ Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, ‘Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d’un Papier Peint Chinois’, *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (pp. 96–116) <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>.

²⁷ Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), p. 73.

²⁸ Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), pp. 72–73.

²⁹ Philip K. Hu, ‘Idealized Labor: Material and Social Manifestations of Riziculture and Sericulture in Imperial China’, in *Discourses and Practices of Everyday Life in Imperial China* (Conference Paper, Institute of History and Philology, Columbia University, New York, October 25-27, 2002), p. 8.

Rice and silk played a central role in the Chinese economy from pre-modern times, and the national importance of these commodities was marked each year by the Emperor and Empress with a ritual ceremony to mark the beginning of the season for agriculture and sericulture.³⁰ As such, images of rice and silk production were imbued with deep cultural significance relating to imperial rule, society, economy and daily life.



Figure 2-35 Album leaves from the *Yuzhi Gengzhi tu*, ink and colours on silk, Jiao Bingzhen (1680-1720), commissioned in 1689 [Source: Library of Congress, Washington, DC., Object number G326 A117.]

Hu describes the details of subsequent Qing versions of the *Gengzhi tu* noting that Prince Yong (later to become the Yongzheng Emperor), commissioned his own version of the *Gengzhi tu* in which he was pictured tilling the soil and female members of his household working to produce silk, thereby using the album as a vehicle to declare his right to imperial succession. The Qianlong emperor commissioned a new album with fresh illustrations by Chen Mei and inscriptions and poems by his own hand and later commissioned engravings on stone of images and poems on the same theme by Yuan artist Chen Qi, from which rubbings could be taken and disseminated making the imagery of the *Gengzhi tu* even more widely available to the Chinese populace. See Hu, 2002, 8-9

³⁰ *The Printed Image in China From the 8th To the 21st Centuries*, ed. by Clarissa Von Spee (London: British Museum Press, 2010), p. 113.

Many iterations of the *Gengzhi tu* were created in the centuries that followed its initial inception, but among the most recognisable and widely circulated versions was that commissioned by the Kangxi emperor (r.1662-1722) in 1689 (Figure 2-35).

With its idealised representations of flourishing industries and idyllic rural life the images presented in the *Gengzhi tu* album reflected political stability, economic prosperity, and beneficent imperial rule. After being presented with a copy of the *Gengzhi tu* by a member of the local gentry during his southern inspection tour in 1689, Kangxi commissioned court artist, Jiao Bingzhen (1680-1720) to create a new version of the album with new illustrations.³¹ The emperor himself composed a preface and a new set of corresponding poems, which were written above each image in running script calligraphy, accompanied by the emperor's personal seals.³² Lou Shou's original poems were retained but written in smaller standard script within the frame of the illustration. Jiao's version of the album contains 46 image/text pairings, equally divided between the subjects of rice cultivation and sericulture.

³¹ Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), p. 73.

³² Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), p. 74.



Figure 2-36 *Gengzhi tu*, Woodblock printed edition, after the painted album by Jiao Bingzhen (1680-1720), China, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) [Source: Harvard Art Museum, Object Number 1985.878]

Soon after Jiao completed the painted album, which was executed in coloured inks on silk, the Kangxi emperor ordered corresponding woodblocks to be carved.³³ The resulting print version of the album was completed in 1696 (Figure 2-36) and it facilitated the dissemination of the work beyond court circles to the general public. As a result, the images became part of the decorative repertoire of Chinese craftsmen making goods for domestic and export markets, and scenes from the album were used to decorate a wide variety of media.

Professor of history, Takeshi Watabe has identified the earliest surviving example of the use of images copied from the *Gengzhi tu* as a decorative motif, on a round

³³ In addition to the original album (or albums) which were painted on silk, further painted sets based on the printed version of Jiao's album were created by later copyists. Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), p. 74.

fan in the collections of the Palace museum in Beijing, dating from some time in the late Song period (960-1279). The image depicts all the tasks of rice-farming set out in a single landscape.³⁴ After this time scenes from the *Gengzhi tu* continued to be used to decorate a wide variety of decorative and practical goods, including ceramics, such as the Kangxi period porcelain plate shown in Figure 2-37, depicting the extraction of silk threads from cocoons. The image was copied directly from the *Gengzhi tu* along with the accompanying calligraphic inscription and seal.³⁵



Figure 2-37 Dish, porcelain, painted in over glaze enamels and gilded, Jingdezhen, China, 1662-1722 [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

³⁴ Takeshi Watabe, “‘Chugolcu Noshō Koshikido No Ryuden to Sono Eikyo Ni Tsuite’ [Studies about the Spread and Influences of “Pictures of Tilling and Weaving.”]’, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Letters, Tokai University*, 1986, 1–37. Cited in *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: The Warp and the Weft*, ed. by Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillie (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 530.

³⁵ Earlier versions of the *Gengzhi tu* had already been reproduced in woodblock-print format during the Ming. However, it was the Kangxi-period revival of the pictorial theme in 1696 that set the stage for its widespread appearance in new forms. Several subsequent printings of the album were made after the initial printing of this revived version of the *Gengzhi tu* in 1696. Philip K. Hu, *Visible Traces: Rare Books and Special Collections from The National Library of China* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 2000), p. 74.

Images copied directly from the *Gengzhi tu* were also used to decorate lacquer objects, such as an eighteenth-century lacquer screen in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum (Figure 2-38 and Figure 2-39).³⁶ This enormous twelve-fold black lacquer screen, decorated on both sides in gold with images of rice and silk production, was commissioned in the first half of the eighteenth century by Sir John Eccleston, a British silk merchant. Through its subject matter it communicates Eccleston's professional interests in silk, but the addition of his personal coat of arms at the top of each panel also communicates his personal family identity. In this way the lacquer screen exemplifies the simultaneously global and local character of many objects which were produced as a direct result of the artistic and trade encounters between China and the West during the early modern period.

³⁶ Wood, lacquer, gold and pigment, dated 1720-30, museum object number E84093, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. 'Peabody Essex Museum', *Peabody Essex Museum*, 2017 <<http://explore-art.pem.org/object/asian-export-art/E84093/detail>> [accessed 12 April 2014].



Figure 2-38 'Eccleston Screen', Twelve fold lacquer screen, 1720-1730, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. USA [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, April 2016]



Figure 2-39 Detail from the 'Eccleston Screen' showing silk production copied directly from the Gengzhi tu, Twelve-fold lacquer screen, 1720-1730, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. USA [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, April 2016]

The imagery presented in the *Gengzhi tu* clearly appealed to both Chinese and European audiences and even appeared as a decorative theme on porcelain wares produced at Sèvres in France in 1775 (Figure 2-40), as described in an article by art historian, Selma Schwartz.³⁷ The designs seen on the tea service in Figure 2-40 and Figure 2-41 were copied directly from a copy of the *Gengzhi tu* album held in the private collection of French foreign minister Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720-1792), who served as a Minister of State under Louis XV of France (1710-1774). Bertin's enlightened scholarly interests in Chinese art, culture, and society were fed by long distance communications with Jesuits based in China, from whom he received Chinese books, paintings, and decorative goods, including a fine painted copy of the *Gengzhi tu*.³⁸

It is clear from this example that although Chinese paintings did not become the subject of systematic collection or study in Europe until the end of the nineteenth century, the *Gengzhi tu* album was not altogether unknown in eighteenth-century

³⁷ Selma Schwartz, 'In the Chinese Taste', *Apollo*, 2012, 68–73 (p. 70). With thanks to Emile de Bruijn for bringing this article to my attention

³⁸ Selma Schwartz, 'In the Chinese Taste', *Apollo*, 2012, 68–73 (p. 70)., John Finlay, 'Cultural Commerce between China and France in the 18th Century: The "40 Views of the Yuanming Yuan" in the Collections of Henri-Leonard Bertin', in *The Yuanmingyuan in Britain and France: Representations of the 'Summer Palace' in the West* (Conference Paper, University of Manchester, 8th-9th July 2013). John Finlay, 'Henri Bertin and the Commerce in Images between France and China in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China And The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 79–94.

Europe and served as a practical source of decorative designs in Europe as well as China.³⁹



Figure 2-40 Tea service, 1775, Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory, Louis-François Lécot (Active 1764-65;1773-1802). Hard-paste porcelain decorated with scenes of rice cultivation and processing copied directly from the *Gengzhi tu*. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. [Source: Photo ©The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Photo by Yuri Molodkovets. Reproduced in Selma Schwartz, 'In the Chinese Taste', *Apollo*, September 2012, p. 70].

³⁹ Richard E. Strassberg, 'War and Peace: Four Intercultural Landscapes', in *China on Paper*, ed. by M Reed and P Dematté (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007), pp. 89–137 (pp. 91–96). Strassberg notes that images from the *Gengzhi tu* were also reproduced in European prints, engravings and watercolours during the eighteenth century.



Figure 2-41 Detail of a tray belonging to a tea service, 1775, Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory, Louis-François Lécot (Active 1764-65;1773-1802). Hard-paste porcelain decorated with scenes of rice cultivation and processing copied directly from the *Gengzhi tu*. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. [Source: Photo ©The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Photo by Yuri Molodkovets. Reproduced in Selma Schwartz, 'In the Chinese Taste', *Apollo*, September 2012, p. 69]

Near facsimiles of the images from the 1696 edition of the *Gengzhi tu* have been reproduced on the Coutts & Co. wallpaper. However, only selected scenes from the whole album, which depicts complete production processes in sequential order, are reproduced on the wallpaper. Furthermore, the inscriptions which accompanied the images in the album format are notably absent from all known examples of Chinese industry themed wallpapers, perhaps because it was understood that they would be indecipherable for export market audiences, but also on a more aesthetic level that they would disturb the visual continuity of the wallpaper design.

Figure 2-42 shows a detail from the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. depicting workers transplanting rice seedlings into the flooded paddies. This corresponds almost exactly with the ninth image in the 1689 album's sequential depiction of rice

cultivation (Figure 2-43). The album leaf shows five men planting the seedlings, three of whom are looking back towards a small group on the grassy bank.

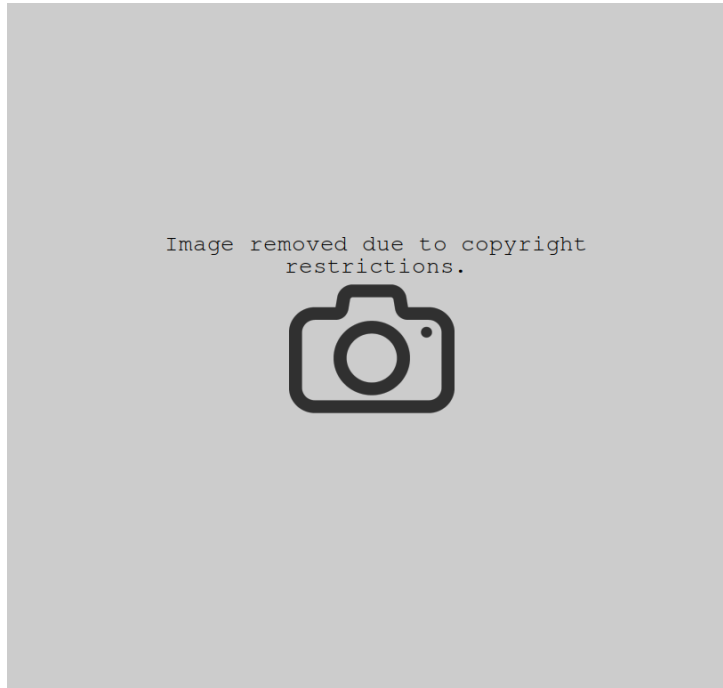


Figure 2-42 Detail showing rice planting, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., London, Ca. 1790 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012]



Figure 2-43 Album leaf from the Yuzhi Gengzhi tu, showing rice planting, painting on silk, attributed to Jiao Bingzhen, commissioned in 1689 [Source: Library of Congress, Washington D.C.]

Two of the men hold bunches of seedlings in their hands. Another man wearing a hat stands on the edge of the paddy field with one foot on the grass and another in the water; these details are replicated exactly on the wallpaper and provide clear evidence of the fact that the images seen on the wallpaper were copied directly from the *Gengzhi tu*.

Images of silk production copied directly from Jiao Bingzhen's 1689 *Gengzhi tu* are also seen on the wallpaper at Coutts & Co. Figure 2-44 shows a detail from the wallpapers, depicting men picking mulberry leaves to feed to the silk worms. This scene is directly based on the image of the same subject matter seen in the *Gengzhi tu* (Figure 2-45). The arrangement of the figures climbing into the trees and those standing below, their postures and their clothing exhibit close similarities.

Figure 2-46 shows a detail from the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. in which a woman is boiling a pan of silk cocoons on a stove to extract the long filaments of silk; a girl kneels in front of the stove tending the fire. While the architectural structures which house the figures are rendered slightly differently in each version of this scene the details of the figures, their activities, posture and dress correlate very closely to those in the *Gengzhi tu* (Figure 2-47).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-44 Detail showing silk production, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., London, Ca. 1790 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

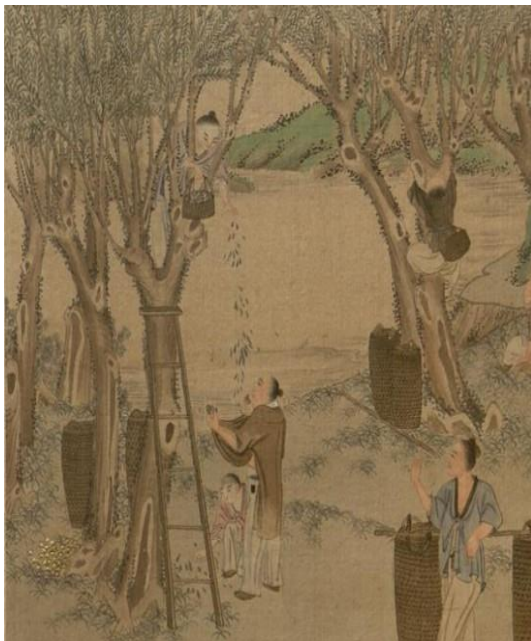


Figure 2-45 Album leaf from the Yuzhi Gengzhi tu, showing silk production, painting on silk, attributed to Jiao Bingzhen, commissioned in 1689 [Source: Library of Congress, Washington D.C]

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-46 Detail showing silk production, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., London, Ca. 1790 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]



Figure 2-47 Album leaf from the Yuzhi Gengzhi tu, woodblock print, ink on paper, colours added by brush, after the painted album by Jiao Bingzhen (1680-1720), China, dated 1696. [Source: The British Museum ©The Trustees of the British Museum]

The application of groups of images drawn from this album to a continuous wallpaper design, where they are viewed simultaneously and without their accompanying inscriptions, fundamentally altered the presentation and interpretation of those images. While the clear sequence of events is disrupted and truncated, this new mode of presentation facilitated the creation of a visually pleasing sense of unity across the large decorative surface of the wallpaper to offer an immersive viewing experience.

While the primary function of the industry motifs on the wallpaper at Coutts and Co. was decorative, the images derived from a Chinese pictorial tradition which aimed to disseminate technical knowledge, as well as idealised images of Chinese industry and society. Historian, Francesca Bray has argued that the *Gengzhi tu* had, from its very beginnings, a two-fold pedagogical purpose:

First the combined poems and images were thought of as technical descriptions that could circulate images of sophisticated Jiangnan rice-farming and silk-producing methods to less advanced regions. But secondly, they were also valued because they so vividly crystalized iconic scenes of an idealised rural landscape, and of the social and political order that such a landscape was supposed to sustain.⁴⁰

It is clear that this set of images functioned simultaneously as a source of technical knowledge and as an ideal vision of Chinese society. Moreover, as Bray has argued, the appearance of the *Gengzhi tu* in print format and the subsequent

⁴⁰ *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: The Warp and the Weft*, ed. by Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillie (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 550.

application of images taken from the album to a wide variety of media, including Chinese wallpaper, played a key role in enhancing the reach and power of this iconic imagery enabling it to find relevance and appeal in a variety of cultural contexts.⁴¹ Even in the truncated and non-sequential form in which these motifs appeared on the wallpaper at Coutts & Co. the images of production provided some important technical information about Chinese industries with detailed images of tools, technical apparatus, machinery and process.

Precious and Practical: Images of Porcelain Production

Images of porcelain production can be seen on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. (Figure 2-34 and Figure 2-48) and like the images of rice and silk production they are similarly derived from Chinese sources and an established tradition of illustrating porcelain production. Whilst Chinese porcelain was sought after as a prestigious material for decorative and practical usage in Europe images of its production were also of great interest to both Chinese and European audiences, for whom they held technological as well as aesthetic appeal.

In eighteenth-century Europe, the technology surrounding Chinese porcelain production was mysterious and exotic. The recipe for porcelain was not discovered in Europe until the early eighteenth century and part of the attraction

⁴¹ *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: The Warp and the Weft*, ed. by Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillie (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 551.

was the modernity of the production processes, the raw materials, division of labour and mechanisation.⁴²

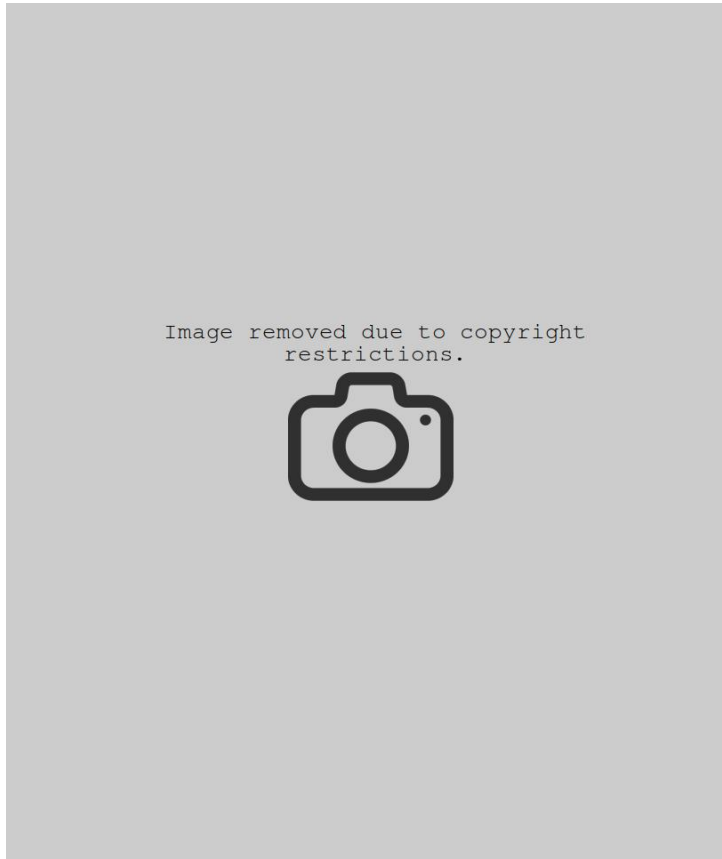


Figure 2-48 Detail showing porcelain production, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., London, Ca. 1790 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]

Desirous for further knowledge of this distinctive material and the technologies surrounding its manufacture, Jesuit missionary Père François Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664-1741) travelled to the centre of China's porcelain industry, Jingdezhen, in South East China, where he lived and documented many details of the industry

⁴² Maxine Berg, 'Macartney's Things. Were They Useful? Knowledge and the Trade to China in the Eighteenth Century', in *GEHN Conference 4 Useful Knowledge* (Leiden: London School of Economics, 2004), pp. 5–7 <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Assets/Documents/Research/GEHN/GEHNConferences/conf4/Conf4-MBerg.pdf>>.

between 1712 and 1723. He produced two reports which were published in the Jesuit missions' annual report, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses de Chine par des missionnaires jésuites* (1702–76) based on his letters written in 1712 and 1722.⁴³ His letters provided information regarding the intricacies of the commercial architecture of the Chinese porcelain industry as well as methods and materials of production. These letters, like the collecting and research activities of Henri-Léonard Bertin, described earlier in this chapter, can be understood as part of the collective endeavours of the European Enlightenment which, among other things, sought to further human understanding of science and technology through empirical research.

The importance of porcelain in Europe was also reflected in its inclusion in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopaedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*, published between 1751-1772, which aimed to summarise the present state of knowledge of the sciences, arts and crafts in several illustrated volumes that were intended to be practically useful and widely accessible.⁴⁴

⁴³ Charles Le Gobien and others, *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses Écrites Des Missions Étrangères*. (Chez J.G. Merigot le jeune, libraire, 1780) <<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100276237>> [accessed 23 September 2018]. Cited in Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métailié, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (p. 108) <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>.

⁴⁴ *Encyclopédie Ou Dictionnaire Raisoné Des Sciences, Des Arts et Des Métiers, Par Une Société de Gens de Lettres*, ed. by Denis Diderot, Second (Paris: Chez les Sociétés typographiques, 1780) <https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_S708cq7i5GAC>.

In China, popular interests in technology and crafts were reflected in the seventeenth century treatise on science and technology, *Tiangongkaiwu* 天工開物 (The Exploitation of the Works of Nature), by Song Yingxing, first published in 1637. This work covers the major industrial technologies of the time including the cultivation of rice, silk, cotton and paper as well as technical processes relating to metals and gems. The simple block printed images which accompanied the text were clear, effective and practical depictions of technical and industrial processes (Figure 2-49).

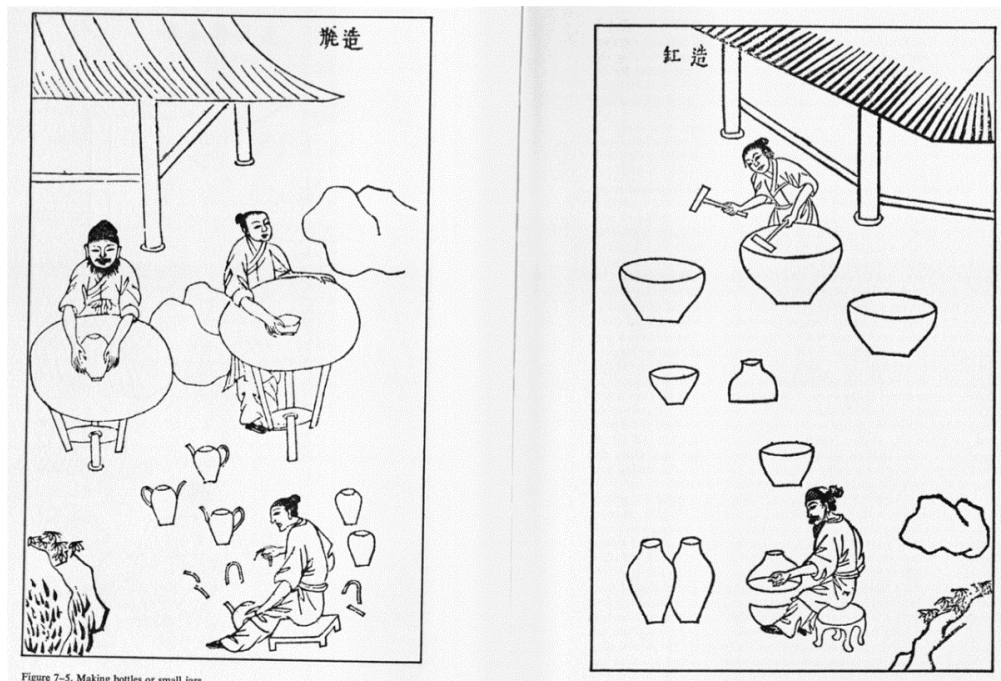


Figure 2-49 Woodblock printed illustrations of ceramic production, *Tiangongkaiwu*, 1637. [Source: Reproduced in *T'ien-Kung K'ai-Wu: Chinese Technology in the 17th century*, by Sung Ying-Hsing Translated by E. Tu Zen Su and Shiou-Chuan Sun, 1966.]

Tiangongkaiwu did not provide a comprehensive description of the production of any one particular ceramic product, but described aspects of the processes used

to make a variety of items such as bricks, tiles and water jars.⁴⁵ As such, *Tiangongkaiwu* did not provide a template for the images of porcelain production seen on Chinese export watercolours and wallpapers, but it represents a tradition of illustrated technical treatises in China and a popular interest in technology.⁴⁶

The depictions of porcelain production seen on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. (Figure 2-34 and Figure 2-48) exhibit a close similarity in style to illustrations presented in a Chinese imperial album known as *Taoye tu* 陶冶图 (Pictures of the porcelain industry). This album comprised twenty image-text pairings and provided an equivalent visual description of the processes of porcelain production to the *Gengzhi tu*'s description of rice and silk production; it was rendered in a similar courtly painting style which exhibited both Chinese and European artistic techniques and conventions. (Figure 2-50 and Figure 2-51).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (p. 18)
<http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>. With thanks to Ming Wilson for discussion and advice regarding the *Tiangongkaiwu*.

⁴⁶ However, copies of *Tiangongkaiwu* were scarce during the Qing period due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in the publication; detailing information about industries with government monopolies as well as information on weapons, particularly firearms. See Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (p. 18)
<http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>.

⁴⁷ Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (p. 108)
<http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>., Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), p. 119.

The illustrations were painted by Chinese court artists Sun Hu, (1728-46), Zhou Kun (1737-48) and Ding Guanpeng (1726-68) around 1730 and the accompanying text was added in 1743 by the supervisor of the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen, Tang Ying (1682-1756) on the orders of the Qianlong Emperor (1735-1796).⁴⁸ Art historian, Ellen Huang notes that the imperial edict received by Tang Ying, ordering him to provide technical explanations to accompany the paintings, refers to this album as *Taoye tu*, the conventional name by which the album is now known.⁴⁹ Huang argues that the word 'ye' in this title '[...] connotes a meaning of cultivation, both in character and care, effectively folding the making of ceramics into a relationship whereby the imperial power was dominant and almost fatherly in nurture and nature'.⁵⁰ In this way *Taoye tu* not only presented a record of the various technical stages of manufacture for porcelain, but symbolised part of a greater imperial interest and influence over Chinese industry.⁵¹ This echoes the

⁴⁸ Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), pp. 159–61. There are three albums in existence which depict porcelain production in sequential fashion and bear the names of Qing Court artists including Jiao Bingzhen the artist responsible for the *Gengzhi tu*. For a discussion regarding the dating of these albums, see Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), pp. 159–61.

⁴⁹ Huang argues that this set of porcelain production paintings, by the name of *Taoye tu*, was probably the first visual depiction of the process at Jingdezhen. See Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), p. 116; *Chinese Art from the Ching Wan Society Collection* (Taipei: Chang Foundation of Chinese Art, 1998), pp. 76–82.

⁵⁰ Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), pp. 158–60.

⁵¹ Huang argues that the illustrations in this album went on to inspire the woodblock printed images of porcelain production that were widely circulated in Zhang Tingui's *Jingdezhen Taolu* 景德镇陶录 (Record of Jingdezhen ceramic production), first printed in 1815. This illustrated text offers an historical record of porcelain production at Jingdezhen, the centre of China's porcelain production industry and was circulated widely throughout China during the nineteenth century and was also translated into French for the benefit of European audiences. Ellen Huang, 'China's

sentiments that were expressed by the images of rice and silk production in the *Gengzhi tu*, already described above.



Figure 2-50 Album leaf showing potters throwing on a wheel taken from the *Taoye tu* commissioned by Emperor Qianlong in 1743, paintings by Sun Hu, (1728-46), Zhou Kun (1737-48) and Ding Guanpeng (1726-68), annotated and compiled by Tang Ying. [Source: Reproduced in Chang Foundation of Chinese Art, *Chinese Art from the Ching Wan Society Collection* (Taipei: Chang Foundation 1998) p.78]



Figure 2-51 Album leaf showing potters preparing glazes taken from the *Taoye tu* commissioned by Emperor Qianlong in 1743, paintings by Sun Hu, (1728-46), Zhou Kun (1737-48) and Ding Guanpeng (1726-68), annotated and compiled by Tang Ying. [Source: Reproduced in Chang Foundation of Chinese Art, *Chinese Art from the Ching Wan Society Collection* (Taipei: Chang Foundation 1998) p. 77]

It is not known if the artisans who painted porcelain production themes on Chinese wallpapers and export watercolours had seen *Taoye tu*, or works based on it. Unlike the *Gengzhi tu*, this imperial album was not reproduced in print format and thus it would not have been accessible to people outside the court.⁵² However, Tang Ying's accompanying textual explanations for the album were circulated beyond court, independently of the album *Taoye tu* after being reproduced almost word for word in Jiangxi official, Zhu Yan's monograph, *Tao Shuo* or "On ceramics", published in 1774.⁵³ Therefore, this text could have been a source of information for the Cantonese painting workshops that were producing Chinese wallpaper after 1774. However, this date of 1774 is late compared to known examples of Chinese wallpaper with industry and porcelain production motifs, suggesting that there may have been other routes through which *Taoye tu* or at least its pictorial themes reached the outside world, or that these themes derived from a different source. It is possible that the artists who painted the album could have disseminated works inspired by the paintings they produced for *Taoye tu* when they worked and travelled outside court. Images based on those presented in *Taoye tu* could also plausibly have been disseminated by Jesuits at court, who had privileged access to imperial collections and were in regular communication with Europeans and Chinese outside court. Jesuit missionaries would also have appreciated how appealing such images would be to European

⁵² Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), p. 117.

⁵³ Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), pp. 117–18.

audiences. The story of exactly how images of porcelain production found their way onto Chinese wallpapers and paintings for export and from what sources they derive remains unclear.⁵⁴

Whilst these images from *Taoye tu* (Figure 2-50 and Figure 2-51) do not provide the near exact matches seen in the earlier comparisons between the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co. and illustrations from the *Gengzhi tu*, they nonetheless demonstrate close similarities in painting style, composition and subject matter when compared with the images of porcelain production presented on the wallpaper at Coutts & Co. Indeed, the style of painting exhibited on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co., particularly the depiction of the figural subjects, suggests that the artisans who painted them were familiar with the Sino-European style of painting, exemplified by the *Gengzhi tu* and *Taoye tu* and suggests that they were familiar

⁵⁴ Huang argues that the illustrations in this album went on to inspire the woodblock printed images of porcelain production that were widely circulated in Zhang Tingui's *Jingdezhen Taolu* 景德镇陶录 (Record of Jingdezhen ceramic production), first printed in 1815. This illustrated text offers an historical record of porcelain production at Jingdezhen, the centre of China's porcelain production industry and was circulated widely throughout China during the nineteenth century and was also translated into French for the benefit of European audiences. Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008), pp. 117–19 & 161. For further discussion see Ellen Huang, 'China's China: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UC San Diego, 2008); Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>.

with some of the western techniques used by the artists of the Qing Court academy.⁵⁵

The Material and Visual Hybridity of Chinese Wallpapers

Both the *Gengzhi tu* and *Taoye tu* are characterised by a hybrid Sino-European painting style which was developed at the Chinese court during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, under the influence of Jesuit missionaries, who imported European images and painting techniques, including realism, chiaroscuro and linear perspective into Chinese modes of artistic representation.⁵⁶ The use of these techniques resulted in a more three dimensional depiction of space, discernible light and shadow and more differentiation in the rendering of physical forms, especially in faces.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The *Gengzhi tu* was widely circulated in colour and monochrome printed editions throughout China during the eighteenth century and would have been familiar to many artists and educated members of Chinese society.

⁵⁶ Jesuit missionaries were present at the Chinese court between 1582-1775. The Jesuits introduced key scientific texts to the Chinese court, among them Andrea Pozzo's *Perspectiva Pictorum et Architectetorum* (Rome 1693). This was translated by court official, Nian Xiyao and published under the title, *Shi Xue* (Study of vision) in 1729 and 1735. See Lihong Liu, 'Shadows in Chinese Art: An Intercultural Perspective', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 190–215 (p. 200). Art historian Kristina Kleutghen has argued that *Shi Xue* was not merely a perspective treatise or translation of Pozzo's work, but moreover a practical manual that demonstrated how to use western illusionistic painting techniques, linear perspective, volumetric representation, foreshortening, shading and cast shadows to depict Chinese subjects and produce a new type of Chinese art. See Kristina Kleutghen, 'From Science to Art: The Evolution of Linear Perspective in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Art', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), p. 177.

⁵⁷ Richard E. Strassberg, 'War and Peace: Four Intercultural Landscapes', in *China on Paper*, ed. by M Reed and P Dematté (Los Angeles: The Getty Reseach Institute, 2007), pp. 89–137 (p. 90).

The use of western artistic techniques by Chinese artists led to the creation of a new kind of Chinese painting in which perspectival space, volumetric modelling and shading were applied to Chinese *Gongbi* (meticulous brush) style painting.⁵⁸ *Gongbi* painting was characterised by a precise, naturalistic style which used fine ink outlines and colours to reproduce a variety of subject matter in great detail.⁵⁹ This hybrid style characterised many official court paintings produced during the Qing period, such as Xu Yang's famous depictions of the Qianlong Emperor's 1751 tour of southern China, recorded in 12 scrolls and completed in 1770 (Figure 2-52). Figure 2-53 shows a detail from the sixth scroll in this set, which records the emperor's arrival in Suzhou in spectacular detail.⁶⁰ It exhibits confident use of perspectival techniques, especially in the architectural details and provides tangible evidence of the cultural engagement between China and Europe during this period.

⁵⁸ Lihong Liu, 'Shadows in Chinese Art: An Intercultural Perspective', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 190–215 (p. 200).

⁵⁹ Lihong Liu, 'Shadows in Chinese Art: An Intercultural Perspective', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 190–215 (p. 200)., *How a Silk Painting Was Made* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2012)
<<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/masterpieces-of-chinese-painting/video-how-a-silk-painting-was-made/>> [accessed 23 September 2017].

⁶⁰ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/41493>

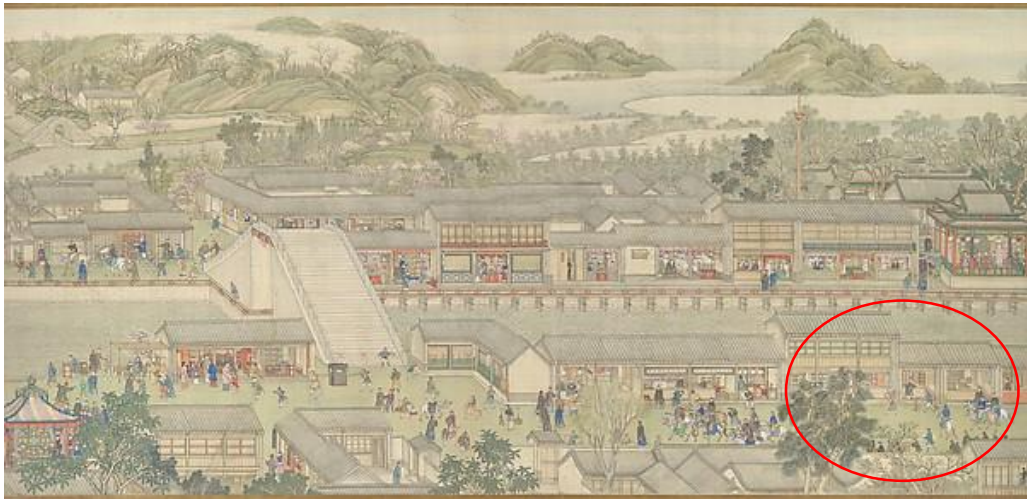


Figure 2-52 Xu Yang (act. ca.1750 - after 1776) and assistants, *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou and the Grand Canal*, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), dated 1770, Handscroll; ink and colour on silk. [Source: The Metropolitan Museum, New York]



Figure 2-53 Detail from scroll 6, Xu Yang (act. ca.1750 - after 1776) and assistants, *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou and the Grand Canal*, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), dated 1770, Handscroll; ink and colour on silk. [Source: The Metropolitan Museum, New York. Photograph taken by Anna Wu, March 2016]

These western techniques filtered down from the Chinese court to artisans who created works for both the Chinese domestic market and global export markets and they became evident in a genre of popular Chinese prints, commonly known as Suzhou prints, which emerged in the early eighteenth century in the districts of

Taohuawu and Shantang, in the city of Suzhou.⁶¹ These Suzhou prints depicted figural and architectural subjects with the use of western artistic techniques including linear perspective, chiaroscuro and cast shadows to create products that would have appeared quite exotic to Chinese audiences (Figure 2-54).⁶² The influence of western artistic techniques was also evident in Chinese export paintings and wallpapers, particularly those with figural and landscape subjects.

⁶¹ Hiromitsu Kobayashi, 'Suzhou Prints and Western Perspective', in *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, ed. by John W O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 217.

⁶² Mayching Kao, 'European Influences in Chinese Art, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univeristy Press, 1991), pp. 221–50. For a detailed account of the adoption of Western artistic techniques in Chinese painting and print making during the Qing period see James Cahill, 'Adoptions from the West', in *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 67–98.



Figure 2-54 *Baizi tu* (One hundred Children), Hanging scroll; multi-coloured woodblock print made from three blocks, some colours applied with stencils and a brush. Print artist: Yungu Print made by: Zhang Xingju, 1743, Suzhou, China. [Source: © Trustees of the British Museum]

While both the *Gengzhi tu* and *Taoye tu* demonstrate a high level of skill in the way in which they synthesised Chinese materials with Chinese and western painting traditions, the integration of these influences is not realised to the same degree on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. The use of perspective is evident only in some sections of the composition, such as that shown in Figure 2-55, where the artisans have depicted buildings and figures of diminishing size, and in the detail shown in Figure 2-56, which exhibits some knowledge of single point perspective, but these techniques are not confidently or consistently employed across the whole composition.

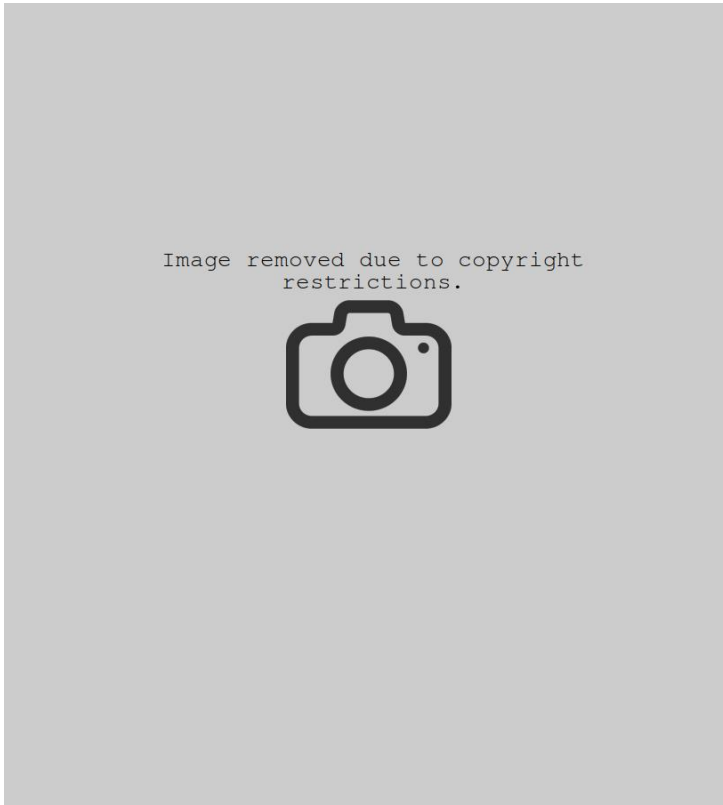


Figure 2-55 Detail showing the south wall, board room Coutts & Co., London [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

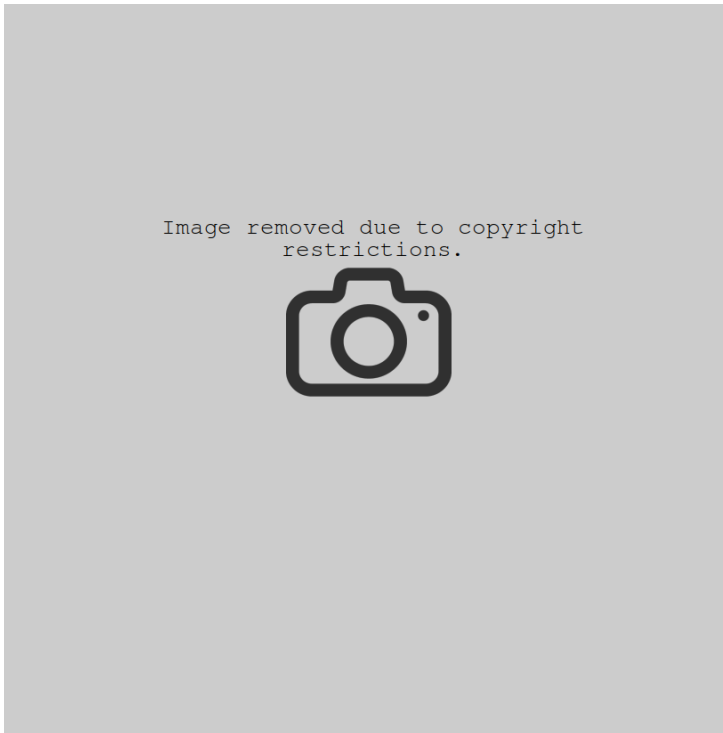


Figure 2-56 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., London, ca. 1790s [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

While the Sino-European painting style had fallen out of favour at the Chinese court by the end of the eighteenth century it continued to thrive after this period in export art.⁶³ Professor of Chinese studies, Richard Strassberg suggests that the style did not take root in courtly or mainstream canons of Chinese artistic production because, 'traditional painting methods and imagination (exemplified by the *xieyi* or 'free', style) were valued more than accuracy by Chinese consumers'.⁶⁴ The success of the style within the export genre of painting was likely based, at least in part, on the relative accuracy of their depictions, which facilitated the multiple function of export paintings as pseudo-documentary images, conduits of knowledge and images of the exotic other.

The artisans who produced wallpapers and paintings for export were very responsive to European demands and preferences for specific pictorial subject matter as well as styles of painting. This fact is particularly well illustrated by the inclusion of images of the cultivation and processing of tea on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. (Figure 2-57) as this subject matter, unlike depictions of rice, silk and porcelain production, had no comparable tradition of illustration in China.⁶⁵

⁶³ Richard E. Strassberg, 'War and Peace: Four Intercultural Landscapes', in *China on Paper*, ed. by M Reed and P Dematté (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007), pp. 89–137 (p. 90).

⁶⁴ Richard E. Strassberg, 'War and Peace: Four Intercultural Landscapes', in *China on Paper*, ed. by M Reed and P Dematté (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2007), pp. 89–137 (p. 90).

⁶⁵ Günther Berger, Takeshi Watabe, and Georges Métaillé, 'Une Chinoiserie Insolite: Étude d'un Papier Peint Chinois', *Arts Asiatiques*, 51 (1996), 96–116 (p. 104) <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arasi_0004-3958_1996_num_51_1_1388>. Berger et al note that the *Cha jing* or *Classic of Tea*, written by Lü Yu between 758 and 761, advocated the creation of a series of paintings to hang on the wall to

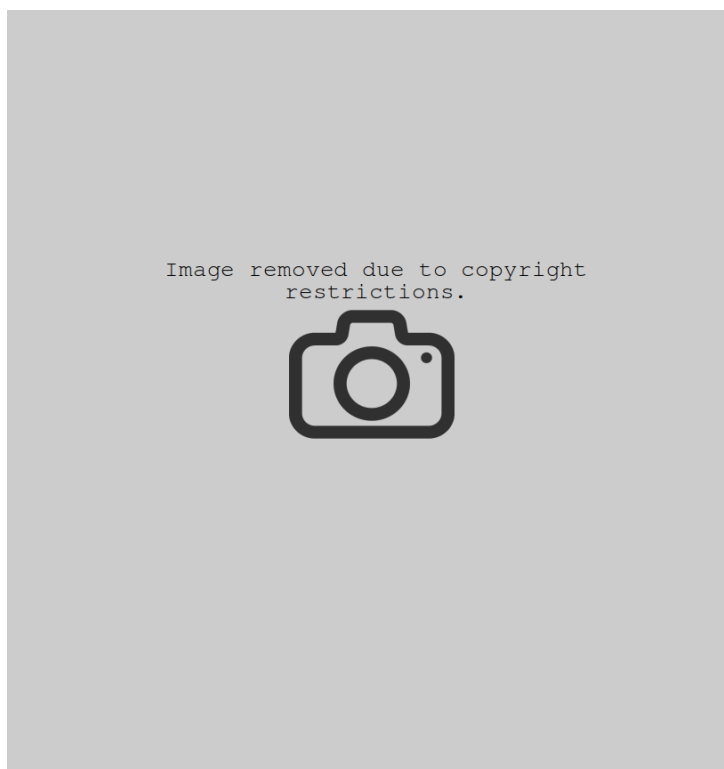


Figure 2-57 Detail showing tea production, Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., London, ca. 1790s [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

Images of Tea Production: Local Responses to Global Markets

The appearance of images of tea production as a decorative motif on Chinese wallpapers coincided with the emergence of the specific genre of export painting in China, during the first half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Many of the motifs

provide, at a glance, all there is to know about the production of tea, though there is no evidence of the existence of such a work.

⁶⁶ Jr Choi, Kee Il, 'Tea and Design in Chinese Export Painting', *Antiques* (New York, October 1998), 510–19 (p. 511).

presented on Chinese, industry themed wallpapers (Figure 2-58) were also popular subjects for Chinese export paintings (Figure 2-59).⁶⁷



Figure 2-58 Detail of Chinese wallpaper showing men watering tea plants, Chinese Bedroom, Saltram House, near Plymouth, Devon, ca. 1760 [Source: ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel]

⁶⁷ Ming Wilson and Liu Zhiwei, *Souvenir from Canton: Chinese Export Paintings from the V&A*, ed. by Ming Wilson (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2003), p. 10.



Figure 2-59 A man watering tea plants, attributed to Chinese artist Puqua, watercolour and ink on paper, ca. 1795 [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

At the time of Macartney's embassy to China, between 1792-1794, tea was the most valuable and thereby important commodity handled by the East India Company and much like porcelain, the details of its production were of great interest to the embassy and the British East India Company at large. Papers relating to Macartney's embassy to China, held in the East India Company archives, show that the directors of the East India Company, who financed the British diplomatic mission, gave Macartney explicit instructions to collect information about the production and processing of China's key export products; namely tea, silk, porcelain and cotton.

In a letter to the Chairman and deputy chairman of the East India Company, dated 23rd December, 1793 Macartney reported on his efforts to meet their requests for information. He wrote:

I have succeeded in obtaining his permission (Viceroy of Canton) to send in search of some of the tea plants of which I have now in my possession several young growing trees, as well as several seeds fit for growth; (...) among your instructions you mention how extremely desirable it would be that tea could be produced within the territories of the company in India; and you recommend the circumstance in the strongest manner to my attention (...). I perfectly concur with you in thinking on how many accounts it would be desirable to raise that plant in plenty and perfection in parts belonging to yourselves and independent of Chinese dominions. I indulge myself therefore with the pleasure of foreseeing to what considerable plantations the few nurslings I have been able to procure may give rise in future, if managed with care and skill.⁶⁸

The use of the tea motif on industry type wallpapers, in combination with established motifs of rice growing, silk and porcelain production, not only points to the importance of tea as a trade product and a social fixture in Europe, but also highlights the responsiveness of Chinese artisans to European demands for new and specific imagery on Chinese wallpapers and export paintings. In this way, they exemplify the way in which global markets exerted influence on the work of local crafts people and fostered the creation of cultural hybrids and demonstrate how

⁶⁸ Earl Macartney, George, 'Letter from Macartney to the Chair and Deputy at Canton, 23 December, 1793.' (British Library; India Office Records (BL:IOR) Factory Records. China and Japan; G/12/92, 1793), pp. 207–8.

Chinese export paintings and wallpapers were directly affected by a global network of influences.

In addition to visualising China's key industries Chinese wallpapers also fed a general European interest in scenes of Chinese life and landscape with detailed depictions of street life and with that details of dress and the activities of daily life.

The Exotic and the Ordinary: Images of Everyday Life in Eighteenth Century China

The wallpaper at Coutts & Co. features vibrant images of street life in the foreground. It depicts figures at leisure, men making ritual offerings, tea merchants selling their goods and a street theatre performance in action (Figure 2-28, Figure 2-29, Figure 2-32 and Figure 2-71). While such images became staple subjects of the new genre of Chinese export painting they also reflect a longstanding tradition of illustrating commerce and street life within Chinese visual culture. The mercantile scene shown in the foreground of the wallpaper (Figure 2-32) is reminiscent of two renowned Chinese paintings in hand scroll format; 'Peace Reigns on the River' (Figure 2-60) created by Zhang Zeduan (act. early twelfth century) in the twelfth century and 'Prosperous Suzhou' (Figure 2-61) by Xu Yang (1712-c.1779), completed in 1759.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Koon argues that Zhang's painting became an important prototype for the depiction of other cities, relating that after his first southern inspection tour in 1741 the Qianlong emperor commissioned a version of *Qingming shanghe tu* adapted to the city of Suzhou, which became a famous painting known as 'Prosperous Suzhou.' Yeewan Koon, 'Narrating the City: Pu Qua and the Depiction of Street Life in Canton', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The*

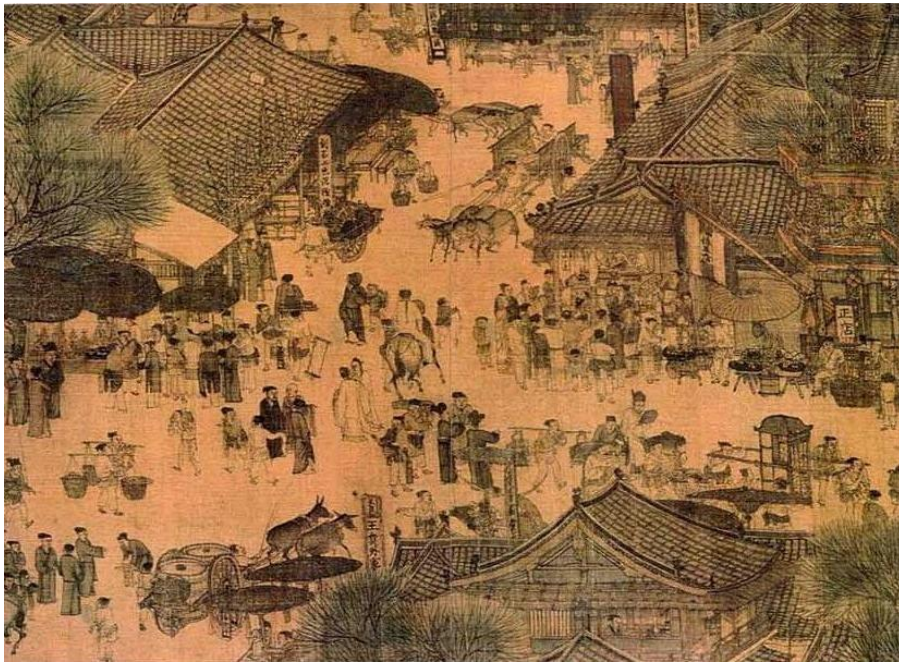


Figure 2-60 Detail from *Peace Reigns Along the River*, 12th century, attributed to Zhang Zeduan, handscroll, Ink and colour on silk. [Source: © Palace Museum, Beijing]



Figure 2-61 Detail from *Prosperous Suzhou*, completed in 1759 by Xu Yang, handscroll, Ink and colour on silk. [Source: © Liaoning Provincial Museum]

These scrolls bring to life the commercial activities of the Northern Song (960-1127) capital Bianliang (now Kaifeng) and the southern city of Suzhou during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, respectively.⁷⁰ They offer a clear precedent for the subject matter and the style in which the street scenes on the wallpaper at Coutts & Co are depicted, though the quality of the painting on the handscrolls is greatly superior to that seen on the wallpapers. They also offer a comparable viewer experience, despite the difference in format, with their continuous panoramic effects and the unique bird's eye view perspective which appears to have no fixed point, allowing the viewer to enter into each scene at will.⁷¹

Such images of everyday life were also represented by a category of Chinese painting known as *fengsu hua* or 'genre painting', a populist Chinese artistic tradition which directly inspired Chinese products for export, including pictorial wallpapers and paintings, satisfying a demand for images of Chinese people, their

⁷⁰ 'Prosperous Suzhou' was painted in the imperial workshops at the Forbidden City in Beijing, commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-96). The scroll was not intended for public display and would have been seen by the Emperor and only a small number of other people. See Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 310. As such I am not arguing that this painting was a direct source of inspiration for the artisans who painted the street scenes seen on Chinese wallpapers and export watercolours, only that a tradition of depicting mercantile activities was already established as a subject in Chinese painting at the time the wallpaper was produced.

⁷¹ These paintings would not have been accessible to the general public, professional artisans or anyone outside the inner most circles of the Chinese Court; they were the preserve of the ruling elite. However, paintings and prints of similar subjects were widely circulated throughout Chinese society from the early eighteenth century in the form of printed New Year pictures known as *Nianhua*. These were produced in great numbers in the print workshops of Suzhou and Tianjin. These colourful prints with auspicious and positive imagery were used to decorate the homes of ordinary people at New Year. In addition to scenes of daily life showing domestic life, farming and cottage industries other popular motifs were Gods of folk religions, symbols of good fortune and happiness such as bats, peaches and fish. See Tsien Tsuen-Hsuei, 'Science and Civilisation in China. Vol. 5, Chemistry and Chemical Technology', ed. by Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), v, 116–32.

dress and occupations in the west. This type of painting is exemplified by an album known as *Taiping huanle tu* or 'Pictures of Peace and Joy', (Figure 2-62), attributed to Fang Xun (1736-99). The album was presented to the Qianlong emperor by a Zhejiang official named Jin Deyu (1750-1800) during an official tour in the Jiangnan region, south of the Yangtze in 1779.⁷² It depicts peddlers of various kinds of merchandise, from vegetables and fruits to clothing and kitchen utensils, depicted in the *gong bi* or 'meticulous' style that was also characteristic of Chinese export paintings.⁷³



Figure 2-62 Reprint of lithograph after Dong Qi (1771-1844), *Butcher*, 1831. From *Taiping huanle tu*. [Source: Reproduced in Yeewan Koon 'Narrating the City', *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West* (2015), p. 225]

⁷² Yeewan Koon, 'Narrating the City: Pu Qua and the Depiction of Street Life in Canton', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidj Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 216–31 (pp. 224–25).

⁷³ Ming Wilson, 'As True as Photographs: Chinese Paintings for the Western Market', *Orientalism*, 31 (2000), 89–93 (p. 90). and Yeewan Koon, 'Narrating the City: Pu Qua and the Depiction of Street Life in Canton', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidj Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 216–31 (p. 224).

From the late eighteenth century, through the nineteenth century, numerous Chinese artisans produced watercolour paintings which represented the subjects of everyday life in China. The name Pu Qua is often associated with paintings of Chinese trades and occupations and is a name which is frequently attributed to Chinese export paintings dating to the late eighteenth century, though no actual work that can be firmly attributed to an artist known as Pu Qua has come to light as yet.⁷⁴ The clear correlations between eighteenth century Chinese export paintings and eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers, in terms of subject and style, suggests a close working practice between those who painted these works, if indeed they were not actually produced by the very same people. Figure 2-63 and Figure 2-65 show details from the Chinese wallpapers hung in the Chinese bedroom at Wrest Park, in Bedfordshire, England, which date to around 1792. The details depict a butcher and a soft bean curd seller respectively. Figure 2-64 and Figure 2-66 show the same subjects depicted in watercolour paintings attributed to the artist Pu Qua and dated to around 1790.

⁷⁴ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: V&A Publications, 1984), p. 34.



Figure 2-63 Detail from the Chinese wallpapers in the Chinese bedroom at Wrest Park depicting an itinerant butcher, Bedfordshire, ca 1792. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, August 2012.]



Figure 2-64 Chinese export watercolour painting depicting an itinerant butcher, attributed to Pu Qua studio, ca 1970. [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]



Figure 2-65 Detail from the Chinese wallpapers in the Chinese bedroom at Wrest Park showing a seller of soft bean curd, Bedfordshire, ca 1792. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, August 2012.]



Figure 2-66 Chinese export watercolour painting depicting a seller of soft bean curd, ca. 1970 [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

Chinese export watercolours and Chinese wallpapers appear to have much in common in terms of their subject matter and style of execution. However, export watercolours, which were generally available as either small single leaves or albums, were significantly more affordable and therefore relatively accessible. Chinese wallpapers by comparison were a true luxury; they were expensive to purchase and to hang and they potentially required a vast space for display. They were therefore accessible to only a privileged few. Furthermore, compared to watercolour paintings Chinese wallpapers offered a completely unique visual experience; presenting a wide variety of subjects simultaneously as part of an all-enveloping panorama. Regardless of scale or expense both export paintings and wallpaper provided a much desired view of China's remote culture, society and industry for audiences in the western world.

Chinese Wallpaper, Knowledge and Reality

European travel to China and within China remained restricted throughout the eighteenth century and in the absence of direct personal experience Chinese wallpapers, export watercolours and illustrated travelogues fulfilled European desires to learn more about China and to visualise its landscapes and people.

However, art historian Craig Clunas has argued:

It seems not too far-fetched to suggest that a country facing the strains of its own industrial revolution was less interested in what China really looked like than it was in establishing a fantasy Orient far away which could be admired or deplored, but which

could be manipulated to suit its own needs regardless of how China's real inhabitants live and work.⁷⁵

While visualising a fantastical orient was undoubtedly one of the functions of the images of China presented in export watercolours and wallpapers, to consider these works solely in this context of 'Othering', is to overlook their practical functionality as valuable insights into Chinese life, society, art and cultural traditions.⁷⁶

Despite the romanticised and idealised nature of many of the illustrations of everyday life and industry, the images presented on export watercolours and wallpapers, such as those at Coutts & Co. did convey some accurate information about Chinese culture and industry, as argued by curator Ming Wilson in her article, 'True as Photographs: Chinese Painting For The Western Market'.⁷⁷ While the working conditions depicted do not document the hardship and filth that many people who were involved in industry experienced, many of them provide fairly representative depictions of street life, production set ups and production processes. This idea is supported by a comparison of recent photographs of street life (Figure 2-66 and

⁷⁵ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: V&A Publications, 1984), pp. 28–29.

⁷⁶ For supporting discussion of the documentary function and value of information presented in Chinese export paintings see Ming Wilson, 'As True as Photographs: Chinese Paintings for the Western Market', *Orientalism*, 31 (2000), 89–93.

⁷⁷ See Ming Wilson, 'As True as Photographs: Chinese Paintings for the Western Market', *Orientalism*, 31 (2000), 89–93 (p. 90).

Figure 2-67), and porcelain workshops (Figure 2-68) in twenty-first century Jingdezhen and the same subject matter as portrayed in the eighteenth century, on the wallpapers at Wrest Park (Figure 2-65) Coutts & Co. (Figure 2-69) and in *Taoye tu* (Figure 2-70).



Figure 2-67 Man transporting porcelain in Jingdezhen, China [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, May 2011]



Figure 2-68 Porcelain workshop in Jingdezhen, China. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, May 2011]

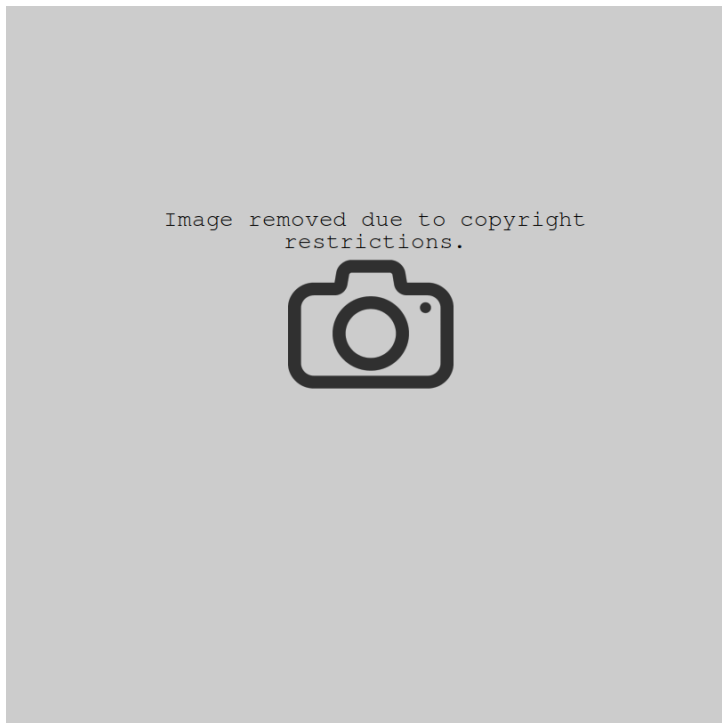


Figure 2-69 Detail showing porcelain production, Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co., London, Ca. 1790 [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co]



Figure 2-70 Album leaf showing potters throwing on a wheel taken from the *Taoye tu* commissioned by Emperor Qianlong in 1743, paintings by Sun Hu, (1728-46), Zhou Kun (1737-48) and Ding Guanpeng (1726-68), annotated and compiled by Tang Ying. [Source: Reproduced in Chang Foundation of Chinese Art, *Chinese Art from the Ching Wan Society Collection* (Taipei: Chang Foundation 1998) p.78]

Chinese wallpapers and export paintings also provided information about personal modes of dress, as already discussed earlier in this chapter, and local

architecture. An outdoor theatre, depicted on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co., exhibits the distinctive Huizhou architectural style of Southern China (Figure 2-71).⁷⁸ Outdoor stages were an architectural feature that was specific to the southern regions of China and the stage depicted on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. bears close resemblance to surviving examples of Ming and Qing period stages in Southern China today (Figure 2-72). Clear similarities are also evident between these stages and the stage shown in a detail from the aforementioned painted handscroll 'Entering Suzhou and the Grand Canal' from the painted series entitled, 'The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour', completed in 1770 by Xu Yang (Figure 2-73). Images of China as depicted in export paintings and wallpaper were representative of China's social, cultural, industrial and intellectual landscape, albeit in an idealised fashion, but it is clear from these examples that they were not merely a fantasy of the Orient.

⁷⁸ Huizhou is the mountainous region in the south of Anhui province, bordering the north of Jiangxi province

Image removed due to copyright
restrictions.



*Figure 2-71 Detail showing an outdoor stage from the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co. London
[Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of
Coutts & Co.]*



Figure 2-72 Outdoor stage in Zhouzhang, Jiangsu Province, China. [Source: Reproduced in Knapp, R. *Chinese Houses*, 2005. Photograph © Andrew Chester Ong. p.124]

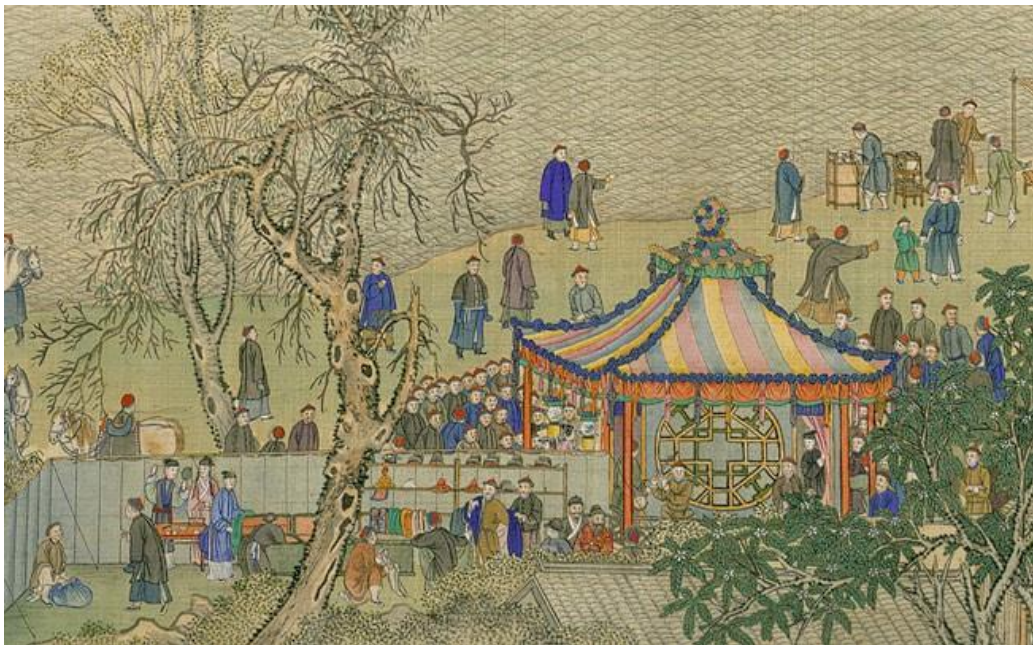


Figure 2-73 Detail showing the rear of an outdoor stage from *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou and the Grand Canal*, dated 1770, by Xu Yang (active ca. 1750–76), Handscroll: ink and colour on silk. [Source: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.]

While Chinese export paintings and wallpapers offered a wealth of visual information about Chinese life, society and industry it is clear that these visual sources did have limitations and could not be relied upon to provide complete or entirely accurate information about technical and industrial processes in particular. It has already been noted that the illustrations showing the manufacture of rice, tea, silk and porcelain found on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. depict only parts of the manufacturing process for each of these products, and in no clear sequential order. In addition, there are also inaccuracies in the depictions of some equipment; a prime example being the aforementioned porcelain kilns, which on the Coutts & Co. wallpapers (

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 2-74) and a Chinese export watercolour of similar date (and Figure 2-75), are erroneously depicted as tall and narrow, individual firing chambers with domed tops.⁷⁹

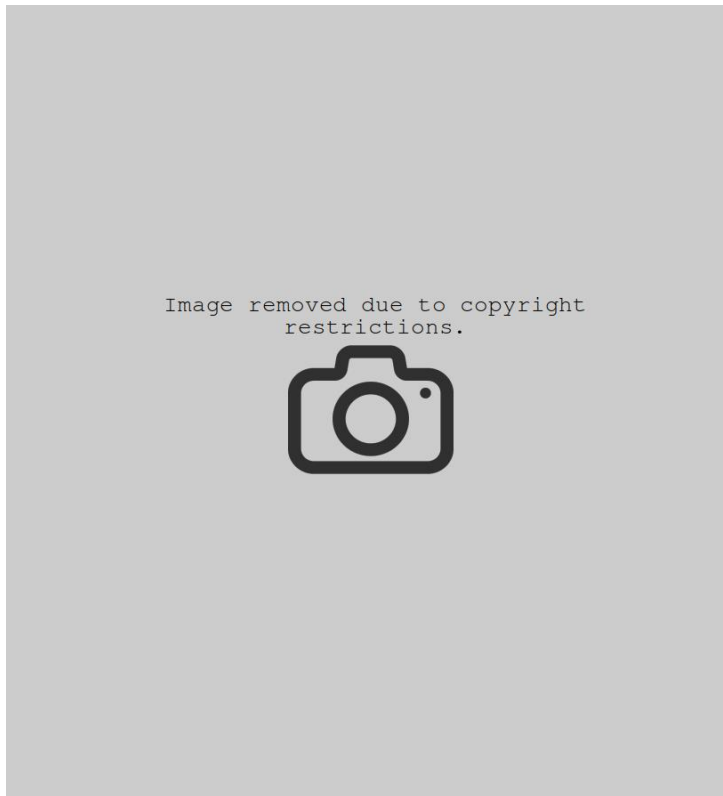


Figure 2-74 Detail showing porcelain kilns from the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts & Co. London. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, November 2012. Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

⁷⁹ Peter. K Lam, 'Porcelain Manufacture Illustrations of the Qing Dynasty', 2011 <<http://www.gzam.com.cn/sitecn/yjlw/3241.html>> [accessed 9 July 2013].



Figure 2-75 Watercolour showing workers unloading porcelain kilns, China, Ca. 1770-90. [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

In an essay on the subject of depictions of porcelain manufacture in the Qing period, Professor of Chinese studies, Peter Lam, argues that this mistake in depicting kilns was common among the painters of Chinese export painting and he notes that, not only did kilns of this shape never exist in China, but that they never existed in East Asia.⁸⁰ The most common kiln types used in China during the late eighteenth century were the egg kiln (Figure 2-76) and the dragon kiln. The former, were shaped like an egg lying on its side with a vertical chimney stack protruding from the narrow end. The main body of the egg kiln was often covered with a wooden shelter (Figure 2-77), which Peter Lam argues prevented a clear view of the kiln structure and led to fabricated depictions of kilns by export painters in Guangzhou. The dragon kiln was of a long tunnel structure containing

⁸⁰ Peter K. Lam, 'Porcelain Manufacture Illustrations of the Qing Dynasty', 2011 <<http://www.gzam.com.cn/sitecn/yjlw/3241.html>> [accessed 9 July 2013].

multiple firing chambers built up a hillside. Lam also points out that, 'The studios responsible for the output of the export illustrations were all run by Cantonese in Guangzhou. Very few, if not none, of these painters had been to Jingdezhen.'⁸¹ Consequently, Cantonese painters had little or no idea what the kilns actually looked like.

This technical inaccuracy draws attention to the powerful agency that Cantonese artisans exercised when representing the specific detail of manufacturing processes. It demonstrates that where artisans lacked specific technical knowledge they applied artistic license, approximating and fabricating their depictions of certain key apparatus.

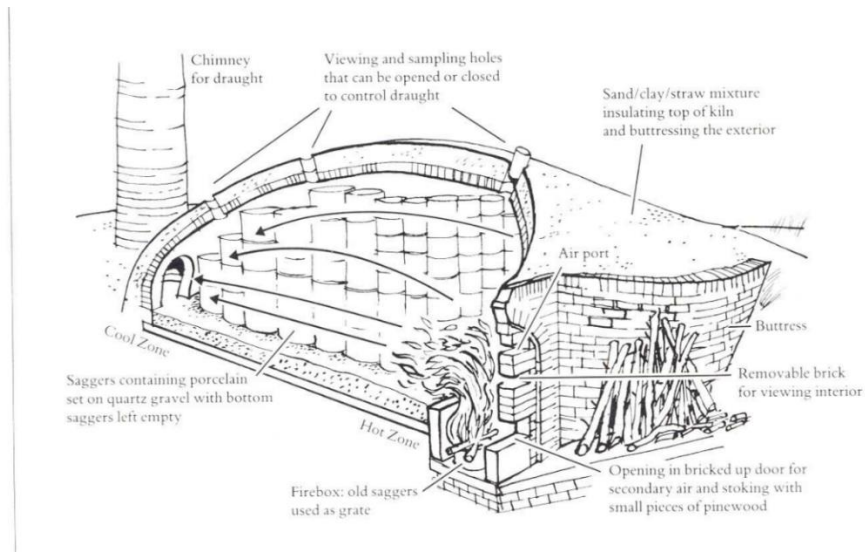


Figure 2-76 Diagram of a Chinese 'Egg' kiln. [Source: Reproduced in ceramics gallery, room 143, Victoria and Albert Museum. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

⁸¹ Peter K. Lam, 'Porcelain Manufacture Illustrations of the Qing Dynasty', 2011 <<http://www.gzam.com.cn/sitecn/yjlw/3241.html>> [accessed 9 July 2013].



Figure 2-77 Album leaf showing an 'egg kiln', taken from *Taoye tu* commissioned by Emperor Qianlong in 1743, paintings by Sun Hu, (1728-46), Zhou Kun (1737-48) and Ding Guanpeng (1726-68), annotated and compiled by Tang Ying. [Source: Reproduced in *Chinese Art from the Ching Wan Society Collection*, Chang Foundation, 1998) p.81.]

While Chinese wallpapers did not provide complete, or wholly accurate, technical information about Chinese industrial processes they did offer valuable technical, and cultural insight. Moreover, they represented the *desire* for knowledge about China and a mutual Sino-European interest in possessing visual records of Chinese industry, technologies, society and culture. In this way, the images on the wallpapers at Coutts & Co. relate a complex picture of realities and ideals.

Picturing Ideals and Imperial Aspirations

At the time of Macartney's embassy, access to China was limited to the port of Guangzhou (Canton) and opportunities to travel into the Chinese interior were exceptionally rare. Consequently, an important part of the embassy's mandate was to document topography, industry, agriculture and customs of dress. Two draughtsmen, Thomas Hickey (1741-1824) and William Alexander (1767-1816)

were appointed to the embassy and tasked with producing visual records of these subjects as well as documenting the formal diplomatic events that took place during the embassy. However, this was a challenging task as the embassy was so tightly managed by Chinese officials. While they were in the capital, Beijing (Pekin or Peking), the British embassy were confined to their quarters and neither of the two draughtsmen were permitted to accompany Macartney to his personal audience with the Qianlong Emperor at Jehol, just outside the capital.⁸² The physical restrictions experienced by the embassy in China reflected the broader trade restrictions that were also imposed on the British East India Company in China at this time.

Macartney went to China seeking to improve trade conditions; to open new ports, secure reduced tariffs and open up Chinese markets to British manufactures, though he ultimately failed to achieve any of these goals. In light of the failure of the mission Macartney's supposed gift of a set of Chinese wallpapers with industry themes and images of desirable Chinese trade commodities to Thomas Coutts may seem ironic, but they can still be understood as representative of an ideal; an image of commercial ideals in terms of British imperial aspirations in China. When hung in sequence the wallpapers created an immersive space in which visitors could wander freely and enjoy a feeling of full access to China, its

⁸² Frances Wood, 'Closely Observed China: From William Alexander's Sketches to His Published Work', *The British Library Journal*, 24.Spring (1998), 98–121 (pp. 98–99).

trade goods and trade secrets (i.e. details of manufacturing processes). It offered British viewers agency in a place where in reality they had none.

The panorama presented by the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts and Co. offers an intriguing parallel to the frontispiece published in Sir George Leonard Staunton's (1737-1801) account of the Macartney embassy, *An Authentic account of an embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (1797).⁸³ The printed engraving shows a European woman in diaphanous robes pulling back a curtain to reveal a view of the Chinese landscape while the emperor makes a gesture of invitation towards Macartney (Figure 2-78).

⁸³ George Staunton, *An Authentic Account of An Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China (...)* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co. for G. Nicol, 1797) <<https://archive.org/details/anauthenticacco00gowegoog>>.

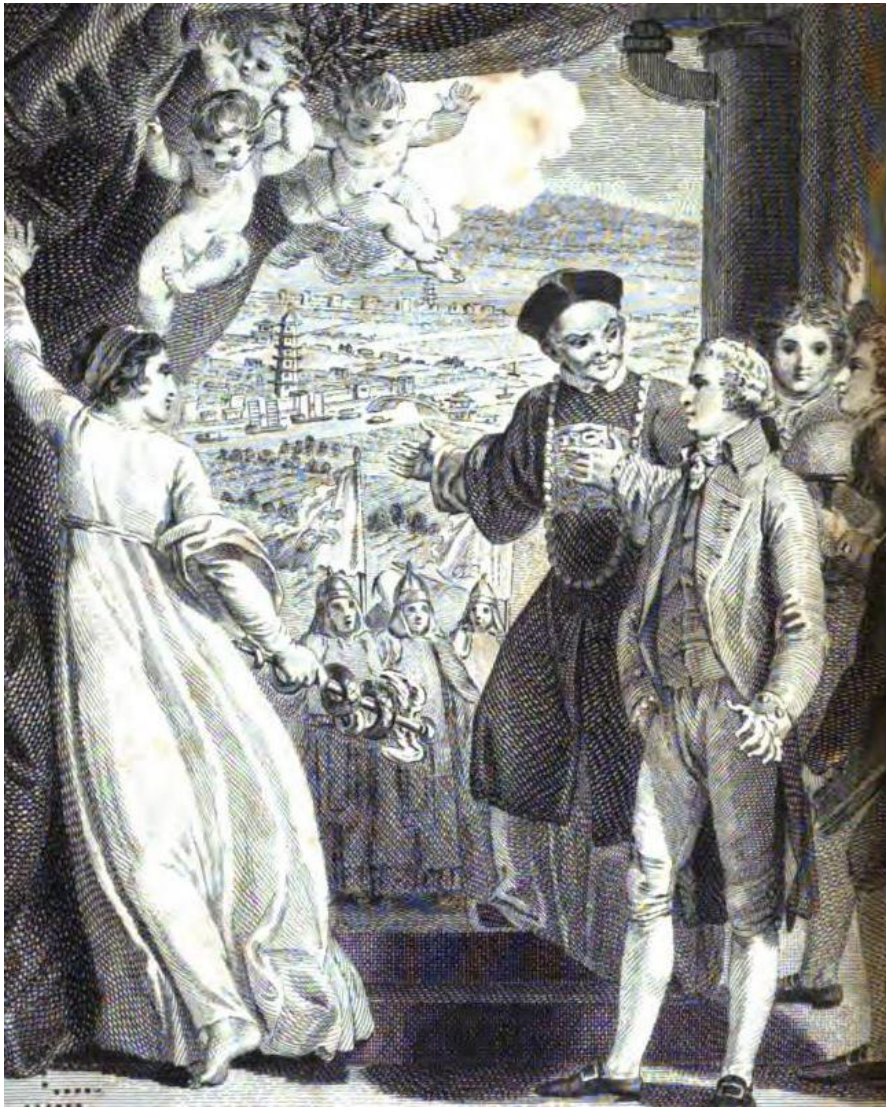


Figure 2-78 'The Earl Macartney's Entrance to China', Charles Grignion (1716-1810 after Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), 1797. [Source: Sir George Staunton, *An Historical Account of the Embassy to the Emperor of China*, 1797 <https://archive.org/stream/anhistoricalacc00staugoog#page/n5/mode/2up/search/frontispiece.>]

Art historian, Stacey Sloboda has argued that this image captured 'the desired end goals of the embassy: to be offered free admission to a legible Chinese civilisation through the guise of commerce.'⁸⁴ As such, it functioned as an image of an ideal state of affairs.

⁸⁴ Stacey Sloboda, 'Picturing China: William Alexander and the Visual Language of Chinoiserie', *British Art Journal*, 9.2 (2008), 28–36 (p. 34).

In both China and Europe, the images presented on industry themed wallpapers represented realities relating to Chinese industries, life and society. At the same time, these images represented romanticised ideals. In this way this set of images simultaneously functioned as a site of knowledge production and as a site on which specific ideals were visualised and projected.

Global and Local: Chinese Wallpaper and the Coutts & Co. Brand

While evidence suggests that Chinese wallpapers were made exclusively for export markets it is clear that established traditions of Chinese visual culture provided the source for many of the subjects and specific compositions seen on Chinese wallpaper, as described earlier in this chapter. While these images were admired in Europe it is unlikely that their specific cultural origins and significance would have been recognised or understood, particularly because knowledge of Chinese painting and visual culture in Europe was very limited until the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ As such, the images that were transferred to Europe on wallpapers and other export goods were subject to cultural translation and new interpretations, serving functions beyond what was intended by those who originally commissioned and created them. In particular, images of Chinese life and industry had specific value and significance for those Europeans who were professionally engaged and financially invested in the China trade. The use of

⁸⁵ Craig Clunas, 'Oriental Antiquities/Far Eastern Art', in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. by Tani Barlow (Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 323–24.

Chinese wallpapers by these individuals and sometimes their larger family networks, was arguably an expression of professional identity and related the importance of China and the China trade to their lives and livelihoods.⁸⁶ Thomas Coutts, after whom two East Indiamen (East India Company trade ships) were named, can be counted among those figures who had significant professional and financial interests in the China trade and displayed Chinese wallpapers with industry themes in their homes.⁸⁷ The Chinese wallpapers displayed at Coutts & Co. have also come to represent broader local *and* global histories. They represent Thomas Coutts and his friendship with Earl Macartney, as well as their mutual professional interests in China. They also represent Sino-British trade and diplomatic relations at a pivotal moment in Sino-British affairs, desirable Chinese trade products and Chinese visual culture.

Since their acquisition in the late eighteenth century, the Chinese wallpapers have acquired new values based on their local history at the bank and through a merging of person and object biography they have become synonymous with Thomas Coutts and the Coutts banking brand.

⁸⁶ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: From Canton to the Country House', in *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp. 39–67 (pp. 51–57) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/the-east-india-company-at-home>>.

⁸⁷ 'Thomas Coutts' and 'Coutts' are recorded in paintings and prints in the collections of London's National Maritime Museum at Greenwich (Object ID BHC3664) and Coutts private archives respectively. With thanks to Tracey Earl for bringing this information to my attention.

At Coutts & Co. the Chinese wallpapers had a practical function as luxury interior decoration and importantly for Thomas Coutts, as a self-made man, they represented an aristocratic decorative idiom. Displayed prominently at his London home they conveyed wealth, social status and global connections. The myth of their connection with the Macartney embassy has added further value and appeal to this particular set of wallpapers and this supposed provenance is now commonly recorded as fact in publications relating to the life of Thomas Coutts and the history of Coutts & Co.⁸⁸

The biography of this wallpaper relates the story of an evolving set of values and a transformation in status; from fashionable, contemporary decorative device to an historic object, which became symbolic of the bank's heritage and has acted as a tangible connection to Thomas Coutts. Treated as a treasured chattel of the Coutts family the wallpapers have been moved, with great difficulty and expense,

⁸⁸ The idea that the wallpapers were gifted to Thomas Coutts by Earl Macartney, following his embassy to China has been quoted as fact in numerous publications and is now widely accepted as such despite the lack of documentary evidence to support this claim. See Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins, *Our First Ambassador to China: An Account of the Life of George, Earl of Macartney, with Extracts from His Letters, and the Narrative of His Experiences in China, as Told by Himself, 1737-1806* (London: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1908)., Ernest Hartley Coleridge, *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker* (London: John Lane Company, 1920)., Mrs. Willoughby Hodgson, 'Chinese Wallpaper at Coutts' Bank', *The Connoisseur*, 1929, 17–19., Margaret Jourdain, 'Chinese Paper-Hangings', *Country Life*, 1948, 684–85., Paul Gillingham, 'The Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94', *History Today*, 43 (1993), 5., Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002). and 'The Silk Card', *Coutts & Co.*, 2013 <<http://www.coutts.com/private-banking/banking-services/cards/coutts-silk-card/>> [accessed 20 July 2013]. Based on a description of 'a glistening paper of pattern both as to colour and beauty far superior to any I have seen in Europe' in a diary entry written by Aeneas Anderson, who accompanied Macartney on the embassy, historian Aubrey Singer argues that this wallpaper inspired Macartney's gift to Thomas Coutts. See Aubrey Singer, *The Lion and the Dragon: The Story of the First British Embassy to the Court of the Emperor Qianlong in Peking, 1792-1794* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1992), p. 46.

to three different locations within the Coutts estate, following the business to new locations and finding a place at its heart, in the bank's board room in London, a longstanding global centre for finance and commerce. The strength of this association between Coutts & Co and the Chinese wallpaper which hangs there has led to the wallpapers becoming an emblem of the bank and a significant feature of Coutts corporate identity and marketing strategies.

According to London design firm Coley Porter Bell, who re-designed the bank's corporate identity in 2011, the visual language of the brand channels Coutts' heritage and its location, specifically as a London bank.⁸⁹ It promotes the concept of 'Best of British', but also highlights London as key global hub. Using the slogan, 'Coutts is London banking', the bank's corporate identity is very localised, but is also intended to have global relevance and appeal.⁹⁰ The wallpapers were made central to this new corporate identity as symbols of continuity, heritage and privilege. In an interview published in *The Financial Times* in 2015, Coutts' archivist, Tracey Earl commented that "By advertising their history, the hope was it sent a message that this was a brand to trust."⁹¹

⁸⁹ 'Coley Porter Bell', 2017 <<https://www.coleyporterbell.com/case-studies/coutts/>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

⁹⁰ 'Coley Porter Bell', 2017 <<https://www.coleyporterbell.com/case-studies/coutts/>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

⁹¹ Emma Jacobs, 'On a Three Centuries Paper Trail at Coutts', *The Financial Times*, 29 October 2015 <<https://www.ft.com/content/eb3be148-77f0-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7>>.

Images from the wallpaper have been used by the bank to provide the identity for its most exclusive credit card, known as the 'Silk card' (Figure 2-79). It is marketed as 'our most prestigious and sought-after card' and brings with it promises of 'a high monthly spending limit, an award winning concierge service, worldwide annual travel insurance benefits and access to over 600 executive airport lounges'.⁹² On the bank card itself the image of men collecting mulberry leaves is reproduced in colour, forging another new role for this well-known imagery from the *Gengzhi tu* (Figure 2-44).⁹³ Following an extended historical and geographical journey through a variety of media including paintings, prints, porcelain, lacquer furniture, wallpaper and engravings this image of Chinese peasants producing silk has transcended any form that would have been recognised by the artisans who printed the woodblock editions of the *Gengzhi tu* and painted its themes on Chinese wallpapers and export watercolours. In this new capacity it represents Coutts & Co. and its history, the privileges of wealth and the conveniences of the twenty first century.

⁹² 'The Silk Card', *Coutts & Co.*, 2013 <<http://www.coutts.com/private-banking/banking-services/cards/coutts-silk-card/>> [accessed 20 July 2013].

⁹³ 'The Silk Card', *Coutts & Co.*, 2013 <<http://www.coutts.com/private-banking/banking-services/cards/coutts-silk-card/>> [accessed 20 July 2013]. The bank card went on to win Best Card Design of the Year, 2012 at the Card and Payment Awards, see 'Coley Porter Bell', 2017 <<https://www.coleyporterbell.com/case-studies/coutts/>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

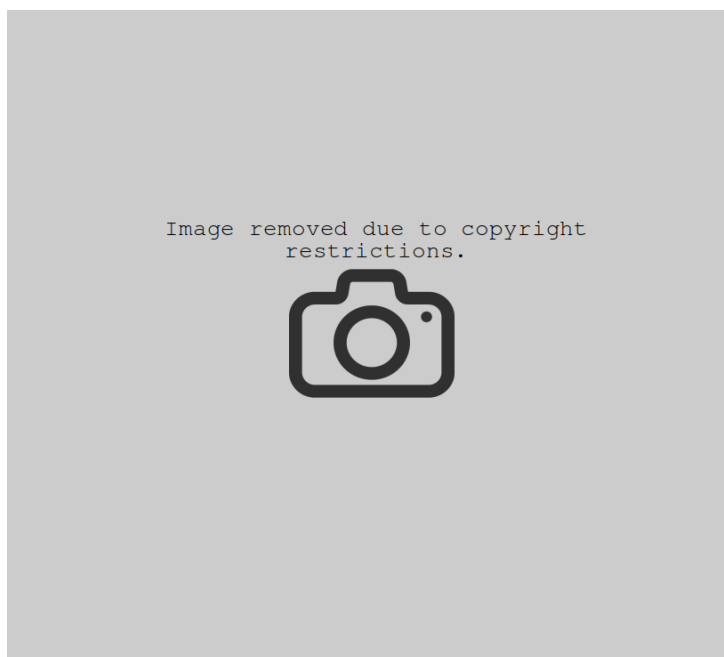


Figure 2-79 Image of Coutts Silk Card. [Source: Image reproduced with the permission of Coutts & Co.]

In 2013 Coutts commissioned hand painted reproductions of sections of the wallpaper for installation in each of the Coutts offices around the world, spreading this visual message of the heritage and continuity of the Coutts brand, globally.⁹⁴ The reproductions, shown in Figure 2-81, were designed by luxury British wallpaper purveyor de Gournay and produced in their workshops in China. De Gournay also sell a 'Coutts' design as part of their own permanent range of so-called 'chinoiserie' wallpapers, providing evidence of the broader public appeal of this design, beyond their association with the bank.⁹⁵ Figure 2-80 shows the reproduction wallpaper panels framed and installed at Coutts' offices in Frankfurt,

⁹⁴ Scenes of silk production were reproduced and printed on silk by Scottish design company Timorous Beasties for use in Coutts' Hong Kong and Singapore offices before de Gournay received commission to produce hand painted reproductions for all other Coutts branches worldwide. This suggests that the images were initially considered most appropriate for Coutts' East Asian branch offices. With thanks to Tracey Earl for this information.

⁹⁵ De Gournay, 'Chinoiserie Collection Catalogue' (London, 2009), p. 98.

Germany, presented in a way that elevates them to the status of artwork rather than interior decoration.

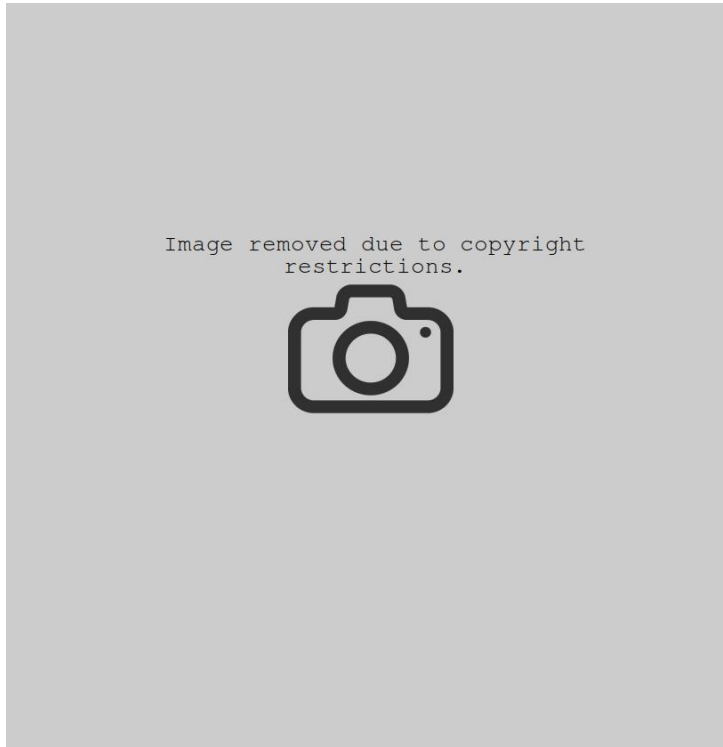


Figure 2-80 Meeting room at Coutts & Co. offices in Frankfurt, Germany, featuring a framed reproduction of sections of the Coutts wallpaper in London. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay, London.]

In this context, it seems that quite apart from any specifically Chinese associations, the wallpapers have become a signifier of Coutts bank itself, first and foremost; representing its history and global presence, as well as acting as a material connection to Thomas Coutts and, by repute, to the famous Macartney mission. The Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. demonstrate the merging of object biography and person biography, their histories and images uniquely entangled. They were invested with local and global histories and their image communicates these experiences.



Figure 2-81 'Coutts' design hand painted wallpaper by de Gournay. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay, London.]

Conclusion

The Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. present a selection of images that held particular symbolic and aesthetic appeal for both Chinese and European audiences. This chapter has shown that many of the decorative motifs that feature on the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. were drawn from pre-existing traditions of Chinese visual culture, but also that some were developed in response to the specific demands of the export market, such as the depictions of tea production. All of the images presented on the wallpaper communicated knowledge about Chinese culture, industry and society to other cultures, but new meanings and values were also developed and attributed to Chinese wallpaper

with industry themes following their integration into the western material landscape.

As a cultural and material hybrid, Chinese wallpapers represent a site of contact where new meanings and values were constructed according to local cultural ideals and agendas. Stacey Sloboda has argued that, 'The decorative objects that circulated between China and Europe in the Qing period should be understood not only as products of commercial and diplomatic exchange but also as sites of contact where meaning was mutually created by producers, consumers, and the material and visual presence of objects themselves.'⁹⁶ Chinese wallpaper is unequivocally one such site of contact, where meaning was created collaboratively, in an intercultural space, and was subject to multiple influences, both local and global.

At Coutts & Co. the Chinese wallpapers functioned not only as a conduit of knowledge but also as a visual representation of ideals and aspirations relating to China and Britain. The supposed links between the wallpaper and the Macartney mission also created a role for the wallpaper as a material record of that pivotal political encounter between Britain and China and more broadly symbolised the importance of, and the desire for, Chinese goods in Great Britain. As a gift and a valuable luxury object, the wallpaper became a treasured possession and

⁹⁶ Stacey Sloboda, 'Surface Contact: Decoration in Chinese Taste', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and The West*, ed. by Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Ning Ding, and Lidy Jane Chu (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015), pp. 248–63 (pp. 248–49).

subsequently an integral part of the material history of Coutts & Co. and the present day image of the Coutts & Co. brand.

In this chapter the role of Chinese wallpaper in communicating knowledge and constructing ideal visions of the self and the cultural other has been explored from the perspective of both Chinese and British audiences. Chapter three goes on to explore the use of Chinese wallpaper in North America at the turn of the nineteenth century. It examines the way in which it was used in this specific cultural context to construct ideal images of America's own material past, as well as contributing an exotic element to modern style movements, drawing on specific layers of Chinese wallpaper's history and value.

Chapter 3 Chinese Wallpaper and the Fashion for History in North

America

History, Nostalgia and the Creation of an Ideal Past

This chapter investigates the use of Chinese wallpaper in North America with particular focus on the period spanning the end of the American civil war (1861-1865) to the middle of the twentieth century, which witnessed the rise of industrial America and with it significant economic growth and global prominence. It explores the burgeoning market for Chinese wallpapers - both antique and reproduction - during this period and describes some of the forces which drove this popularity, from museum period rooms to the influence of interior decorators and popular media. Furthermore, it examines the contrasting cultural narratives to which Chinese wallpapers contributed during this period and the lasting influence of the interior design schemes in which they featured. The case studies and examples which are examined highlight not only the variety of ways in which Chinese wallpapers were used, but also describe the role that Chinese wallpapers played in fashioning American identities and how they reflected America's burgeoning economic growth and global political influence.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Chinese wallpapers came to be valued as historical objects in Europe and North America. While newly manufactured Chinese wallpapers were available throughout the nineteenth century they were

sold alongside antique examples which found added value and appeal based on their provenance; their former use contexts and their often elite connections with well-known houses and people of the past. Simultaneously regarded as contemporary design and historic object, as Chinese, European, and American material culture, Chinese wallpapers contributed to patriotic Colonial Revival interiors as well as fashionable, modern interiors influenced by classical European models and global style movements, including Arts and Crafts and Art Deco.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, America was emerging as a global industrial leader and a modern economic powerhouse and the question of American identity was the subject of national debate. This interest in American identity, and more particularly the desire to establish a material connection with America's past, gave rise to the Colonial Revival movement. The Colonial Revival movement offered a nationalistic expression of early North American cultural identity, primarily through architecture and interior design. Georgian and neo-classical architectural styles were predominant and interiors included an eclectic mix of furniture and decorative arts reflecting American and European decorative styles, dating from the eighteenth century, with an emphasis on the value of craft.¹ The preservation of historic material culture was central to the Colonial Revival movement and, 'The impulse to assert a personal historical past and

¹ For in depth discussion and analysis of the Colonial Revival movement in architecture and design see, William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977); William B. Rhoads, 'The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 4.35 (1976), 239–54.

create a mythic image of life in colonial times were key factors in the initiation and promulgation of Colonial Revival interiors.² Chinese wallpapers captured the imagination of architects and decorators working in the Colonial Revival style and they were installed in restored historic houses as well as museum period rooms as a fitting backdrop for displays relating to colonial living.

The use of Chinese wallpapers in Colonial Revival interiors made no overt cultural reference to China; foregrounding and referencing instead, their associations with important pre-revolutionary American political figures and interiors. Chinese wallpapers were not widespread in eighteenth-century America, even amongst the social and political elite. At that time, they were in limited supply and suitable only for the largest spaces, due to their prescribed size and large scale designs. As such, their use in Colonial Revival interiors contributed to the creation of an ideal vision of the past rather than reflecting the reality of America's material past. The role of the museum in constructing this image of the pre-revolutionary interior, dressed with Chinese wallpapers will be central to the discussion in this chapter and will examine the Powel House room at the Metropolitan museum in New York as a key case study.³

² Geoffrey Louis Rossano and N.Y. Historic Cherry Hill Museum: Albany, 'Creating a Dignified Past : Museums and the Colonial Revival' (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), p. 72.

³ With special thanks to wallpaper historian Robert Kelly for discussion and advice regarding the use of Chinese wallpaper in early American interiors and Colonial Revival interiors and for drawing my attention to key articles, information and sources on this subject. Kelly, Robert. Personal email correspondence. 20th & 21st January, 2016.

The burgeoning international art market and the emergence of the professional decorator were also significant factors in the growing popularity of Chinese wallpapers amongst the American social elite during the first half of the twentieth century. In the hands of interior decorators, many of whom enjoyed transatlantic social and business networks, numerous antique Chinese wallpapers, often with illustrious provenance, found their way from Europe to America where they conferred social status and acted as a cipher for heritage. The eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper used to decorate publisher Condé Nast's apartment in New York in 1925 was sourced by pioneering interior decorator, Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950). This wallpaper is discussed in detail later in this chapter as evidence of the mobility, durability and enduring appeal of Chinese wallpapers as part of fashionable, as opposed to historic, interiors. This case study is also used to explore the idea that Chinese wallpaper was, and is, used as a tool for commercial branding, in this instance, for Condé Nast publishing.

The use of Chinese wallpapers in fashionable modern interiors influenced by global style movements is also explored in depth in this chapter. Chinese wallpapers dovetailed with the Arts and Crafts movement as well as with Art Deco. They were valued in both contexts for their craftsmanship as well as their exotic associations with China. In direct contrast to their use in Colonial Revival interiors they indulged fantasies around imperial China, drawing directly on the Chinese origins and aesthetics of Chinese wallpaper to create elaborate, orientalist design schemes; in this way they were simultaneously nostalgic and modern. The use of eighteenth-century Chinese wallpapers by decorator Henry

Sleeper, to create a theatrical 'China trade room' at his New England summer home, in 1923 will be central to the discussion of Chinese wallpaper in modern, orientalist, American interiors. In addition to this case study, the use of antique Chinese wallpapers by actress Marlene Dietrich at her fashionable Beverly Hills home during the 1930s will also be examined. This example represents the spread of Chinese wallpaper to the West Coast of America and its adoption into Hollywood's visual lexicon of glamour, but it also further supports the idea that Chinese wallpapers were used as a tool for self-promotion and personal branding, picking up this thread from earlier discussions of Condé Nast's apartment and Coutts & Co.'s brand campaign, discussed in the previous chapter.

Beyond its immediate aesthetic appeal, the adoption of Chinese wallpaper across these contrasting American design contexts was driven by the common motivating factor of nostalgia; nostalgia for particular periods in the past, as well as for particular people of the past, serving specific cultural narratives in the present. In each of the case studies and examples which follow the value of the accumulated histories embedded in Chinese wallpaper is highlighted. The theoretical concept of singularization; the drawing out of specific ideas and associations to describe the way in which an object is used and valued by different people in particular contexts, with diverse meanings applied to it at various points in its lifetime, is central to understanding the values attributed to Chinese wallpaper in this cultural context and period. In his essay, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process' Igor Kopytoff theorizes, 'In the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography becomes the story of the various

singularizations of it (...).⁴ Just as the historical associations of the wallpapers at Coutts & Co., with Thomas Coutts, Lord Macartney and the Macartney mission became a significant part of their value in later periods, so the examples presented in this chapter will show how the global trajectories and specific histories evident in Chinese wallpapers were mobilised to support the construction of particular cultural narratives in the context of American interiors. In particular, the associations between specific people, through ownership, use and images (e.g. photographs), form an important thread in the narrative of this chapter. As Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello have argued in their introduction to *The Global Lives of Things*, the flows and cross-currents of objects, materials, people and ideas that form part of the global life of an object include its acquisition by particular people.⁵ The value of prior ownership and association is illustrated in each of the case studies presented and brings a diverse group of people from across a three hundred year time period, ranging from America's forefathers to Marlene Dietrich, into the story of Chinese wallpaper's global history.

⁴ Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64–91 (p. 90).

⁵ *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 14–15.

Retro-Projecting Chinese Wallpaper onto Pre-Revolutionary Interiors: The Powell House Room, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1924

The first decades of the twentieth century marked a turning point in the status of Chinese wallpapers when they began to be appreciated as antiques, heirlooms, and symbols of heritage. While Chinese wallpapers were available in North America from the middle of the eighteenth century, initially transshipped from China via Europe, evidence suggests that they were at that time used in very limited numbers.⁶ By contrast, the first half of the twentieth century represents a period in which Chinese wallpapers flourished, on a relative scale, in the homes and shared social spaces of the American social and political elite on the East and the West Coast of America, where they contributed to the creation of both historicist and eclectic, chinoiserie and orientalist interior design schemes.

During the 1920s the restoration of historic houses and the creation of museums in historic buildings was a popular philanthropic pursuit among affluent Americans, many of whom had amassed extraordinary wealth as a result of the rapid industrial growth and development witnessed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Detroit, Michigan, Henry Ford created Greenfield Village. In

⁶ The small number of extant Chinese wallpapers in American interiors today, which were hung during the eighteenth century, suggests that they were seldom used in early American homes, even among the social elite. Historian Kate Sanborn's 1905 survey of historic wallpapers in New England, *Old Time Wall Papers*, supports this idea with only a tiny percentage of the large body of examples she describes (100+) being Chinese. With thanks to wallpaper historian Robert Kelly for alerting me to the proportionally small number of Chinese wallpapers mentioned in this text as evidence for this argument. See Kate Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers; an Account of the Pictorial Papers on Our Forefathers' Walls, with a Study of the Historical Development of Wall Paper Making and Decoration*. (Greenwich: Literary Collector Press, 1905).

Delaware, Henry Francis Du Pont transformed his family estate, Winterthur, into a living museum. In Virginia, John D. Rockefeller Jr. funded the largest preservation project the country had seen: Colonial Williamsburg, an entire eighteenth century town containing more than eighty-eight historic buildings which made up the capital of the former British colony of Virginia.⁷ Museums which followed a more conventional model also played a significant role in the preservation and presentation of America's material past. On November 11th, 1924, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York opened the American Wing, '[...] devoted entirely to American art of the Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republican periods (...).'⁸ It was curated by staff in the museum's department of Decorative Arts, under the guidance of Chairman of the Committee of American Decorative Art, R.T.H. Halsey. The period rooms presented in the American Wing were central to the expression of Colonial Revival movement in America. They recreated and celebrated the material worlds of America's founders, asserting a distinct identity for modern America in a global context, and these room designs exerted significant influence in the fields of interior design and historical restoration.⁹

⁷ Mary Miley Theobald, 'The Colonial Revival: The Past That Never Dies', *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, 2002 <<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/summer02/revival.cfm>>.

⁸ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928). For additional information regarding the plans and opening of the American Wing see 'The American Wing', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, XIX.11 (1924), 251–65 <<https://www.jstor.org/journal/metrmuseartbull>>.

⁹ Decorating and lifestyle magazines reflected popular interest in Colonial Revival interiors, for an example see 'Founder's Colonial', *House and Garden* (New York, September 1936), pp. 38–40.

Among the large suite of rooms presented in the galleries is the eighteenth century Powel House room (Figure 3-1), a complete neo-classical room set replete with fireplace, window frames, cornices and panelled dado. When the room was initially installed in 1924 a set of eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers, which had originally been acquired by the museum as a backdrop for a display of eighteenth century English furniture, was redirected to the Powel House room display and hung along with drapes, rugs and rococo style furniture thought to be in keeping with the period and social standing of the original occupants.¹⁰

The room was originally located on the second storey of a Georgian style house at 244 South 3rd Street in Philadelphia, constructed between 1765-1766 by Charles Stedman and sold to Samuel Powel (1738-1793) in 1769.¹¹ Powel was the last Mayor of Philadelphia under British rule and the first after the American Revolution. He was an emblematic figure of revolutionary America, having been a vociferous advocate for independence and an important political figure in the early years of the republic.

¹⁰ The museum acquired this set of wallpapers from English architectural firm White Allom & Co. in 1914. They were purchased as a decorative backdrop for the display of the Cadwalader bequest of eighteenth century English furniture, in the Wing of Decorative Arts. See Metropolitan Museum Object file 14.106. See also, Durr Friedley, 'The Cadwalader Room', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 10.6 (1915), 121–22 (p. 121) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3253676>>.

¹¹ 'Gallery Text: Room from the Powel House, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Art' (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016).



Figure 3-1 The Powel Room, 1765-66, Gallery 722, Tananbaum Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2016]

As such, the inclusion of a room from Powel’s elegant Philadelphia home seemed a fitting choice for display in the patriotic American Wing.

However, none of the furniture displayed in the room was actually owned by the Powel family and neither was the eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper, only the architectural fabric of the room actually came from the Powel House in Philadelphia. In fact, ‘[...] in 1931 the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks [...] reported that the plaster walls may have originally been painted a “beautiful blue”’.¹² In spite of this, the Chinese wallpapers formed a central feature of the room design, directly informing the choice of other aspects of the

¹² ‘Gallery Text: Room from the Powel House, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Art’ (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016).

room decoration, in particular the window treatments (Figure 3-2), as described in the present day gallery text: ‘The room’s Chinese wallpaper inspired the pagoda-like valances of the draperies [...]’ and ‘Museum curators designed the red damask draperies many years ago to harmonize with the Chinese wallpaper.’¹³



Figure 3-2 Detail from the Powel Room, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/18.87.1-.4/>]

The design of the wallpapers is a relatively unusual combination of birds and flowers in a garden landscape populated with a variety of architectural structures, a design which steadily became more common in the nineteenth century (Figure

¹³ ‘Gallery Text: Room from the Powel House, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Art’ (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016).

3-3). While the images depicted exhibit a degree of realism with the use of single point perspective, particularly in the depiction of the buildings, a sense of the fantastic is preserved by the disproportionately large scale of the birds in the foreground.



Figure 3-3 Detail from the Powel Room, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/18.87.1-.4/>]

The wallpaper, now darkened and faded from its original bright colours, provides atmosphere and character to the room. It also arguably provides greater visual

interest than the aforementioned plain blue walls that were most likely original to the room, creating a more exciting visual back drop in which to imagine America's early political elite living out their social encounters and daily lives.

The fact that that the Chinese wallpaper was not part of the original Powel House room and was not even owned by Samuel Powel raises questions about why the museum's curators made the decision to hang Chinese wallpapers in the Powel room. Even when research suggested that the walls of the room were most likely painted 'a beautiful blue', just a few years after the room was put on display, the wallpapers were retained. The relatively small number of Chinese wallpapers that were evident in America during the period of Powel's occupancy of the house, in the second half of the eighteenth century, also calls into question the suitability of Chinese wallpaper for the museum's period room set.

Chinese wallpapers were not widespread in eighteenth century America, even among the social elite, though importations and interest in them increased with the establishment of a direct American China trade in 1784. A 1786 advertisement in the Philadelphia press for upholsterer Thomas Hurley, gives an indication of the fact that they were still in scarce supply even after 1784, describing them as an '[...] esoteric commodity of considerable rarity.'¹⁴ Additionally, later surveys of historical wallpaper in America, particularly historian Kate Sanborn's 1905 survey

¹⁴ Advertisement of Thomas Hurley, *Pennsylvania Packet*, Philadelphia, May 9, 1786. Cited in Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton Inc, 1980), p. 102.

of New England wallpapers, *Old Time Wallpapers*, support the idea that they were relatively uncommon, with only a tiny percentage of the large body of examples she describes in her book (100+) being Chinese.¹⁵ Among the few extant examples of Chinese wallpaper installed in American interiors during the eighteenth century are those in the parlor at the former home of Samuel Dexter Senior (1726-1810), at 699 High Street in Dedham, Massachusetts (Figure 3-4 and Figure 3-5), built in 1761.¹⁶

Samuel Dexter Senior was a prominent merchant and member of the first provincial congress in Massachusetts and his son, Samuel Dexter junior (1761-1816) was a lawyer and an influential American statesman.¹⁷ As such, both men were prominent members of society and had an active involvement with government at local and national levels respectively.

¹⁵ Kate Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers; an Account of the Pictorial Papers on Our Forefathers' Walls, with a Study of the Historical Development of Wall Paper Making and Decoration*. (Greenwich: Literary Collector Press, 1905).

¹⁶ Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (London: Antique Collector's Club, 1991), p. 403; 'The Boston Museum of Fine Arts: Its Treasures Reflect the Old Town's Love of Oriental Opulence', *LIFE* (New York, 22 July 1940), pp. 50–54., 'Massachusetts Historical Commission: Samuel Dexter House' (Boston, 1972) <<https://doi.org/DED.102>>. With thanks to Sally Zimmerman at Historic New England for bringing the last named source to my attention. Zimmerman, Sally. Historic New England. Personal email correspondence. 21 January, 2016.

¹⁷ Lucius M. Sargent, *Reminiscences of Samuel Dexter* (Boston: Henry W. Dutton, 1857). Samuel Dexter junior was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives and served 1788 to 1790 and later elected to the 3rd Congress by way of the United States House of Representatives and then elected as Federalist to the United States Senate. See, 'Dexter, Samuel, (1761-1816)', *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, 1774-Present* <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=D000296>> [accessed 15 December 2015].



Figure 3-4 Chinese wallpapers at the Samuel Dexter House, Dedham, Mass. [Source: LIFE, 22 July, 1940, p. 54]



Figure 3-5 Detail, Chinese wallpapers at the Samuel Dexter House, Dedham, Mass. [Source: Reproduced in Kate Sanborn, *Old Time Wallpapers*, 1905, Plate XII]

These wallpapers provide some evidence of a preference for Chinese wallpaper among America's historical political elite and this concept was central to their

later inclusion in Colonial Revival interiors and restored historic houses. A 1787 letter from George Washington to Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris also provides some evidence of the fact that Chinese wallpapers were attracting the attention of high profile figures in the late eighteenth century. He wrote; 'It is possible I may avail myself of your kind offer of sending for India Paper for my new Room [the dining room at Mount Vernon], but presuming there is no opportunity to do it soon; I shall not, at this time give the dimensions of it.'¹⁸

Powel's personal experiences and social connections were central to the way in which the curatorial committee imagined the Powel House room as part of the American Wing's displays. With specific reference to the Powel House room, in *A Handbook of the American Wing*, curator R.T.H. Halsey wrote: 'For a thorough appreciation of the sumptuous furnishings, rich in historical association, which the museum has given it, some knowledge of the personality of the owner is needed.'¹⁹ Halsey then went on to describe Powel's Grand Tour of Europe as a youth, where he gained '[...] intimate insight into the manner of living in the Old World and an acquaintance with some of those men who were making the world's history.'²⁰ He also described Powel's connections with influential American

¹⁸ Letter from George Washington to Robert Morris, Oct. 2, 1787. Fitzpatrick, John Clement ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, 39 vols. (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 29 (Sept. 1786-June 1788, printed Jan. 1939): 283, cited in Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton Inc, 1980), p. 106.

¹⁹ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

²⁰ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

figures, including Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and, in particular, his close friend and one-time next door neighbour on South 3rd Street, Philadelphia, George Washington.²¹ Halsey concludes by writing:

Such are a few of the historic memories clustering around this beautiful room, which may be considered to embody the very essence of the decorative architectural treatment of our second period (...). It must certainly be adjudged one of the finest interiors produced in the Colonies.²²

The present day gallery text displayed in the Powel room is also explicit about the importance of the people who visited the Powel's home in Philadelphia and the value that these associations added to it and its decorative contents, by association. Indeed, the connections between the physical space of the Powel room and important historical figures who inhabited it was one of the key reasons for its acquisition. Present day museum interpretative text displayed in the Powel room states that, 'Curators had purchased the room in 1917 for its fine Georgian style wood work and its association with Revolutionary luminaries such as George and Martha Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams, all of whom had been entertained by Samuel and Elizabeth Powel.'²³

²¹ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

²² R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

²³ 'Gallery Text: Room from the Powel House, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Art' (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016).

The inclusion of Chinese wallpaper in the room was also predicated on their use by Powel's political colleagues and contemporaries. Halsey wrote, 'The painted Chinese wallpaper in this room is similar to a set imported for Samuel Powel's cousin, Robert Morris, about 1770.'²⁴ Robert Morris (1735-1806) was a prominent Philadelphia merchant and revolutionary politician in America.²⁵ He was also a significant investor in the first American trade ship to sail to China in 1784, *The Empress of China*.²⁶ Morris did own a large set of Chinese wallpapers. He ordered an entire set of home furnishings crafted by Canton artisans to be brought back on *The Empress of China*. According to research published by China Trade historian, Jonathan Goldstein the order included hand-painted wallpaper and paper borders; four lacquered fans and a dressing box for Mrs Morris; a glass specially decorated for that box by one "Puqua, painter on glass"; a case of porcelain; and bundles of mounted silk window blinds with bamboo ribs.²⁷ The Powel Room wallpapers were in fact not at all similar to the papers which are purported to be those purchased by Morris, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. The Morris papers depicted Chinese landscapes and Chinese industry while the Powel Room papers are decorated with birds, flowers and garden pavilions.

²⁴ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

²⁵ Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682-1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 8.

²⁶ Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682-1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 27.

²⁷ Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682-1846: Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 30.

Halsey offered further justification for the use of Chinese wallpapers in the Powel room by citing other historical American figures who had installed Chinese wallpaper in their homes during this period, writing; ‘This type of paper was used in making the “Chinese” room in the house of George Mason, the Virginian, an intimate friend and neighbour of Washington [...]’.²⁸ The mere association between Chinese wallpapers and distinguished historical figures of the period appears to have provided strong impetus for their use.

Ultimately, Chinese wallpapers were a means by which history and historical figures could be visually re-imagined in an ideal setting, one which communicated graceful and elite living. Already imbued with the elite contexts of their use in European palaces and country houses they conferred a similar vision of elegant living and cultural refinement in American contexts, bringing Americans a much desired sense of parity with their European counterparts, so rich in material culture and global experience.

Explanatory gallery text displayed in the Powel House room today describes the vision of the curators who devised the designs for the Powel House room in the early 1920s, drawing particular attention to the nationalist agenda which underpinned the creation of the American wing:

Their idea of what was beautiful and historically significant was a reflection of the Colonial Revival movement. Adherents to this

²⁸ R.T. Haines Halsey and Charles Over Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1928).

movement respected the fine craftsmanship, simplicity of form and restrained ornamentation in furniture and architecture. Historic figures were revered, as were objects associated with their lives. The American Wing's founders sought to present colonial objects as expressions of national taste and culture.²⁹

Thus, Chinese wallpapers came to be imagined as part of America's national fabric. With this agenda leading curatorial decision making during the planning of the American Wing it appears that historical accuracy, at least in some instances, became subordinate to the stories they wished to tell, particularly in the case of their use of Chinese wallpaper. Neither simple, nor restrained, they did not conform to the central tenets of the Colonial Revival movement as described in the aforementioned gallery text, but importantly offered provenance, a tangible link to the past and a connection to specific people who played key roles in the founding of America; all of which facilitated the creation of an idealised past.

The American wallpaper industry was not fully established until the 1760s and therefore the early history of wallpaper in America is dominated by imports, predominantly from England but also from France and China.³⁰ Even after the 1760s, fashions from Europe continued to dominate and dictate the appearance of American interiors among the wealthiest in American society. Design historian, Catherine Lynn argues, 'English, French and Oriental papers acted as style carriers, bringing to colonial American Houses superficial coatings of the latest

²⁹ 'Gallery Text: Room from the Powel House, 1765-66, Gallery 9, Tananbaum Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Art'.

³⁰ Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton Inc, 1980), p. 13.

European fashions, rendered in full colour'.³¹ In this way, European decorative trends continued to influence American interiors, even as America sought independence from Britain, and Chinese wallpapers, as pre-existing symbols of social status and luxury, found a receptive new market among those who could afford such luxuries.

The Legacy of Colonial Revival Interiors

In 1933, less than a decade after the opening of the American Wing, the curatorial committee at Colonial Williamsburg, a living history museum and preserved eighteenth century town on the site of the former capital of the British colony of Virginia, took the decision to hang a set of eighteenth-century Chinese wallpapers in the supper room at the Governor's Palace (Figure 3-6) which had been home to successive royal governors. They took this decision despite the fact that 'relatively little was known about the form and architectural finish of the circa 1751 rear wings'³², and the fact that there was no record of there ever having been Chinese wallpapers at the residence. Architect, Thomas Tileston Waterman who, among others, developed plans for the reconstruction of the Governor's Palace was

³¹ Catherine Lynn, *Wallpapers in America* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, W.W. Norton Inc, 1980), p. 24.

³² Edward A. Chappell, *Reconsidered Splendour: The Palace Addition of 1751', A Report to the Program Planning and Review Committee, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series - 0149* (Virginia, 1990)
<<http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0149.xml>>. With thanks to Robert Kelly for sharing this article with me and bringing its significance as evidence for the influential effects of the installations of Chinese wallpaper at Colonial Williamsburg to my attention.

candid about this fact, writing in 1946, 'The supper room is purely an assumption as far as the decorative treatment is concerned. The use of the so-called Chinese Chippendale style was based on its vogue at this time in England, and its dissemination through architectural publications took it to the farthest parts of the English Colonies.'³³ The presentation of Chinese wallpapers in the Powel House room most likely influenced this choice by establishing an authoritative idea that Chinese wallpapers were representative of pre-revolutionary interiors.



Figure 3-6 Supper room, Colonial Williamsburg. Circa 1960 [Source: Official Colonial Williamsburg post card by H.S. Crocker Co. Inc. Baltimore, Peabody Essex Museum Chinese wallpaper research files.]

³³ Thomas Tileston Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1946), p. 52. cited by Edward A. Chappell, *Reconsidered Splendour: The Palace Addition of 1751', A Report to the Program Planning and Review Committee, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series - 0149* (Virginia, 1990), p. 10 <<http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0149.xml>>.

While Waterman's design for the supper room was viewed as a success in terms of visual appearance, Edward Chappell, Director of Architectural and Archaeological Research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, argued in his 1985 report to the foundation's planning review committee that, 'The question posed by the Program Planning Committee was not, however, how coherent or pleasing the design of the supper room is, but rather whether it is a believable approximation of its eighteenth-century predecessor.'³⁴ With this comment Chappell brought into focus the responsibility of historical restoration projects to create accurate, rather than idealised representations of the past.

While the Chinese wallpapers displayed in the Powel House room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art have been retained as a reflection on curatorial practices of the 1920s the decision was taken, following extensive research, to remove and de-accession the Chinese wallpapers at Colonial Williamsburg. The papers were later offered for sale at auction by Christie's, New York in 1987 and the proceeds were used to make new acquisitions for Colonial Williamsburg's collections.³⁵

³⁴ Edward A. Chappell, *Reconsidered Splendour: The Palace Addition of 1751', A Report to the Program Planning and Review Committee, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series - 0149* (Virginia, 1990), p. 13
<<http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0149.xml>>.

³⁵ Graham Hood, *Christie's Sale Sunday, October 17th, 1987 – Fine English Furniture and Objects of Art* (New York: Christie's New York, 1987); "'Chinese Wallpaper'" Peabody Essex Museum, Curatorial Research Files' (Salem, Massachusetts).

While ultimately the wallpaper was removed it nonetheless influenced generations of visitors to Colonial Williamsburg during the period of its display (1933-1981), shaping popular and professional views of the role of Chinese wallpaper in eighteenth century American interiors. Edward Chappell notes in his report, 'The supper room design was particularly successful, sufficiently so to exert an influence on several generations of popular American taste'.³⁶ This influence is directly reflected in a 1937 article about Colonial Williamsburg entitled, 'History Lives in Old Virginia' in which the Chinese wallpaper is described as part of the original decorative scheme at the Governor's Palace, despite Thomas Tileston Waterman's open and candid remarks about the conjectural nature of the decoration in the supper room. The article states:

The Governor's Palace, perhaps the most outstanding of the many restoration projects, is a stately mansion in which the royal governors lived in pomp and splendor. Some of the rooms contain rare Chinese wallpaper, antique furniture and other furnishings conforming to ancient inventories.³⁷

This article, written just two years after the completion of the restoration project at Colonial Williamsburg demonstrates how readily recreated historic interiors were accepted as fact, in this case creating a false impression of the role of

³⁶ Edward A. Chappell, *Reconsidered Splendour: The Palace Addition of 1751', A Report to the Program Planning and Review Committee, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series - 0149* (Virginia, 1990), p. 10
<<http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0149.xml>>.

³⁷ Stuart J. White, 'History Lives in Old Virginia', *The Journal of Education, Trustees of Boston University*, 120.7 (1937), 170–72 (p. 170). With thanks to Robert Kelly for drawing my attention to this article.

Chinese wallpapers in Colonial Williamsburg's decorative history and more broadly early American decorative history.

The National Society of the Colonial Dames, New York, 1930

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Chinese wallpapers continued their dialogue with Colonial Revival interiors, contributing a sense of elegance, nostalgia and romance to nationalist projects. The red brick neo-Georgian headquarters of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in New York was built between 1928 and 1930 by architect, Richard Henry Dana Jr. While it was a new building it contained many eighteenth century architectural elements salvaged from historic houses around America and included a set of antique Chinese wallpapers imported from England. The society and its mission to 'actively promote our national heritage through historic preservation, patriotic service and educational projects', were very much part of the Colonial Revival movement. The society's headquarters were designed as '[...] a replica of a fine pre-revolutionary home of an affluent citizen.',³⁸ replete with eighteenth century Chinese bird and flower design wallpapers in the drawing room (Figure 3-7).

³⁸ 'The National Society of The Colonial Dames, New York', 2016 <http://nscda.org/?page_id=150&state=NY&prop=120> [accessed 23 May 2016]. The society was founded in 1891 and remains active today.



Figure 3-7 Reception Room, National Society of The Colonial Dames, 215 East 71st Street, New York. [Source: *Arts and Decoration*, May, 1931, p.32]

The building was featured in *Arts and Decoration* magazine in 1931, shortly after its completion. The title of the article, ‘A House Evoking Romantic Memories’ was in itself indicative of the key ideas that the interior design conveyed, including nostalgia, romance, reverence for the past and, in particular, the material culture of America’s forefathers. The house incorporated architectural features from a number of important eighteenth century houses and in this way brought a new generation of Americans into direct contact with America’s material past. The article is illustrated with an image of the main reception room which is decorated with antique, hand painted bird and flower design Chinese wallpaper (see Figure 3-7 and Figure 3-8), the caption reads:

One of the beautiful side walls of the reception room is shown above with old pine doors from Maryland, Queen Anne desk and

early Chippendale chairs. The wallpaper is an old Chinese design of flowers and birds.³⁹

Chinese wallpaper played an important role as a decorative back drop for the historical architectural fittings and furniture used in the interior. In the main body of the article the author elaborates on the intended effects of the interior decoration:

This new home of the New York Chapter of the Colonial Dames is so full of rich historic associations that it carries us back to a time when our homes, our lives, held dignity and grace; which apart from the actual reason of existence of the beautiful structure itself, renders the house worthy of the profound respect of all patriotic and art loving Americans [...]. As a museum, this society hopes to prove of benefit to the city educationally, showing, in a living way, the customs and furnishings of our Colonial Period⁴⁰

The effect of the Chinese wallpaper was transporting and enabled viewers to immerse themselves in the past. Their provenance facilitated this to an even greater degree and they sent clear visual messages regarding heritage by means of their former use contexts in Europe and the largely imagined extent of their use in eighteenth century America. Again, as the above quote from the aforementioned article published in *Arts and Decoration* makes clear, this setting in which Chinese wallpaper was used aimed to accurately represent 'the customs and furnishings of our Colonial Period' reinforcing the connection between

³⁹ 'A House Evoking Romantic Memories', *Arts and Decoration* (New York, May 1931), pp. 31, 90 (p. 31).

⁴⁰ 'A House Evoking Romantic Memories', *Arts and Decoration* (New York, May 1931), pp. 31, 90 (p. 31).

Chinese wallpaper and Colonial interiors. The Chinese wallpaper is described further as '(...) a rare old Chinese wallpaper, made for some eighteenth century house in England'⁴¹, a rather vague description which indicates that the exact provenance of the wallpaper beyond England and the eighteenth century was not of great importance. The value of Chinese wallpaper for this project lay in its connection with England and eighteenth century American living more than with China itself.



Figure 3-8 Side wall, reception room, National Society of The Colonial Dames, 215 East 71st Street, New York. [Source: Arts and Decoration, May, 1931, p.32]

⁴¹ 'A House Evoking Romantic Memories', *Arts and Decoration* (New York, May 1931), pp. 31, 90 (p. 31).

Beyond the museum, the Colonial Revival movement also exerted a strong influence on domestic American architecture and interior design. An article in *House and Garden* magazine in September 1936 entitled, 'Founder's Colonial' captures the broad popular interest in the Colonial Revival movement in interior decorating trends.

We hear great talk these days about the 'Founding Fathers', those leaders in the infancy of our country, whose opinions laid the basis of our national ideals. The way these founders lived – the types of homes they built, the chairs and tables and the beds and wallpapers with which they furnished them – is also commanding interest among those who are building and furnishing new homes today.⁴²

In the context of Colonial Revival interiors, Chinese wallpapers were valued as historic objects and those with known provenance were sought after. By using antique Chinese wallpapers, Americans were literally able to re-create historic spaces imbued with the past and experience that past in a tangible and direct manner. The appeal of Chinese wallpapers was predicated as much on their historical value as their aesthetic appearance and they were a validating presence in Colonial Revival interiors, contributing to an image of fine, storied, elegant and elite living.

⁴² 'Founder's Colonial', *House and Garden* (New York, September 1936), pp. 38–40.

Chinese Wallpaper, Interior Decorators and the International Art Market

The increasing popularity of Chinese wallpapers in early twentieth century America was also driven by an emerging generation of interior decorators who used them to create elite interiors, loosely based on historical European models, often characterised by a mixture French and English historical styles.

One of the most influential proponents of the classical style was Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950), whose name became synonymous with the birth of the interior decorating profession.⁴³ Although she was raised in a modest, American middle class family, Elsie de Wolfe quickly found her way among America's social elite. After spending some years in Britain as a young woman in the 1880s, during which time she was presented at the court of Queen Victoria, she returned to America, where she established a short term career in the theatre, bringing her to the attention of New York society.⁴⁴ In 1905, having turned away from theatre, de Wolfe resolved to make interior decoration the focus of her working life, encouraged by her close friend and companion, literary agent Elizabeth Marbury (1856-1933).⁴⁵ She enjoyed much greater success in interior decorating than in the

⁴³ Allen Tate and C. Ray Smith, *Interior Design in the 20th Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 271.

⁴⁴ Penny Sparke and Mitchell Owens, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration*, ed. by Mitchell Owens (Acanthus Press, 2005), pp. 13–16.

⁴⁵ Penny Sparke and Mitchell Owens, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration*, ed. by Mitchell Owens (New York: Acanthus Press, 2005), p. 16.

theatre and in 1914 published her first book of decorating advice, *The House in Good Taste*.⁴⁶

De Wolfe rejected the dark and cluttered character of Victorian interiors and instead sought to bring elegance, light and comfort to the interiors she designed. She filled them with antiques and modern replicas, broadly following classical French and English models of the eighteenth century, placing emphasis on the importance of '[...] romantic tradition and architectural history.'⁴⁷ Chinese wallpapers often featured in her interior designs and played a central role in creating an aesthetic reference to eighteenth century French and English interiors (Figure 3-9) as well as offering a light hearted, fanciful and romantic visual appeal. In chapter thirteen of her book, entitled 'A Light, Gay Dining-Room', de Wolfe wrote:

I like very much the Chinese rice-papers with their broad, sketchy decorations of birds and flowers. These papers are never tiresomely realistic and are always done in very soft colors, or in soft shades of one color, and while if you analyse them they are very fantastic, the general effect is as restful and it is cheerful.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (The Century Co., 1914) <<https://archive.org/details/houseingoodtaste00deworich>>.

⁴⁷ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (The Century Co., 1914), p. 4 <<https://archive.org/details/houseingoodtaste00deworich>>.

⁴⁸ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (The Century Co., 1914), p. 175 <<https://archive.org/details/houseingoodtaste00deworich>>.



*Figure 3-9 Anne Morgan's drawing room, Sutton Place, New York, designed by Elsie de Wolfe in 1922. [Source: Reproduced in Penny Sparke and Mitchell Owens, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of the Modern Interior*, (Acanthus Press, 2005), p.216]*

Both antique and reproduction Chinese wallpapers were increasingly in vogue among America's wealthy from the first decades of the twentieth century but special status and a degree of excitement was afforded to the antique examples, as described in a 1916 article published in *Vogue* magazine:

Opportunities for securing one the genuine old papers, made about 1750, occur at rare intervals in the art market to-day and create a pleasant amount of excitement, for an interior hung with one of these eighteenth century fantasies is considered a charming and covetable thing.⁴⁹

Reflecting on the merits of modern Chinese wallpaper reproductions and the rare antique examples respectively, the article's author is unequivocal, 'Time, however invests the old papers with a tenderness of tone, an "atmosphere" that is more than artistic excellence.'⁵⁰

Another influential figure who promoted the use of Chinese wallpapers in American interiors and sourced antique examples for the U.S market was American wallpaper historian, designer and interior decorator, Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959). College educated and multi-lingual, McClelland conducted extensive and pioneering research into historical wallpapers, leading to the publication of her first book, *Historic Wallpaper: from its inception to the introduction of Machinery* in 1924, shortly followed by *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall Treatments* in 1926. Before writing these publications McClelland worked in the advertising department of Wanamaker's department store and went on to develop a career in design, initially curating window displays for Wanamaker's before spending several years in Paris as the department store's

⁴⁹ Anon., 'The Chinese Wall-Papers of Georgian England', *Vogue*, September 1916, 64, 124 (p. 64) <<https://search.proquest.com/vogue/docview/879147004/204D31C4ACBC460FPQ/1?accountid=28521>>.

⁵⁰ Anon., 'The Chinese Wall-Papers of Georgian England', *Vogue*, September 1916, 64, 124 (p. 64) <<https://search.proquest.com/vogue/docview/879147004/204D31C4ACBC460FPQ/1?accountid=28521>>.

representative and buyer.⁵¹ From 1913 to 1922 McClelland ran Wanamaker's antiques department, *Au Quatrième*, the first of its kind in America, which she stocked with antiques from her European and American buying trips.⁵²

By the 1920s East Asian decorative art, including Chinese wallpaper was increasingly available in American department stores including Macy's, which had its own Far Eastern department (Figure 3-10), as well as at the aforementioned, *Au Quatrième* at Wanamaker's, in New York.⁵³

⁵¹ A.S. Preston, 'Decorating History, From Wanamaker's to the Metropolitan: Nancy McClelland, Au Quatrième, and the Colonial Revival' (MA thesis, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution and Parson School of Design, 2005), p. 9. Cited by Bridget May, 'Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Design History*, 21.1 (2008), 59–74 (p. 59).

⁵² Bridget May, 'Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Design History*, 21.1 (2008), 59–74 (p. 60); 'Nancy McClelland Archive' (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum).

⁵³ 'Mattie E. Hewitt & Richard A. Smith Photograph Collection (PR26)' (New York: New York Historical Association). Design historian, Sarah Cheang has examined and described the marketing of Chinese goods in British department stores during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in great detail. She argues that the marketing of Chinese goods was predicated upon a practice of colonial nostalgia for imperial China and acted as a locus for the acting out of perceived feminine excesses and broader orientalist narratives. See, Sarah Cheang, 'The Ownership and Collection of Chinese Material Culture by Women in Britain, c. 1890-1935' (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2004); Sarah Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, 20.1 (2007), 1–16.



Figure 3-10 Lacquer and Chinese textiles on display at Macy's Far Eastern department, New York, 1924. [Source: Image 16200, 1924 Macy, R.H. & Co. Broadway at 34th Street, Box 14, file 342, Macy's 1924-1934, Mattie E. Hewitt & Richard A. Smith Photograph Collection (PR26), New York Historical Association, New York.]

Chinese wallpapers were the subject of a special exhibition organised by Nancy McClelland at the Belmaison Gallery in New York on behalf of Wanamaker's around 1920. An advertisement for the exhibition highlights the appeal of Chinese wallpapers in this period, focusing on their rarity, historic provenance and characteristic eighteenth century aesthetic:

Au Quatrième presents at the Belmaison Gallery an important collection of antique Chinese wallpaper

These old Chinese wall-papers are unusually choice examples of a type rarely seen outside museums or those fine old houses whose walls they were once brought from the Orient to adorn. The vogue for such papers reached its height in England and America during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and many were made in China especially for exportation to these countries. With the coming of Chippendale and the Chinese taste in furniture they were considered almost indispensable as backgrounds.⁵⁴

This advertisement provides evidence of the interest in Chinese wallpapers among consumers and interior decorators of the 1920s, based on their use in eighteenth century Europe and America. The advertisement also reiterates the idea that Chinese wallpapers were considered to be 'indispensable backgrounds' for eighteenth century furniture.

⁵⁴ Undated advertisement for Au Quatrième found in the Nancy McClelland Archive, Cooper Hewitt Museum, Box 7. Likely to date between 1913-1922 as these were the dates of McClelland's employment at Au Quatrième. 'Nancy McClelland Archive' (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum).



Figure 3-11 Mrs Dwight Wiman's bedroom, decorated by Nancy McClelland in 1928. [Source: Nancy McClelland, 'The Decorative Possibilities of Papered Walls', Arts and Decoration, December 1928, p.56.]

The way in which McClelland integrated Chinese wallpapers into her own interior designs is demonstrated by the room she created for Dorothea Wiman, wife of American silent movie star Dwight Wiman, at her home in New York (Figure 3-11) in 1928, which was romantic and classical in style as well as intimate and luxurious.⁵⁵ In general, McClelland combined Chinese wallpapers with French, English and Colonial American styles to create an eclectic yet classical decorative effect. In Dorothea Wiman's bedroom she combined a French rococo style

⁵⁵ Dwight Deere Wiman (1895-1951) was an American silent movie star as well as playwright and theatre director. Chinese wallpapers appear to have been popular among people connected with the media as well as film and theatre during the first half of the twentieth century.

chimney piece and rococo furniture with Chinese wallpaper which was framed above the chimney piece as well as applied as full drops to the side walls.⁵⁶

McClelland was just one of a number of decorators and design firms who dealt in Chinese wallpaper, which were the subject of a burgeoning international trade during the 1920s. British architectural and decorating firms with transatlantic presence played a pivotal role in sourcing antique Chinese wallpapers for the American market throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Decorating firm White, Allom & Co. sold the Chinese wallpaper to the Metropolitan museum in 1914 which was later hung in the Powel Room in 1924, and London based decorating firm Cowtan and Tout, which had offices in London and New York, supplied the wallpapers for the supper room at Colonial Williamsburg, as well as the Chinese wallpapers used in the Port Royal Hall at American philanthropist, H.F du Pont's home and museum, Winterthur House in Delaware.⁵⁷ Many of these antique papers were salvaged from historic houses in England as they were being re-modelled or demolished, and were given new life in the homes and historical projects of American socialites, industrialists and philanthropists. While there was a buoyant market for antique Chinese wallpapers in America from the nineteenth

⁵⁶ Bridget May, 'Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of Design History*, 21.1 (2008), 59–74 (p. 60).

⁵⁷ 'Object File 14.106, Acquisition of Chinese Wallpaper from White, Allom & Co, 1914' (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives); 'Cowtan & Tout Invoice to Henry Francis Du Pont, April 4, 1931, Box HF233' (Winterthur Archives). With thanks to Maggie Lidz, former Estate Historian Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library for bringing the latter source to my attention and to Jeff Groff the current Director of Interpretation and Estate historian Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library for his assistance. For further information relating to the provenance of the Chinese wallpapers at Colonial Williamsburg see 'An Important Suite of Chinese Painted Wallpaper, Circa 1770', *Christie's Fine English Furniture and Objects of Art* (New York: Christie's, 17 October 1987).

century into the present day, less expensive, newly manufactured reproduction Chinese wallpapers, based on historic designs were also readily available through American importers of Chinese goods such as Gracie in New York.⁵⁸ This gave decorators and consumers a choice based on the relative importance of provenance, design, pricing and ease of acquisition. Less expensive modern reproductions were still admired for their decorative effects as described by Nancy McClelland in her, *Book of Decorative Wall Treatments* published in 1926:

Old Chinese papers or their reproductions, covered with birds and flowers and bamboos or done in landscape designs, make fine backgrounds for English rooms and for a certain type of French room [...] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such papers were considered fitting backgrounds for rooms that contained beautiful lacquers and porcelains from the East. They have never lost this quality of oriental richness. Even modern reproductions have a depth and beauty of colour that is admirable.⁵⁹

Interior decorators recognised the potential of Chinese wallpapers, both antique and reproduction, to create interior designs with a variety of aesthetic effects.

They could be, as Elsie de Wolfe described them, 'restful and cheerful'⁶⁰ with their soft colours and romantic subjects in classical interior designs, but they could also

⁵⁸ Gracie has the longest continuous history of any company, still in operation today, of importing Chinese wallpapers to Europe or America, having established trade in this product in 1927. The company was initially established in 1898 manufacturing ornate hand carvings for the architectural and carriage trade, but went on to diversify into interior decoration in the early twentieth century. Gracie, Mike. Director, Gracie Studio, New York. Telephone interview. 2 April. 2013; Gracie, Mike. Director, Gracie Studio, New York. Personal interview. 6 March 2015.

⁵⁹ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926), p. 154.

⁶⁰ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (The Century Co., 1914), p. 175 <<https://archive.org/details/houseingoodtaste00deworich>>.

be used to create opulent and exotic interiors in which they conveyed an alluring aesthetic of 'Oriental richness'.⁶¹ They could be modern or traditional, but they were consistently recognised as symbolic markers of luxury and wealth.

Industrial developments in America during the nineteenth century, including steel production, mining, railroads, shipping, construction and finance created an elite group of exceptionally wealthy individuals in America. These individuals spent lavishly on building houses and country retreats in and around America's major cities, creating significant business opportunities for architects and interior decorators. Classical decorative models and Chinese wallpapers appealed to many of these elite families, for they enabled them to draw parallels between themselves and the historical European elite and thereby to convey wealth, taste and social status. In the case of American publisher Condé Nast (1874-1942), the Chinese wallpapers which were used to decorate the ballroom at his New York apartment became part of the image of the Condé Nast brand during the 1920s, projecting the same aspirational image of glamour and luxury as his publications. His magazine publications, consulted by a global readership, acted as essential guides to fashions in clothing and interiors.⁶² As such, the very visible use of Chinese wallpapers by Condé Nast in his own home undoubtedly contributed to

⁶¹ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926), p. 154.

⁶² For further detail regarding Condé Nast's private and professional life see Caroline Seebohm, *The Man Who Was Vogue: The Life and Times of Condé Nast*. (New York: Viking Press, 1982).

their popularity among the wealthy American elite during the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Staging an International Brand with Chinese Wallpapers: Condé Nast Apartment, 1040 Park Avenue, New York, 1924

In 1923, Elsie de Wolfe was commissioned with the redecoration of publishing magnate Condé Nast's (1874-1942) apartment in New York, a vast twenty room duplex apartment with a garden terrace overlooking Park Avenue.⁶³ Nast purchased *Vogue* in 1909 and under his ownership it became a hugely influential and successful publication. *Vogue* and Nast's other magazine titles, which included *House and Garden* and *Vanity Fair*, brought him significant wealth which was ostentatiously exhibited in his luxury apartment. De Wolfe completed the decoration of the apartment in 1924. The majority of the interior spaces referenced eighteenth century French interior design however, the apartment also featured distinctive Art Deco accents such as silvered, mirrored and marbled walls as well as the use of animal skins and bold animal prints; the ladies dressing room was entirely mirrored with a silver papered ceiling, giving it a modern edge.⁶⁴ The centrepiece of the apartment was the ballroom (Figure 3-12);

⁶³ Penny Sparke and Mitchell Owens, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration*, ed. by Mitchell Owens (New York: Acanthus Press, 2005), p. 232.

⁶⁴ Edna Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', *Vogue (America)* (New York, August 1928), pp. 44–47 (p. 45)
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/879185044/DAFBDF4D4C4C42A9PQ/2?accountid=28521>>.

a vast space with floor to ceiling windows leading directly to a glazed garden terrace (Figure 3-13).

The ballroom was characterised by a flamboyant chinoiserie aesthetic, the main focus of which was an unusual set of eighteenth-century Chinese wallpapers on a powder blue ground, accented with pale pinks and greens with a design of birds and flowers in a walled garden. The room was furnished with a grand piano as well as chairs and side tables in French rococo style. There was relatively little furniture in the room in order to accommodate large numbers of guests and allow for ease of circulation, but the lack of furniture also allowed the Chinese wallpapers to be even more prominent (Figure 3-12).



Figure 3-12 Ballroom, Condé Nast Apartment, 1040 Park Avenue, New York. [Source: Edna, Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', Vogue, August 1st, 1928, p.46]

The wallpapers depict birds and flowers in an ornamental garden, partially obscured by sections of garden wall, a moon shaped gate and a trellis creating the

illusion of a traditional Chinese walled garden. The enormous set of wallpapers reached from skirting board to cornice and acted as the central focal point of the room, rather than a background. Without a panelled dado the effects of the wallpaper were even more dramatic, offering a continuous panorama with almost trompe l'oeil effects. The chinoiserie theme was exaggerated by the use of pagoda shaped pelmets (Figure 3-13), reminiscent of the pagoda shaped pelmets seen in the Powel House room, which was being installed at the same time as De Wolfe was designing the interiors of Nast's apartment.⁶⁵ The ballroom also featured a large, ornate Chippendale style chinoiserie mirror with pagoda shaped finial and wall sconces decorated with 'Christmas-tree lighting appliqués with crystal drops.'⁶⁶ Every detail was devised to work in harmony with the wallpaper and to create a consistent, but exaggerated chinoiserie theme, the details of which were recorded in an article in *Vogue* in 1928:

The pink and blue motif of the Chinese wall-paper is accented by the salmon-pink moire curtains edged with bluish green fringe. The silver gauze under-curtains are trimmed with Chinese-blue ribbon and silver banding.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ I was unable to find evidence of any contact between de Wolfe and curators working on the American Wing displays, but it is likely that de Wolfe had both social and professional contacts that would have allowed her insight into the displays. As such, the design of the pelmets in Nast's ballroom may have been influenced by the pelmets in the Powel House room.

⁶⁶ Edna Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', *Vogue (America)* (New York, August 1928), pp. 44–47 (p. 47)
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/879185044/DAFBDF4D4C4C42A9PQ/2?accountid=28521>>.

⁶⁷ Edna Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', *Vogue (America)* (New York, August 1928), pp. 44–47 (p. 46)
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/879185044/DAFBDF4D4C4C42A9PQ/2?accountid=28521>>.

The ballroom was Nast's main entertaining space. His regular parties served to confirm his home and his publications as key loci for fashionable taste making in America and beyond. The ballroom played a key role in visualising and promoting the Condé Nast brand, as a location for events as well as for photoshoots for Nast's publications. Several pages of *Vogue* were devoted to de Wolfe's designs for the apartment, in a lavishly illustrated article published in 1928 (Figure 3-14).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Edna Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', *Vogue (America)* (New York, August 1928), pp. 44–47
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/879185044/DAFBDF4D4C4C42A9PQ/2?accountid=28521>>.



Figure 3-13 Door leading to the terrace from the ballroom at Condé Nast Apartment, 1040 Park Avenue, New York. [Source: Image 22873, 1927 Condé Nast Apartment, 1040 Park Avenue, New York, Box 16, file 408, Nast, Condé, 1040 Park Avenue, Mattie E. Hewitt & Richard A. Smith Photograph Collection (PR26), New York Historical Association, New York.]

The article notably reports the well documented provenance of the wallpapers, describing the antique, eighteenth-century wallpaper as ‘Chien-Lung’, and thereby invoking imperial, Chinese associations. The European provenance of the wallpapers is also related with details of its discovery in the attic at Welbeck

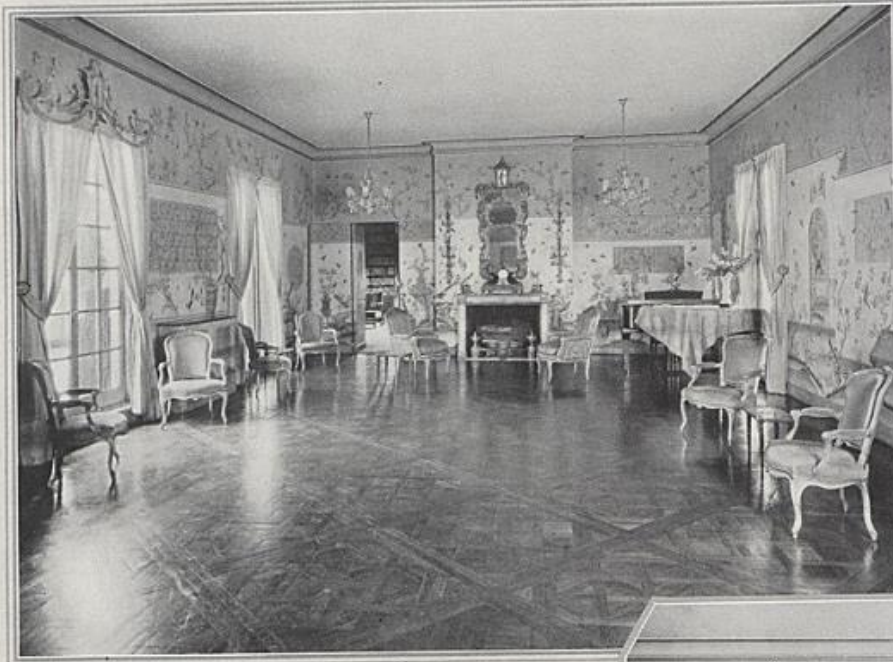
Abbey, the seat of the Dukes of Portland in Nottinghamshire before it was used in the ballroom at Beaudesert, the Marquess of Anglesey's country estate in Staffordshire, providing further evidence of an elite past.⁶⁹

An image and description of the Nast wallpapers was published in Nancy McClelland's book *Historic Wall-papers* in 1924, in which McClelland noted that the wallpapers were, at the time of writing, in the possession of a Mrs. J.H. Weaver at her home, Maroebe, a French rococo style chateau in Merion, Philadelphia, USA.⁷⁰ It is unclear whether or not the wallpapers were ever installed at Maroebe. De Wolfe must have purchased the wallpapers from Mrs. J.H. Weaver directly or via a dealer at about the same time or shortly before McClelland's 1924 book was published as she started work on Condé Nast's apartment in 1924 and the first party took place there on January 18th, 1925.⁷¹

⁶⁹ For further discussion of the provenance of this paper see Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017); Emile de Bruijn, 'Writing the Biography of a Chinese Wallpaper', *National Trust Treasure Hunt*, 2012 <<https://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2012/09/06/writing-the-biography-of-a-chinese-wallpaper/>> [accessed 26 May 2018].

⁷⁰ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 109.

⁷¹ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 109.



The ballroom walls are covered with an eighteenth-century Chien-Lung wall-paper. This has an interesting history, having been found in the attic at Welbeck Abbey and later put in the ballroom at "Beau Desert," the residence of the Marquess of Anglesey in Wales



The long windows of the ballroom give onto the terrace. The pink and blue motif of the Chinese wall-paper is accented by the salmon-pink moire curtain edged with bluish-green fringe. The silver gauze under-curtains are trimmed with Chinese-blue ribbon and silver banding



Mattie Edwards Hewitt

(Left) The roof-terrace is treated as a continuation of the ballroom. This portion is glass enclosed, and, when an entertainment is planned, tables are set also on the open terrace, which commands a view of Park Avenue

Figure 3-14 Condé Nast Apartment, 1040 Park Avenue, New York. [Source: Edna, Woolman Chase, 'The New York Apartment of Condé Nast', Vogue, August 1st, 1928, p.46]

The Chinese wallpapers remained in Condé Nast's apartment until his death in 1942, after which the contents of the apartment were sold at auction and the

apartment itself was split into smaller units and sold. It was at this time, in 1943 that American wallpaper purveyors, Gracie removed and acquired the Chinese wallpaper from the apartment for their own stock.⁷² The fact that the wallpapers remained in Nast's apartment for so many years is indicative of how valuable they were perceived to be, a value that was most likely predicated on their illustrious provenance and elite historical associations as well as their spectacular visual effects, which made them the centrepiece of the room.

The wallpapers were published again a few years after Nast's death in *House and Gardens' Complete Guide to Interior decoration*, in an article entitled 'A Period Apartment that drew its treasures from both France and England.'⁷³ While the article celebrated the timelessness of the interior design of Nast's apartment, the reference to decorative elements from Europe in the article's title indicates that the Chinese origin of the wallpapers was considered secondary to their European provenance, which conferred greatest value; the European chapter of their history is specifically invoked, or 'singularized', to use Kopytoff's terminology, in this context. The Chinese wallpapers were featured prominently in the article and the fact that they were published in this collection in 1947 suggests that they were

⁷² D Colman, 'Dreams Come True: Just Check the Wall', *New York Times*, 19 April 2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/fashion/michael-smith-a-man-and-his-wallpaper.html?_r=0>.

⁷³ *House and Gardens' Complete Guide to Interior Decoration*, ed. by R Wright (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947), pp. 182–83.

still considered to have relevance as an example of fashionable interiors almost twenty years after they were first published in *Vogue*.

As described earlier in this chapter, wallpaper purveyors Gracie had acquired some of the original panels from Condé Nast's apartment when the apartment and contents were sold in 1943.⁷⁴ These had been kept in the company archive since their initial acquisition, with a few panels being sold incrementally over the years.⁷⁵ In 2012, Condé Nast's Chinese wallpapers came to public attention once more when they were published in *Architectural Digest*, in a feature on the home of celebrity interior designer Michael S. Smith and his partner James Costos (Figure 3-15).⁷⁶

Smith's Los Angeles based interior design practice, which opened in 1990, has thrived on producing designs which are 'distinguished by a deep respect for tradition, filtered through a modern lens.'⁷⁷ Smith's modern yet traditional designs saw him appointed as the official decorator for the White House in 2008, and he

⁷⁴ Judith Thurman, 'L'Art de Vivre', *Architectural Digest*, 2012, 140–43 <<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/michael-smith-james-costos-penthouse-apartment-new-york-article>>. With thanks to Emile de Bruijn for bringing this article to my attention.

⁷⁵ Gracie, Mike. Director, Gracie Studio, New York. Telephone interview. 2 April. 2013.

⁷⁶ Judith Thurman, 'L'Art de Vivre', *Architectural Digest*, 2012, 140–43 <<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/michael-smith-james-costos-penthouse-apartment-new-york-article>>.

⁷⁷ 'Michael S. Smith Inc', 2018 <<https://www.michaelsmithinc.com/the-company>> [accessed 23 August 2018].

was tasked with re-decorating the Oval Office in 2010. Consequently, his profile has become highly visible and his design work increasingly popular and influential.

The Chinese wallpapers, which Smith acquired from Gracie, depicting birds and flowers in a walled garden, are pictured in the kitchen and dining area of the couple's luxury Manhattan apartment in the aforementioned 2012 AD article (Figure 3-15). In this article, Smith explained that a circa-1925 photograph of the ballroom that Elsie de Wolfe designed for Condé Nast was the design inspiration for his own apartment. Smith then described his search for a Chinese wallpaper that was similar to that pictured in the photograph of Nast's apartment, which led him to wallpaper purveyor, Gracie Studio in New York. Smith recounted his delight at unexpectedly being able to acquire a small number of panels from the actual set of wallpapers pictured in the image that had inspired him and these were subsequently installed in his apartment.

Smith found the perfect space to accommodate the small number of panels available, in his small dining room, demonstrating a dynamic similar to that described in the previous chapter when the new board room at Coutts & Co. was designed according to the dimensions of the Chinese wallpapers, prioritising the wallpapers over the architectural space. Smith knew that he wanted to accommodate the Chinese wallpapers that he had sourced in Gracie's stores and he found an appropriate space for them. In Smith's intimate dining room, the wallpaper fills the full height of the room and curves up onto the ceiling, adding to the all-enveloping effects of the design (Figure 3-15). The wallpaper is

complemented by subtle, chinoiserie architectural design elements, including simple, clean-lined, pagoda-shaped architraves and a similarly shaped cupola surround, to create an updated, modern chinoiserie aesthetic (Figure 3-15).

HBO executive, James Costos describes the couples' approach to the re-decoration of their period apartment as a specifically visual exercise, explaining; "You adapt a property for the screen the same way you adapt one of bricks and mortar: by breathing new life into an old narrative. That sometimes means taking poetic license, and there's some trickery in these rooms—a little French and a lot faux. But the tension generates a modern energy."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Judith Thurman, 'L'Art de Vivre', *Architectural Digest*, 2012, 140–43
<<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/michael-smith-james-costos-penthouse-apartment-new-york-article>>.



Figure 3-15 Dining room in Michael. S Smith and James Costos' apartment, New York. [Source: Architectural Digest, September, 2012. <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/michael-smith-james-costos-penthouse-apartment-new-york-article>]

The Chinese wallpapers from Condé Nast's apartment represent both new life and an old narrative in Smith and Costos' apartment, exemplifying the way in which Chinese wallpapers facilitate a complex dialogue between tradition and modernity, past and present. The Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co., similarly

represent the past and the present through their images, material presence and their own particular biographical stories. Both sets of Chinese wallpapers opened the door to the past for later generations and allowed them to imagine the lives of those who had lived with them previously.

In an interview published in *The New York Times* in 2013, Smith described the specific aesthetic appeal of the Chinese wallpapers beyond their illustrious provenance:

Hand-painted wallpapers usually depict landscapes, with gardens and animals and people and buildings. This wallpaper does nothing of the kind. It is a garden, yes, but the interior of a lovely walled garden — the image is mostly wall, in fact — so it creates a sense of being cloistered and private, even as openings in the wall give glimpses of landscapes outside. Walking a line between inside and outside, the imagery suggests a sense of place rather than space. (...) This is a small room and a flat surface, but the wallpaper still gives you this magical experience of compression and expansion.⁷⁹

Although the same set of wallpapers were used to decorate both the Condé Nast ballroom and the domestic spaces of Michael S. Smith's home, the spatial and decorative effects created are markedly different. The once expansive, social stage of the ballroom has been reduced to a reflective, intimate space in Smith's apartment, where the wallpapers offer not a social stage, but a private retreat within the garden walls. Despite the difference in aesthetic effect it seems clear that in both spaces the wallpapers were used to promote a personal brand. In this

⁷⁹ D Colman, 'Dreams Come True: Just Check the Wall', *New York Times*, 19 April 2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/fashion/michael-smith-a-man-and-his-wallpaper.html?_r=0>.

case, Smith's apartment acted as a promotional showcase for his design work. Following the use of this set of Chinese wallpapers by Michael S. Smith, Gracie produced hand painted copies of the original wallpapers for use by clients of the designer, demonstrating the success of the designer's home as a marketing tool. The wallpaper design has also now been added to Gracie's permanent line of Chinese wallpaper designs (Figure 3-16).⁸⁰



Figure 3-16 Window display, Gracie Studio, New York, 2016 [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2016.]

The well documented history of this particular wallpaper traces a global trajectory, from China, to Europe, to America and reflects a journey taken by many historic Chinese wallpapers. Their longstanding aesthetic appeal, robust

⁸⁰ Gracie Studio Design SY-705

material qualities and portability have made them the object (and subject) of fashionable interiors amongst the privileged, international elite for over three centuries, tracing the ebb and flow of global capital. As they travelled the wallpaper panels were slowly dispersed and cut down in size, undergoing a process of physical shrinkage, but during this process their influence spread more widely as they were seen by greater numbers of people, particularly through magazine publications. The history of this wallpaper highlights the trade networks and social networks through which Chinese wallpapers have moved and it is clear that its associations with illustrious previous owners added to its subsequent value and appeal.

While this set of papers has documented provenance and a detailed biography dating back to the eighteenth century it was the use of this set of wallpapers by Elsie de Wolfe and Condé Nast in the early twentieth century that formed the primary appeal for designer Michael S. Smith. This provides support to the idea that by the twentieth century the history and provenance of Chinese wallpaper beyond their origins in China was most often the main basis of their appeal. So, while the Chinese origins of the wallpapers was most likely recognised it seems that this value became secondary to other values now inherent in it.

Picturing Nostalgia and Modernity in American Orientalist Interiors

While Chinese wallpapers contributed to traditionalist interior designs following historical European models in the first decades of the twentieth century, they also

dovetailed seamlessly with modern global style movements, in particular, Arts and Crafts and Art Deco. In these contexts, they were valued for their meticulous craftsmanship and their seemingly exotic and alluring East Asian origins.⁸¹ As such, Chinese wallpapers contributed to a variety of co-existing cultural narratives pertaining to history and heritage as well as to modern, global style movements, emphasising the dual qualities of Chinese wallpaper as modern and antique, Chinese and European, contemporary and traditional.

The market for Chinese wallpapers in early twentieth century America was undoubtedly affected by the Centennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876. It precipitated a growing interest in Chinese art and material culture and provided a new source of Chinese decorative objects for American interiors. Chinese decorative art was valued for its superior craftsmanship and exotic materials (especially lacquer, ivory and metalwork), as well as its romantic and nostalgic associations with an ancient imperial nation.⁸² The exhibition was held in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and was the first official World's Fair to be held in the United

⁸¹ Anna Jackson, 'Inspiration from the East', in *Art Deco, 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2005), pp. 67–77 (p. 73). For further background context relating to Art Deco in China specifically also see: Patrick Lecomte, 'From Puccini to Powder Boxes, How China Infused Art Deco Era', *Post Magazine, South China Morning Post*, 5 March 2016 <<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/fashion-luxury/article/1920075/puccini-powder-boxes-how-china-infused-art>>.

⁸² Anna Jackson, 'Inspiration from the East', in *Art Deco, 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2005), pp. 67–77 (pp. 71–73).

States.⁸³ It was a showcase for industrial technology as well as international arts and crafts and exerted significant influence on American architecture and interior design in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

At the time of America's centennial celebrations the question of American national identity was being widely debated. While European material culture and decorative models had been absorbed into American material culture to a significant degree there was, on the part of many Americans, a desire to define an American national style which gave rise to the Colonial Revival movement, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, this search for a distinctive cultural and material identity also created a role for Asian decorative art in American interiors.⁸⁴ The use of Japanese objects in American interiors from the late nineteenth century, into the twentieth century, as described by design historian, Christine Guth, importantly facilitated the expression of identities that were separate and not indebted to European forerunners.⁸⁵ The use of Chinese objects was more complex in this respect as they had been absorbed, and in many cases acculturated into European material landscapes. However, Americans used Chinese art and decorative objects in new and creative ways, distinct from

⁸³ Linda Gross and Theresa R. Snyder, *Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition* (Charleston, S.C: Arcadia, 2005).

⁸⁴ Anna Jackson, 'Imagining Japan: The Victorian Perception and Acquisition of Japanese Culture', *Journal of Design History*, 5.4 (1992), 245–56 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315989>>.

⁸⁵ Christine M.E. Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting and Japan* (University of Washington Press, 2004).

European decorative trends, as well as in ways which emulated historical European decorative models.

While the Japanese display at the centennial was generally regarded to have been a greater success and to have exerted greater influence in America than the Chinese display, historian, Jennifer Pitman's research on the Chinese exhibit argues that there was in fact 'a genuine taste for Chinese material among the general (American) public, private collectors and institutional collections in 1876.'⁸⁶ The growing American appreciation for Chinese art and decorative objects was also clearly reflected in reviews of the Chinese exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, where the unfamiliar materials and the exceptional craftsmanship of the Chinese products marked them out for special mention. Of the Chinese display J.S. Ingram, author of *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated* wrote:

One of the most attractive and remarkable departments of the main building was beyond all question that containing exhibits of China [...].⁸⁷

Taken as a whole, the display was one of the most choice and elegant collections ever seen, whether at any of the great

⁸⁶ Jennifer Pitman, 'China's Presence at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 10.1 (2002), 35–73 (p. 37) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40662992?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>. A significant proportion of the items on display were from the private collection of a wealthy Chinese customs official based in Hangzhou, Named Hu Tuen Tzen. The collection included bronzes, cloisonné, porcelain, textiles and carved ivory.

⁸⁷ J.S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition: Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centenary of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), p. 570.

Worlds' Fairs or in the art cabinets of the crowned heads of Europe.'⁸⁸

The craftsmanship of the objects was particularly noted:

[...] every line of this work was the product, not of mechanical contrivances, but of human labour directed by an unnerving though somewhat incongruous sense of the beautiful, and aided by endless patience and perseverance.'⁸⁹

The entire exhibit of China was composed not of mighty engines for economising labour [...] but of artistically beautiful though aesthetically grotesque ornamentation, which has been cultivated until even the most ordinary articles of household use have been transformed into visions of beauty.⁹⁰

The description of 'artistically beautiful though aesthetically grotesque' Chinese objects, which were also notably 'not of mechanical contrivances', stood in direct contrast to the cutting edge industrial displays offered up by Western nations. Ingram's description of the display reflects broader popular perceptions of China and Chinese decorative art as perpetually ancient and remote. Throughout Ingram's illustrated guide to the Centennial Exhibition, China and Chinese people are persistently referred to as 'Celestials', a term widely used to describe Chinese emigrants to the United States during the nineteenth century. This derives from

⁸⁸ J.S Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition: Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centenary of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), p. 572.

⁸⁹ J.S Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition: Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centenary of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), p. 572.

⁹⁰ J.S Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition: Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centenary of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), pp. 572–73.

the term *Tianchao*, meaning 'Celestial Empire', commonly used to refer to China during this period. This terminology gives a strong indication of the Orientalised gaze with which Chinese people and Chinese material culture were viewed in nineteenth century America.⁹¹ This language served to distance China and this in turn served Orientalist narratives or at least enhanced the sense of exoticism surrounding the use of Chinese objects in American interiors.

The increased flow of goods from China to America came about as a direct result of aggressive western attempts to open China to further trade during the nineteenth century. This led to the two 'Opium Wars' between China and western nations in 1839-42 and 1856-60, which resulted in the opening of four treaty ports for international trade at Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai, in addition to Guangzhou (Canton). In 1844, the first Sino-American treaty, which became known as the Treaty of Wangxia, was negotiated by Caleb Cushing (1800-1879) and, particularly with the establishment of American rights to extraterritoriality in China, worked to establish a pseudo imperialist relationship between the U.S and China in which the U.S. was the dominant force.⁹² This treaty resulted in significantly increased trading opportunities for American import/export companies, such as Perkins and Co., Russell and Company and Bryant and Sturgis

⁹¹ For a detailed account of the history of Chinese immigrants in America see Iris Chang, 'The Chinese in America: A Narrative History' (New York: Viking, 2003).

⁹² Many of the treaties that China signed with Western nations during the nineteenth century later became known as 'unequal treaties' in early twentieth century China, reflecting a rising nationalist fervour in China at that time and a sense of injustice at the aggressive ways in which China had been manipulated. For in depth discussion on this topic see, Warren I Cohen, *America's Response to China; an Interpretative History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1971).

who traded American ginseng, furs and opium for Chinese tea, silk, porcelain and decorative goods throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

While the Chinese were lauded at the Centennial for their craft skills, this favourable view of Chinese art and culture did not always extend to Chinese people, who were often portrayed in negative stereotype in the popular American press (Figure 3-17).⁹³

The sketch shown in Figure 3-17 depicts a Chinese opium den in New York. It was published in *Harper's Weekly* magazine in 1874 and shows opium smokers and gamblers crammed into a small room, presided over by a large, sinister-looking, male Chinese caricature. This image reflects a wave of popular anti-Chinese sentiment in America, precipitated by the large numbers of Chinese immigrants who came to find work, primarily on the west coast, from the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁴ This resulted in the 1882 Chinese exclusion act which severely curtailed Chinese immigration to the United States.⁹⁵ Though initially a temporary measure, this exclusionary legislation was revised in 1892 resulting in even more stringent

⁹³ For an insightful account of the kind of negative attitudes and violence suffered by Chinese communities across America during the late nineteenth century see Julie Courtwright, 'A Slave To Yellow Peril: The 1886 Chinese Ouster Attempt In Wichita, Kansas', *Great Plains Quarterly*, 22.1 (2002), 23–33 <<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2351>>.

⁹⁴ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking, 2003).

⁹⁵ For details of the Chinese exclusion act in the United States and its impact see Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); John Robert Soennichsen, 'The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882' (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood, 2011).

restrictions on the movement of Chinese people in and out of the United States.

These restrictions remained in place until 1943.⁹⁶



Figure 3-17 Print, *The Chinese in N.Y. scene in a Baxter St. Club house*, March 1874; Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910); USA; 1946-68-4, published in *Harper's Weekly*, March, 7th 1874, p. 212. [Source: Cooper Hewitt Museum of Design, Object ID: 18604613, <http://cprhw.tt/o/2Dmvc/>]

While Chinese immigrants increasingly represented a threat to American society from the perspective of many Americans, the alluring image of an exotic and ancient China, represented by Chinese material culture continued to attract

⁹⁶ 'Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States', *United States National Archives*, 2018 <<https://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/guide>> [accessed 24 August 2018].

consumers and interior decorators to Chinese decorative arts, including Chinese wallpapers.⁹⁷ Chinese material culture, such as lacquered furniture, jades, bronzes and textiles, represented loci for orientalist fantasies while the presence of Chinese people was perceived by many as an inconvenient and undesirable reality. In this way, negative stereotypes of Chinese people co-existed with nostalgic and exotic images of China which objectified China as perpetually ancient, static and consigned to the distant past. This nostalgic gaze generated orientalist representations of China in fashion and interiors and was reflected in fashion and lifestyle magazines as well as in department store displays (Figure 3-10). In American interiors this was often experienced as a theatrical fantasy using a variety of textures, colours and materials in riotous combination presenting a complete contrast to classical interior designs.

An American Orientalist Interior: The China Trade Room, Beauport, Gloucester, Massachusetts, Henry Davis Sleeper, 1923

The early twentieth century fashion for Chinese decorative art and dramatic Orientalist interiors in America is exemplified by the China Trade room at the former summer residence of early twentieth century collector and interior decorator, Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934). As an interior decorator, Sleeper was

⁹⁷ John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. XV. Cited by Julie Courtwright, 'A Slave To Yellow Peril: The 1886 Chinese Oyster Attempt In Wichita, Kansas', *Great Plains Quarterly*, 22.1 (2002), 23–33 (p. 24) <<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2351>>.

renowned for his 'flair for color and arrangements'⁹⁸ and his use of patriotic American decorative themes, but also his wonderfully eclectic style and creative displays of *objects d'art*. While, as curator Richard Nylander has written, he learned much from prominent practitioners of the Colonial Revival style, such as Ogden Codman Jr., Herbert C. Browne and Arthur Little, he did not share their respect for historical accuracy and created eclectic interior designs which expressed a 'romantic vision of an ideal past.'⁹⁹ He counted American philanthropist and art collector, Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924) among his friends and undertook commissions for many elite East Coast families, including collector and philanthropist H.F du Pont, whose homes Chestertown in New York and Winterthur in Delaware he worked and advised on.

Sleeper was born in Boston, Massachusetts to a middle class family. Little is known about his early life and education as most of his personal papers have been lost, but it is known that as an adult he served in an administrative capacity in the American Field Service during the First World War (1914-1918) before going on to become one of the first generation of interior decorators.¹⁰⁰ His extant design

⁹⁸ David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), p. 9.

⁹⁹ David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), p. 11.

projects remain his most lasting legacy, foremost among them is his personal summer and weekend retreat, Beauport, in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Sleeper began constructing his whimsical country retreat, Beauport, in 1907 (Figure 3-18). The house, which was initially conceived of as a Queen Anne cottage,¹⁰¹ was expanded extensively and repeatedly during the years that Sleeper lived there and by the time of his death it had evolved to become a unique forty room labyrinth characterised by ‘crooked passageways, doors leading to nowhere, secret staircases, dramatic surprises and shadowy recesses [...]’.¹⁰² As well as adding to the structure, Sleeper also updated the interior design at regular intervals to accommodate his new collections and design ideas. While he used the house as a retreat for himself and for entertaining guests, latterly the house also doubled as a showcase for his interior decorating business, reflecting a practice of locating a personal brand in one’s own home, already described in the previous case study relating to Condé Nast and Michael S. Smith.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The “Queen Anne” architectural style was popular in the United States from the 1880s to the 1920s. Despite its name it bore little resemblance to the English Baroque architecture produced during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714) but was characterised instead by projecting gables, hipped roofs and wrap around porches, though they varied widely in design.

¹⁰² David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), pp. 7, 11.

¹⁰³ Van Kovering, Martha. House Manager and Curator, Beauport, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Personal interview. 7 March 2016.; David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), p. 10.



Figure 3-18 Exterior, Beauport, Gloucester, Mass. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2016]

Each space in the house was individually and beautifully conceived, incorporating historic American architectural structures and fittings and discreet collections of decorative art such as coloured glass, French tole (painted, enamelled or lacquered tinplate) in the style of Chinese lacquer, illustrated books and porcelain. The interiors were wholly eclectic in style reflecting Sleeper's experimentations with a wide variety of historical styles, ranging from English Gothic to American folk, as well as Arts and Crafts, as noted by curators at the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) in Boston, Richard Nylander and

Nancy Curtis, 'Beauport certainly reflects the aesthetic philosophy and concepts of interior design of the Arts and Crafts movement [...].'¹⁰⁴

The Arts and Crafts movement emerged in Britain during the 1860s as a response to growing industrialisation and its effects on the material landscape. Simple forms, natural materials and honest craftsmanship were the central tenets of the design movement, which celebrated vernacular traditions and design motifs inspired by nature.¹⁰⁵ Arts and Crafts flourished in America; on the East coast, in the Midwest and in California from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ While the movement originated in Britain, it acquired its own particular and unique forms in America, guided by leading figures including designer and entrepreneur, Gustav Stickley (1858-1942), architect and designer, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), and architectural design firm Greene and Greene, established in 1894.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), pp. 7–8.

¹⁰⁵ Monica Obniski, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement in America', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2000–, 2008
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm (June 2008)> [accessed 4 April 2018].

¹⁰⁶ Monica Obniski, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement in America', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2000–, 2008
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm (June 2008)> [accessed 4 April 2018]. For an in depth account of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America see *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1876–1916*, ed. by Robert Judson Clark (Princeton University Press, 1972).

¹⁰⁷ Monica Obniski, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement in America', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2000–, 2008
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm (June 2008)> [accessed 4 April 2018].

Japan was the dominant foreign influence in the Arts and Crafts movement, following the re-establishment of US-Japanese trade relations in 1854.¹⁰⁸ Many western artists and designers began to look to Japan as a source of inspiration and the imagined locus of an ideal way of existence. Japanese objects were displayed in Arts and Crafts interiors in America from the late nineteenth century, often as part of exaggerated orientalist design schemes, exemplified by William H. Vanderbilt's opulent Japanese parlor (Figure 3-19) described and illustrated in *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (1883-84).¹⁰⁹ Another key example of the influence of Japanese art and aesthetics in American interiors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is James McNeill Whistler's Peacock room, an iconic Aesthetic interior in the Anglo-Japanese style completed in 1877, brought from London to America in 1904, to the home of industrialist and collector, Charles Lang Freer in Detroit.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Arts and Crafts also became a popular artistic movement in Japan itself at this time. For a detailed account of the Arts and Crafts *Mingei* movement in Japan see Rupert Faulkner, 'Arts and Crafts in Japan', in *International Arts and Crafts*, ed. by Karen Livingstone and Linda Parry (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ Edward Strahan, William H Vanderbilt, and George Barrie, *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (Boston; New York; Philadelphia: Published by George Barrie, 1883).

¹¹⁰ Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1998).

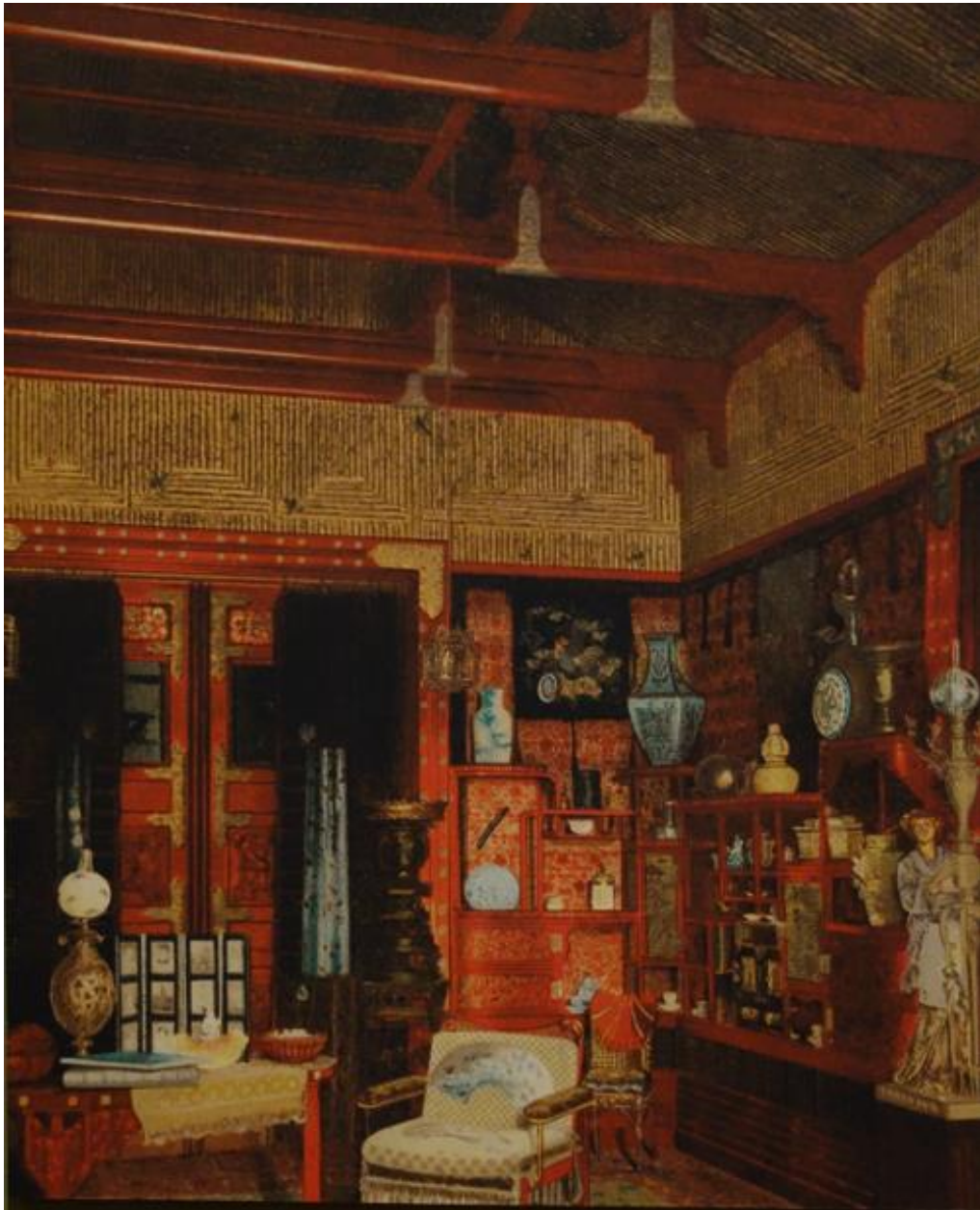


Figure 3-19 Chromolithograph reproduction, The Japanese Parlor, Mr Vanderbilt's House and Collection, New York City, 1883-1884, Edward Strahan (American, 1838-1886) [Source: Thomas J. Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.]

China and Chinese material culture was also influential in the Arts and Crafts movement and the Aesthetic movement, wherein Chinese blue and white porcelain was particularly prized. Among American designers who aligned themselves with the Arts and Crafts movement, New York based furniture designer Charles Rohlf (1853-1936) looked to China for inspiration and similarly

jewellery designer and metal worker Marie Zimmerman (1879-1972) also sought inspiration from foreign cultures, including Greece, Egypt and China.¹¹¹ Through architectural design and applied art, Arts and crafts designers sought to create environments in which beautiful and fine workmanship governed.¹¹² The interiors designed by Henry Sleeper at Beauport were a direct reflection of these ideals, featuring a broad range of American craftwork, predominantly wood work, as well as decorative art sourced from around the world.

The double height reception room at Beauport was originally conceived as an Elizabethan hall, but in 1923 Sleeper transformed this space into a China Trade Room (Figure 3-20).¹¹³ Here, Sleeper installed an exceptional set of eighteenth century, hand-painted, Chinese wallpapers with fresh, jewel-like colours (Figure 3-23), depicting rice cultivation and porcelain manufacture. These were displayed alongside dark-wood, vernacular, Chinese furniture and custom made architectural fitments in dramatic chinoiserie style.

¹¹¹ Monica Obniski, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement in America', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–*, 2008
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm (June 2008)> [accessed 4 April 2018].

¹¹² Monica Obniski, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000)
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm (June 2008)> [accessed 15 January 2018].

¹¹³ 'Beauport, Gloucester, Mass., Photograph Albums Collection' (Boston: Historic New England), p. PC009.132 <<https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections>>.



Figure 3-20 China Trade Room, Beauport, Gloucester, Mass. ca. 1940, Attributed to Samuel Chamberlain (1895-1995). [Source: *Historic New England*, Collection reference code: PC009.132, <https://www.historicnewengland.org/collections/>.]

The wallpapers are reputedly those ordered by financier Robert Morris (1734-1806) in 1783.¹¹⁴ Morris was a cousin of the aforementioned Samuel Powel, who was a signatory of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. These elite historical connections conferred status upon this particular Chinese wallpaper, but also, perhaps more importantly, offered the romantic value of a storied past for this particular set of wallpapers. As has already been discussed in relation to the Powel House room, the Morris papers were brought to the United States on the *Empress of China*, which was part owned by Morris and was the first official American trade

¹¹⁴ Nancy Vincent McClelland, 'Chinese, Anglo-Chinese And Franco-Chinese Papers', in *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), pp. 89–111 (pp. 96–99).

ship to sail directly to China in 1784. This alleged provenance for the wallpapers seen in Sleeper's China Trade room was first published by Nancy McClelland in her 1924 survey, *Historic Wall-papers*.¹¹⁵ While there is evidence for the importation of a set of Chinese wallpapers, ordered by Robert Morris, in the ships' Captain's log book there is no evidence to suggest that the papers used by Sleeper were the same set of papers.¹¹⁶ In spite of this, the Morris provenance is cited in numerous publications.¹¹⁷ This provides further evidence of the propensity for myths to grow and form around Chinese wallpapers and transform ideal histories and conjecture into 'fact'. Such myths tend to confer additional value upon the wallpapers, as already described in case of the Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. with their reputed connection to Lord Macartney and the famous Macartney mission to China, described in chapter two.

Sleeper's China Trade room is relatively small and is both long and narrow, with a double height ceiling. The wallpaper fills the entire wall space above the dado with spectacular all enveloping effects (Figure 3-20). The exotic aesthetic is heightened by a tent form plaster ceiling and a minstrels' gallery with pagoda shaped architrave, sweeping curtains and lacquer effect fret work balustrades.

¹¹⁵ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), pp. 94–95.

¹¹⁶ Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (London: Antique Collector's Club, 1991), p. 401.

¹¹⁷ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1924), p. 96., Carl L. Crossman, *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (London: Antique Collector's Club, 1991), p. 401., Michele Hamill, *Summer Work Project: A Technical Examination of the Chinese Parlor Wallpaper*, 1989, p. 17.

The room is filled with elaborate, bespoke Chinese style architectural fittings and decorative art in combination with a selection of relatively restrained, simple vernacular Chinese furniture.

The colours of the wallpaper have remained strong, unlike many other extant eighteenth century examples which have faded readily on exposure to light. The bright blue background of the wallpaper contrasts with the apple green foliage of the trees and the coloured garments of the figures, dotted throughout the landscape. The orientalist aesthetic of the original room design, as conceived by Sleeper in 1923, was amplified by the presence of a large pagoda roofed pavilion (Figure 3-21).¹¹⁸ The structure was built directly into the wall and was large enough to fit a Chinese table and stools for playing chess and other games. From each corner of the roof there stretched a sinuous, scaled tendril with a small bell hanging from the end and the top was crowned with a palm leaf finial. Sleeper also added a fire place (Figure 3-22)¹¹⁹ with Chinese design accents, with a mantel which took the form of a tiled Chinese roof with upturned eaves at either end. The doors were similarly framed with architraves modelled on a Chinese roof, embellished with gilded cockerel finials and inset with carved jade roundels (Figure 3-23).

¹¹⁸ 'Beauport, Gloucester, Mass., Photograph Albums Collection' (Boston: Historic New England), p. PC009.132 <<https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections>>.

¹¹⁹ 'Beauport, Gloucester, Mass., Photograph Albums Collection' (Boston: Historic New England), p. PC009.132 <<https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections>>.

Many of these more dramatic features of the original design scheme for the China Trade Room, including the pagoda and the fireplace, were removed when the house was purchased by Mrs. Helena Woolworth McCann, wife of Charles E. F. McCann of Oyster Bay, Long Island, in 1935, though the wallpaper was retained.¹²⁰



Figure 3-21 China Trade Room, Beauport, Gloucester, Mass. ca. 1940, Attributed to Samuel Chamberlain (1895-1995). [Source: Historic New England, Collection reference code: PC009.132, <https://www.historicnewengland.org/collections/>.]

¹²⁰ For further details of the alterations made see David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991).

All the furniture chosen by Sleeper for the original 1923 room design was of Chinese manufacture, characterised by dark, heavy, wood and the floor was bare brick, in the style of a Qing period (1644-1911) Chinese merchant's home.¹²¹

While Sleeper referred to the room as the 'China Trade Room', apart from the industry themes depicted on the wallpapers themselves and a few decorative pieces, such as carved ivories typical of Chinese export products, China Trade historian Carl Crossman argues that there was in the room, 'nothing to reflect the American trader at home.'¹²² However, Crossman's argument is based on an assumption that Sleeper was trying to re-create an image of the American China trader at home in America, when in fact the use of vernacular furniture and the traditional style Chinese brick floor might rather indicate that Sleeper was in fact attempting to imagine a space that a China Trader may have inhabited in China, or alternatively a Chinese merchant's home.¹²³

While Sleeper worked with a Chinese theme his designs were completely different to chinoiserie interiors based on historical European models. In his China Trade

¹²¹ For examples of extant middle class Qing period Chinese homes with brick floors like these see Yin Yu Tang at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem Massachusetts, and Lou Kau mansion in Macau, see 'Yin Yu Tang', 2018 <<https://www.pem.org/visit/yin-yu-tang>> [accessed 27 August 2018]; 'Lou Kau Mansion', 2018 <http://en.macaotourism.gov.mo/sightseeing/sightseeing_detail.php?c=10&id=135#.W4RDRuhKjLY> [accessed 27 August 2018].

¹²² David Bohl and others, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991).

¹²³ With thanks to Sarah Cheang for suggesting these ideas.

Room Sleeper conflated the ornamental language of chinoiserie with that of vernacular Chinese architectural and furniture design. By conflating these two decorative traditions Sleeper created something quite unique and unlike historic European chinoiserie interior designs. He created a space of imagination and an orientalist fantasy reminiscent of a stage set for its theatricality and exaggerated forms.¹²⁴



Figure 3-22 China Trade Room, Beauport, Gloucester, Mass. ca. 1940, Attributed to Samuel Chamberlain (1895-1995). [Source: Historic New England, Collection reference code: PC009.132, <https://www.historicnewengland.org/collections/>.]

¹²⁴ Little is known about Sleeper's exact intentions regarding the decorative schemes at Beauport as all Sleeper's diaries and correspondence were destroyed after his death, at his request. Van Kovering, Martha. House Manager and Curator, Beauport, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Personal interview. 7 March 2016.



Figure 3-23 China Trade Room, Beauport, Gloucester, Mass. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2016]

According to Nancy McClelland, Sleeper acquired the Chinese wallpapers from the Elbridge Gerry house, the circa 1730 home of American statesman and diplomat Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814) in Marblehead, Massachusetts. According to McClelland, the wallpapers were never hung at the Elbridge Gerry house, but were stored in an attic.¹²⁵ McClelland also recorded that some sections were cut from the tops of this large set of wallpaper and installed in the parlour at the ‘King’ Hooper Mansion in Marblehead, Mass., home to shipping merchant Robert

¹²⁵ Nancy Vincent McClelland, ‘Chinese, Anglo-Chinese And Franco-Chinese Papers’, in *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), pp. 89–111 (pp. 96–99).

'King' Hooper.¹²⁶ The presence of the wallpapers at the Hooper house was recorded in the local Boston press in 1920 (Figure 3-24).¹²⁷ Sleeper later acquired those sections of wallpaper used in the 'King' Hooper mansion in addition to those from the Elbridge Gerry House.¹²⁸



Figure 3-24 The King Hooper Mansion in Marblehead built by Robert Hooper in 1745, *Boston Herald*, August 1st, 1920 [Source: Nancy McClelland Archive, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, New York]

Once Sleeper had acquired the full set of wallpapers he used some of the panels to decorate his own China Trade room at Beauport, but used the majority of this

¹²⁶ Nancy Vincent McClelland, 'Chinese, Anglo-Chinese And Franco-Chinese Papers', in *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), pp. 89–111 (pp. 96–99).

¹²⁷ 'The King Hooper Mansion in Marblehead Built by Robert Hooper in 1745', *Boston Herald*, 1 August 1920.

¹²⁸ Nancy Vincent McClelland, 'Chinese, Anglo-Chinese And Franco-Chinese Papers', in *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To The Introduction of Machinery* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1924), pp. 89–111 (pp. 96–99).

large forty piece set to decorate the ballroom at the home of E. Bruce Merriman, in Providence, Rhode Island (Figure 3-25).¹²⁹ The sections used to decorate the Merriman ballroom at 60 Manning Street, Providence, R.I. were acquired by the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts in 1974 (Object number E79,541).¹³⁰ Twenty-eight panels were acquired including thirteen tea scenes, six porcelain scenes and nine general landscape scenes. The ballroom was torn down in 2001.¹³¹



Figure 3-25 Ballroom at the home of E. Bruce Merriman, Providence, Rhode Island. [Source: Reproduced in Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers; From Their Inception to The Introduction of Machinery*, Lippincott, 1924, plate 7, page 97.]

Sleeper's own China Trade room is small by comparison, but despite the different dimensions of the two rooms the designs are remarkably similar; each featuring a swooping plaster ceiling, creating tent-like effects, a minstrels' gallery with

¹²⁹ The decoration of these two spaces using the Chinese wallpaper took place in 1923. See David Bohl and others, *Beaumont: The Sleeper-McCann House*, ed. by Richard C Nylander and Nancy Curtis (Boston: Godine in association with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1991), p. 104.

¹³⁰ 'Peabody Essex Museum Acquisition Files for E79,541' (Salem, Massachusetts).

¹³¹ 'Peabody Essex Museum Acquisition Files for E79,541' (Salem, Massachusetts).

lacquer effect fret work balustrades and bespoke Chinese style fittings, furniture and decorative art.

Sleeper completed design commissions for many wealthy clients during the 1920s and early 1930s, up until his death in 1934. Among his clients was Henry Francis du Pont, who sought Sleeper's assistance on projects at both Chestertown in New York (1926) and Winterthur in Delaware (1928-1931). At Winterthur, du Pont used antique Chinese wallpapers in the Chinese Parlor, the Philadelphia bedroom and the aforementioned Port Royal Hall. According to Winterthur historian, Pauline Eversmann, du Pont was directly influenced by both the American Wing and Henry Sleeper's designs for his own home at Beauport.¹³² It is evident that there was an elite network of socialites, wealthy industrialists and interior decorators who used antique and reproduction Chinese wallpapers in their homes and design projects. They were significantly influenced by one another and their shared social circles, interests and decorative tastes contributed to the growing popularity of Chinese wallpapers in early twentieth century America.¹³³

Despite their spectacular and theatrical nature, Sleeper's designs for his China Trade room and Bruce E. Merriman's ballroom were not wholly unique or unusual. Other interior decorators were also working to create similar orientalist interiors

¹³² Pauline K. Eversmann, 'Evidences of American Home Life: Henry Francis Du Pont and the Winterthur Period Rooms', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 46.2/3 (2012), 179–94 (p. 180). With thanks to Robert Kelly for sharing this article with me.

¹³³ Noel Fahden Briceño, 'The Chinoiserie Revival in Early Twentieth-Century American Interiors' (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 2008), p. 57.

for their wealthy clients during the 1920s and early 1930s. Nancy McClelland describes an interior designed by decorator Victor White (Figure 3-26), around the same time as Sleeper's China Trade Room, in her 1926 book, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-treatments*:

In the residence of Mt Kisco, Victor White has constructed another dressing room of the same general type, although still greater interest has been obtained by suggesting the form of a tent. [...] This is done by the treatment of the ceiling and by a raised plaster frieze with edges shaped like a valance, which has a line of emerald green, and red tassels depending between the scallops. The painted bamboo railing is lacquer red; on the silver walls above it are fantastic sailing ships and birds, and trees in red, orange and purple that suggest old Chinese embroideries. The silvery grey doors, whose general tone harmonizes with the silver paper walls have panels raised with gesso, and are painted blue-green and lacquer –red stripes. The dragons in relief on the large door panels are gilded. To complete the room, the tent shaped ceiling is glazed a rich gold colour, and the furniture is lacquer red.¹³⁴

It is unclear whether or not Victor White was inspired by Sleeper's design but all three interiors clearly belonged to a growing trend for exaggerated oriental themed interiors, based on imagination and fantasy rather than historical models. McClelland aptly commented, 'Such imaginative schemes are fresh and interesting and leave a vivid impression of something different from the ordinary.'¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926), p. 85.

¹³⁵ Nancy Vincent McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926), p. 85.



*Figure 3-26 Dressing room at Mt Kisco, designed by Victor White. [Source: Reproduced in Nancy McClelland, Plate 49 in Nancy McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-treatments* (J.B. Lippincott company, 1926), p.85]*

The Influence of East Asian Art in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century American Interiors

Late nineteenth century fashions for Japanese art, particularly in the contexts of the Arts and Crafts movement was part of broader a fashion for Asian decorative art, and designs inspired by it, in America. Chinese decorative arts became similarly domesticated in America, particularly in the wake of the Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia, when Chinese decorative art became more accessible and appreciated.

In her research on the subject of orientalism and the department store at the turn of the nineteenth century, design historian Sarah Cheang describes the appeal of Chinese decorative goods as being predicated on 'a colonial form of nostalgia', which she argues was an important component in the creation and attraction of the exotic in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³⁶ It is clear from the discussion, earlier in this chapter, of American reaction to the Chinese display at the Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia, that a similar form of nostalgia was felt by American consumers of Chinese decorative goods at this time, which led to a popularising of exotic, orientalist interior designs, which persisted well into the twentieth century. Cheang proposes that:

[...] exoticism was one of the oppositional terms crucial to the structuring of modernity, where the modern condition necessitated nostalgia and cultural heterogeneity in order to produce the mystery and novelty that modernity itself had destroyed in the process of its own becoming. In order for China to satisfy Western desires for the exotic, a sense of the mysterious needed to be preserved.¹³⁷

This, she argues was achieved through a practice of nostalgia. Antique Chinese wallpapers, especially those with known provenance were ideal subjects for this practice. With their ability to transform entire interior spaces, their experiential properties enabled viewers to immerse themselves in this practice of nostalgia on a grand scale. Orientalist narratives served to make America seem modern; it

¹³⁶ Sarah Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, 20.1 (2007), 1–16 (p. 3).

¹³⁷ Sarah Cheang, 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store', *Journal of Design History*, 20.1 (2007), 1–16 (p. 3).

enabled Americans to engage and connect with the past in creative ways and to use it to create modern, but not modernist interiors.

The growing trend for oriental decorative themes in the first half of the twentieth century is evidenced by advertisements, decorating advice and style columns published in the popular American press at that time. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s *New York Times* columnist, Walter Rendell Storey frequently wrote about Chinese decorative arts, including antique textiles and Chinese wallpapers and their merits as interior decoration. In 1928 he wrote, 'The art of the Orient, which had more than once enriched occidental interiors, is again making a definite contribution to home decoration.'¹³⁸ The decorative possibilities of Chinese textiles, dress and other objects were explored in new and creative ways, but a strong sense of romance and nostalgia, especially relating to imperial provenance, remained central to their appeal:

A hanging silk that once was suspended in a temple above a Buddha or Kwan Yen may appropriately be used as a valance for window curtains or as exotic decoration above an open doorway. [...] Sleeve bands from a mandarin's coat, placed at either side of a mirror, create a remarkable decorative effect. The embroidered squares from the fronts and backs of robes are used to ornament a space at the top of a mirror, or they may adorn a pillow. For a striking wall hanging the full spread of a priest's robe, perhaps in mellowed yellow silk, is mounted with a

¹³⁸ Walter Rendell Storey, 'Far East Plays a New Decorative Role', *The New York Times* (New York, 11 March 1928).

deep blue and black border. Some of the robes trace their pedigree back to imperial owners.¹³⁹

Chinese textiles and dress were brought into the decorative repertoire of twentieth century interior designers as well as their wardrobes to create exotic, sensory effects (Figure 3-27).¹⁴⁰ Used in these creative ways designers took Chinese objects and made them look modern as well as exotic.

The popularity of Chinese wallpaper in particular was indicated in an article written by Rendell Storey in 1936. He wrote, 'Valued more highly than ever in home decoration are Chinese hand-painted panels and wallpapers that have come down from old dynastic periods, and the furniture, fabric and wallpaper design in the Chinese manner which were made in Europe in eighteenth century.'¹⁴¹ The adaptability of Chinese wallpapers facilitated their inclusion in flamboyant, modern, orientalist interiors as well as more classical interior designs, based on historic European models. In both contexts they symbolised the past and the present and invariably evoked a sense of luxury and glamour.

¹³⁹ Walter Rendell Storey, 'Far East Plays a New Decorative Role', *The New York Times* (New York, 11 March 1928).

¹⁴⁰ Jeffrey Simpson, 'From a Different Cloth: Pioneering Decorator Rose Cumming's Bold Textile Designs Are Rediscovered', *Architectural Digest* (New York, March 2007).

¹⁴¹ Walter Rendell Storey, 'Wall Motifs from China', *The New York Times* (New York, 24 May 1936). Cited by Noel Fahden Briceño, 'The Chinoiserie Revival in Early Twentieth-Century American Interiors' (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 2008), p. 10.



Figure 3-27 Photograph of interior decorator, Rose Cumming (1887-1968), Wilbur Pippin/courtesy of Rose Cumming Fabrics & Wallcoverings. [Source: *Architectural Digest*, March, 2007, Jeffrey Simpson, 'From a Different Cloth: Pioneering Decorator Rose Cumming's Bold Textile Designs Are Rediscovered', <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/cumming-slideshow/all>]

A Dialogue with Art Deco: 913 North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills, California, 1926

East Asian objects played a significant role in Art Deco design based on their exotic material and sensory qualities, as well as their nostalgic appeal as objects from an ancient culture, as described by Anna Jackson in her contribution to the exhibition catalogue which accompanied the V&A's exhibition, *Art Deco 1910-1939*, 'Inspiration from the East'.¹⁴² Art Deco's anti-traditional elegance brought together an eclectic array of objects with seemingly contradictory characteristics.

¹⁴² Anna Jackson, 'Inspiration from the East', in *Art Deco, 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2005), pp. 67–77 (pp. 67–69).

They included works inspired by historic western high styles and vernacular traditions as well as those inspired by 'exotic' non-western cultures of the distant past and the contemporary Avant Garde.¹⁴³ Art Deco also embraced luxury handcrafted objects using precious materials as well as mass produced designs made with new low cost materials such as Bakelite.¹⁴⁴

Art Deco design capitalized on the glamour and nostalgia that surrounded the idea of imperial China. Following on from the popular responses to Chinese decorative art at the Philadelphia Centennial, Art Deco designs referenced China as a static and ancient civilisation, consigned to the past. Chinese lacquer, jades and Neolithic bronzes were particularly influential, but Chinese wallpaper was also part of Art Deco's engagement with East Asian objects. They contributed to the spirit of fantasy that was so central to the Art Deco movement but also to its characteristically contradictory nature, appearing to be simultaneously traditional and modern.¹⁴⁵ Chinese and Japanese lacquer screens made popular wall coverings, hung like wallpaper, but Chinese wallpapers proper were also employed in Deco inflected interiors, such as those created by Elsie de Wolfe for Countess Dorothy di Frasso (1888-1954), at her Beverly Hills home in 1926.

¹⁴³ Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton, 'The Style and the Age', in *Art Deco: 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2003), pp. 14, 22–23.

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton, 'The Style and the Age', in *Art Deco: 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2003), p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton, 'The Style and the Age', in *Art Deco: 1910-1939*, ed. by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publishing, 2003), pp. 14–17.

Up until the early twentieth century Chinese wallpapers in North America were predominantly concentrated on the East Coast. By the 1920s, China themed decorative designs and Chinese wallpapers became increasingly evident in interiors on the West Coast, particularly in the Hollywood homes of the film industry elite, broadening the rarefied social networks in which Chinese wallpaper was used.¹⁴⁶ Chinese wallpapers in this context were valued as individually crafted luxury items which sat well with the ideals of the Art Deco movement, but historical provenance also played a role in creating a sense of nostalgia and invoking the glamorous and mysterious image of ancient and imperial China.

Independently wealthy Dorothy Caldwell Taylor married Count Carlo Dentice di Frasso, a former member of the Italian Parliament, in 1923. By this time, she was already a well-known, if not notorious, socialite. She went on to attract further attention by means her numerous love affairs; in particular, her affair with Hollywood actor Gary Cooper and later, gangster Bugsy Siegel. Di Frasso was also known for throwing extraordinary parties.¹⁴⁷ This spirit of excess and flamboyance

¹⁴⁶ Theatrical and highly exaggerated evocations of chinoiserie themes also informed the architectural design and interior design of theatres and movie theatres as documented by Noel Fahden Briceño in her MA thesis, 'The Chinoiserie Revival in Early Twentieth-Century American Interiors'. Briceño cites the Paramount Theatre, which opened in New York's Times Square in 1926 and Grauman's (now Mann's) Chinese Theater in Los Angeles, which opened in 1927, among others, as examples to illustrate the spectacular scale on which chinoiserie creations were realised in America and how suited the themes were to a space in which fantasy was central to the experiences of the audience. See Noel Fahden Briceño, 'The Chinoiserie Revival in Early Twentieth-Century American Interiors' (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 2008), pp. 48–51.

¹⁴⁷ For an account of Dorothy di Frasso's social milieu and lifestyle see Vincent Meylan, *Bulgari: Treasures of Rome* (New York: ACC Art Books, 2018).

was reflected in the designs that de Wolfe produced for her Hollywood home, an elegant Spanish Revival villa in Beverly Hills.

De Wolfe combined Art Deco accents with chinoiserie themes in the decorative schemes that she devised for the dining room, sitting room and the master bedroom, using Chinese wallpapers in the sitting room and bedroom and mirrored *verre églomisé* panels decorated with French chinoiserie designs in the dining room.¹⁴⁸ In the sitting room, eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers were hung above a dado, referencing historical European design practices, but in a break from historic traditions of paper hanging, the wallpapers curve right up onto the ceiling space (Figure 3-28), taking advantage of the comparatively low ceiling heights of di Frasso's Spanish revival villa, relative to the historic European residences that the wallpaper was originally intended for.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Other rooms in the house exhibited bolder Art Deco designs such as the sun room which was decorated with a hand painted mural called *Zebra and Black Panther With Cacti*, signed by portrait artist Charles Baskerville. Brooke Bobb, 'Inside Marlene Dietrich's Glamorous Beverly Hills Home', *Vogue* (New York, February 2016) <<https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>>.

¹⁴⁹ Heather Clawson, 'Beautiful in Beverly Hills', *Habitually Chic: Glamorous Lives & Stylish Places*, 2011 <<http://habituallychic.luxury/2011/03/beautiful-in-beverly-hills/>> [accessed 3 May 2017]; Bianca Barragan, 'Marlene Dietrich's Barely Touched Home in Beverly Hills Just Sold', *LA Curbed*, 2015 <<https://la.curbed.com/2015/6/8/9951962/marlene-dietrich-countess-dorothy-di-frasso-beverly-hills>> [accessed 5 December 2016]. Chinese wallpapers were also being incorporated into British Art Deco style interiors around the same time. In his book *Chinese Wallpapers in Britain and Ireland* Emile de Bruijn examines a bedroom at Home House in London. It features dark blue ground bird and flower wallpapers installed between 1919-1926 which is similarly complemented by silvered architectural elements and mirrors so evocative of Deco design. See Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 216.



Figure 3-28 Sitting room, Di Frasso/Iturbi House, North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills, Ca. 2015. [Source: <https://la.curbed.com/2015/6/8/9951962/marlene-dietrich-countess-dorothy-di-frasso-bevelry-hills>]

This set of wallpapers is identical to the eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers used to decorate one of the main bedrooms and adjoining dressing room at Wrest Park in Silsoe, Bedfordshire in the United Kingdom. The Chinese wallpapers are thought to have been installed in the original medieval house at Wrest Park around 1792. It is thought that the papers were later moved to the new house which was built on the same site between 1834-1839.¹⁵⁰ At Wrest Park the wallpapers were used to create a chinoiserie style interior - in the dressing room the wallpapers were set into chinoiserie style lacquer effect wainscot panels (Figure 3-29) and auction records suggest that chinoiserie style furniture was used

¹⁵⁰ According to the Steward's notes supplied to docents at Wrest Park, Amabel Hume-Campbell (1751-1833), daughter of Jemima Yorke, 2nd Marchioness Grey (1722-1797), refers in her diary to her mother buying and hanging such wallpaper in 1792. 'Wrest Park Room Steward's Notes - The House' (English Heritage, 2012), p. 87.

in the bedroom.¹⁵¹ In di Frasso's home the Chinese wallpapers contributed to a contrastingly modern Deco aesthetic demonstrating the varied decorative effects that could be achieved with the same wallpaper.¹⁵²

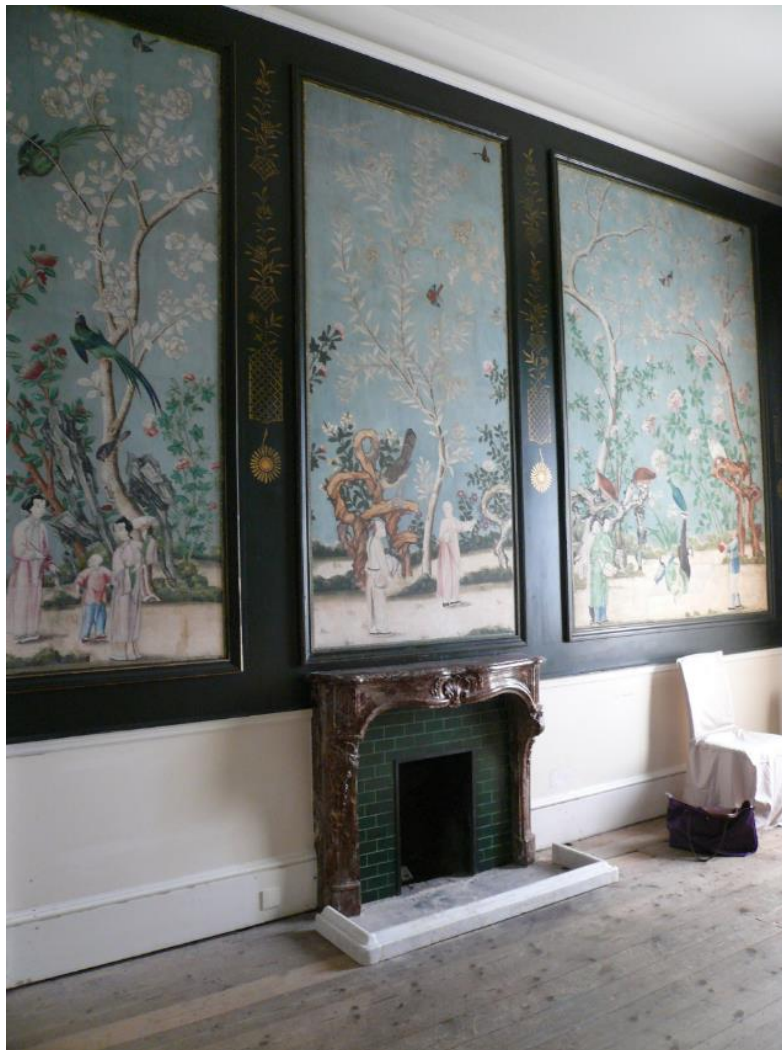


Figure 3-29 Dressing Room to the Chinese Bedroom, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, 2012 with the permission of English Heritage.]

¹⁵¹ English Heritage Steward's notes state that, 'There is no other information available as yet to show how the rooms were furnished, only one reference in the 1917 auction catalogue to a four post bedstead with cornices with silver dragons.' See 'Wrest Park Room Steward's Notes - The House' (English Heritage, 2012), p. 88.

¹⁵² These two sets of wallpaper also support the idea, that despite what was thought by many during the eighteenth century and afterwards, Chinese wallpapers were not in fact unique in their designs, but were produced in multiples using reusable design templates.



Figure 3-30 Chinese wallpaper, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, 2012 with the permission of English Heritage.]

On a delicate pale blue ground the wallpapers hung in the living room at North Bedford Drive depict people in a market place engaged in a variety of activities; buying and selling goods, watching street performances and engaging in military exercises and activities, including archery. In the middle ground, large scale ornamental rocks are depicted with huge birds perched on top, creating a scale difference which emphasises the fantastical character of the composition. The upper register is filled with white tree foliage and luxurious flower heads, creating a clear contrast against the blue ground while bringing light to the room and balance to the pictorial composition. Elsie de Wolfe accentuated the oriental aesthetic of the wallpaper designs with narrow lengths of faux bamboo framework, which she used to border the ceiling as well as in the corners of the

room, which were hung with mirrored stiles reaching from floor to ceiling (Figure 3-28).

Further deco design elements include a mirrored fire place surround, complemented by huge floor to ceiling mirror panels inset with crystal wall sconces. The use of such large quantities of mirrored glass brought light to the room, which must have sparkled when the fire was lit. De Wolfe combined the Chinese wallpapers with sumptuous textiles, including a huge ankle deep white shearling rug and velvet upholstery as well as furniture in both contemporary and historic styles to create an eclectic and comfortable living space which referenced both modern Art Deco trends as well as historic European interiors.

German actress Marlene Dietrich moved from Berlin to Beverley Hills in 1930 and later rented the house on North Bedford Drive from di Frasso.¹⁵³ It was one of several that she rented in the area over the years she spent in Hollywood and one of the many opulent locations in which she was photographed for promotional materials (Figure 3-31 and Figure 3-32).¹⁵⁴ In Figure 3-32, Dietrich is pictured in

¹⁵³ Matt Berman, 'Dietrich on Décor', *House Beautiful*, 2001, pp. 48–49.

¹⁵⁴ The house and most of the original furnishings, including the Chinese wallpaper have remained together and were most recently sold in 2015 for \$23.5 million see: Candace Taylor, 'Marlene Dietrich's Onetime Beverly Hills Home Sells for \$23.5 Million', *Wall Street Journal*, 2015 <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/marlene-dietrichs-onetime-beverly-hills-home-sells-for-23-5-million-1433450704>> [accessed 10 December 2015]. And Bianca Barragan, 'Marlene Dietrich's Barely Touched Home in Beverly Hills Just Sold', *LA Curbed*, 2015 <<https://la.curbed.com/2015/6/8/9951962/marlene-dietrich-countess-dorothy-di-frasso-beverly-hills>> [accessed 5 December 2016]. Christy Hobart, 'Elsie in Amber', *House and Garden* (New York, May 2007), pp. 166–86 (pp. 166–73, 186).

the lavish setting of the sitting room, leaning against a grand piano placed in front of the eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers in a circa 1936 photo shoot.¹⁵⁵



Figure 3-31 Marlene Dietrich at home, North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills, Ca. 1936. [Source: <http://lastgoddess.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/marlene-dietrichs-beverly-hills-mansion.html>]

¹⁵⁵ The image was possibly published in *Architectural Digest*, but it has not been possible to confirm this. Cristopher Worthland, 'Hollywood at Home', *The Art of the Room*, 2015 <<http://theartoftheroom.com/2015/02/hollywood-at-home/>> [accessed 6 November 2016]., is the only reference to where the image of Dietrich with the wallpaper might have come from but no year of publication is given. It appears on Pinterest and other websites without a stated source. The image is also published in, Patrick O'Conner, *The Amazing Blonde Woman: Dietrich's Own Style* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1991)., in chapter 2, 'Chaste taste', but no image credit is provided. The image was most likely commissioned by Paramount Pictures publicity department. These images were probably taken just a few years after the release of *Shanghai Express* (1932), a film which not only cemented Dietrich's reputation as one of Hollywood's leading ladies, but which also articulated many of the popular public perceptions of China during this period; as a place and a culture that was exotic, alluring, dangerous and sordid; concepts which simultaneously elicited repulsion and fascination. Indeed, the Chinese wallpapers with which Dietrich posed in her home could be seen to function as what art historian Homay King calls an enigmatic signifier: 'an Asian decorative object that appears in western film narrative, seemingly for no other reason than to convey a sense of exotic mystery'. See Homay King, 'Cinema's Virtual Chinas', in *China Through the Looking Glass*, ed. by Andrew Bolton (Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 57–73. citing King, H. (2010) *Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema and the Enigmatic Signifier*, Duke University Press.

Photographs like those in Figure 3-31 and Figure 3-32, which were circulated in magazines and used as promotional material, reinforced the image of Dietrich as glamorous, exotic and elite in the public imagination. In an interview about her mother, Dietrich's daughter, Maria Riva commented that the houses in which Dietrich lived were "sets" which she considered to be "houses, not homes."¹⁵⁶ The conscious choice to use the sitting room, papered with Chinese wallpapers as a location for this photo shoot was clearly led by the idea that this setting would set the desired tone for Dietrich's particular personal brand image, offering some comparison to the use of Chinese wallpapers as marketing tools by Henry Sleeper, Condé Nast and Michael S. Smith, even if they were less explicitly used as such.

¹⁵⁶ Matt Berman, 'Dietrich on Décor', *House Beautiful*, 2001, pp. 48–49.



Figure 3-32 Marlene Dietrich at home, North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills, Ca. 1936. [Source: Reproduced in *US Vogue*, February 15th 2016, <https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>]

The decorative scheme at di Frasso's villa has remained largely untouched since its initial creation and was brought to public attention when the house was put up for sale in 2015. Amongst the media coverage was an article in *American Vogue*, published in February 2016. The article, which describes the particular appeal of the house to two contemporary fashion designers who were fascinated and inspired by the untouched interiors and the histories associated with them, succinctly illustrates the layers of value inherent in Chinese wallpaper and how these values are singularized and applied to specific design agendas and cultural

narratives.¹⁵⁷ In this particular wallpaper there is a direct link to eighteenth century China and Britain, but there are also more recent layers of history, relating to Elsie de Wolfe, Dorothy di Frasso and Marlene Dietrich; three women who collectively defined the concept of glamour in early twentieth century America and whose presence and touch added significant value to the wallpaper. The article describes the use of the house, including those rooms decorated with Chinese wallpaper, for a fashion shoot by LA based clothing designers Justin Kern and Stephanie Danan, for their fashion brand *Co*. The designers were drawn to the interior not only by its beautifully preserved and distinctive aesthetic, but also quite specifically for its glamorous historical associations with de Wolfe, di Frasso and Dietrich, a truly glittering list of early twentieth century taste makers:

Though Dietrich lived in the house briefly, it was owned by Countess Dorothy di Frasso, who, Kern explains, “was a racy heiress who used the house to host some of Hollywood’s most extravagant parties before she ended up renting it to Dietrich in the mid-1930s.” Aside from its glamorous Tinseltown ties, Kern was also impressed by the fact that the legendary Elsie de Wolfe had decorated the estate. As he notes, de Wolfe was the “international grande dame who is now largely credited with inventing the interior design profession. She was known for her love of whimsical murals and hand-painted chinoiserie and use of mirrors, all of which can be found in the home unchanged after almost 80 years.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Brooke Bobb, ‘Inside Marlene Dietrich’s Glamorous Beverly Hills Home’, *Vogue* (New York, February 2016) <<https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>>.

¹⁵⁸ Brooke Bobb, ‘Inside Marlene Dietrich’s Glamorous Beverly Hills Home’, *Vogue* (New York, February 2016) <<https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>>.

Several of the images shot by Kern and Danan specifically reference photographs taken of Dietrich at the house; with models striking the same poses in the same locations including against the backdrop of the Chinese wallpaper (Figure 3-33). Kern describes the timelessness of the aesthetic to which the Chinese wallpaper contributes: ““Despite the Old Hollywood pedigree, there’s something about the décor that still feels completely modern,””.¹⁵⁹ Although the Chinese wallpaper is used as a prominent backdrop for Kern and Danan’s photoshoot no specific mention is made of Chinese wallpaper (rather chinoiserie is referenced), its specifically Chinese origins, its age or its history beyond its arrival in the di Frasso house. Indeed, the article’s author, Brooke Bobb even comments, ‘Much of the lookbook was photographed against the house’s impressive hand-painted murals (there’s no actual wallpaper in the home) (...)’¹⁶⁰, indicating a general lack of understanding regarding the Chinese wallpapers beyond their aesthetic effects. This magazine article shows how the early history of the wallpapers has been eclipsed by later stories and values, layered upon the values attributed to Chinese wallpapers by earlier generations. In spite of this displacement of values it is clear that a sense of exoticism, similar to that evoked in eighteenth century interiors is recreated with the use of Chinese wallpaper in these Deco inflected twentieth century interiors.

¹⁵⁹ Brooke Bobb, ‘Inside Marlene Dietrich’s Glamorous Beverly Hills Home’, *Vogue* (New York, February 2016) <<https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>>.

¹⁶⁰ Brooke Bobb, ‘Inside Marlene Dietrich’s Glamorous Beverly Hills Home’, *Vogue* (New York, February 2016) <<https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>>.



Figure 3-33 Co. photoshoot at Di Frasso/Iturbi house, North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills, 2016. [Source: US Vogue, February 15th, 2016, Photo courtesy of Co. <https://www.vogue.com/article/marlene-deitrich-home-tour-co-justin-kern>]

The Chinese wallpaper became a part of the house at 913 North Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills; a witness to the events that took place there and part of the personal histories and image of the people who lived there, drawing parallels with the story of the Chinese wallpaper at Coutts and Co. In this modern, early twentieth century interior historic Chinese wallpapers contributed an exotic and storied aesthetic full of fascinating detail and played a role in visualising the

fantasies and aspirations that Hollywood represented; glamour, exoticism, and elite social networks.

Conclusion: An American Engagement with a Global Product

Chinese wallpapers were uncommon in North America during the eighteenth century. Limited numbers were transshipped to America via Europe at this time but in general the large scale designs and dimensions of Chinese wallpapers made them unsuitable for American interiors, which were small compared to the kind of elite European residences for which Chinese wallpapers were initially intended. Extant and documented eighteenth century installations of Chinese wallpaper in America show that they were installed in public areas of domestic interiors more readily than they were in Europe at that time, marking the beginning of a specifically American engagement with this global product.

By the nineteenth century Chinese wallpapers were made more readily available through direct trade between China and America and were a noted presence in the homes of American China traders, for whom they represented an image of their trade, livelihood and personal experiences, as well as historic associations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese decorative art was providing increasingly strong competition for Japanese decorative arts in the American market for East Asian collectibles and interior design.

From the beginning of the twentieth century Chinese wallpapers began to be revered as historical objects. Increasing numbers of antique Chinese wallpapers were imported from Europe and they came to flourish in the elite contexts of historical restorations and revivals as well as fashionable modern interiors. Their provenance bestowed legitimacy on historical restoration projects and offered a direct material connection with the past, often relating to specific historical figures, which was particularly relevant in the context of the Colonial Revival. In this way, Chinese wallpapers played a key role in the creation of an ideal American past and Chinese wallpapers became an integral part of the eighteenth century period room as it was re-imagined in the first half of the twentieth century.

Beyond the context of historic interiors, Chinese wallpapers also found a role in modern twentieth century American interiors and interior design. Following on from the success of the Chinese exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, Chinese decorative arts in general found a role in elite American interiors. They brought fantasy and exoticism to both Arts and Crafts and Art Deco interiors wherein they were valued for their nostalgic appeal and fine craftsmanship. Art Deco design embraced the glamour and sense of nostalgia that surrounded the idea of imperial China with a pseudo imperial gaze. In this way Chinese wallpapers simultaneously contributed to the creation of ideal visions of the past, but also indulged and facilitated the creation of modern orientalist fantasies. So, while Chinese wallpapers were not modernist they became part of modern American interiors and modern American brands, such as the Condé Nast brand.

While Chinese wallpaper was historically made in China and reflects Chinese visual culture in its designs it is also clear that it has subsequently been perceived as the sum of its global experiences; as part of the elite material culture of eighteenth century Europe, the epitome of the English country house, symbolic of American pre-revolutionary interiors and representative of twentieth century re-inventions of chinoiserie themes, built around romantic imaginings of imperial China. In the twenty-first century Chinese wallpaper is as valued for its associations with twentieth century celebrity figures such as Condé Nast, Elsie de Wolfe and Marlene Dietrich as much as for its elite historical associations with Europe and its origins China. In each specific circumstance of its use, a particular moment in the history of Chinese wallpaper and a particular set of values is evoked in order to contribute to a specific cultural narrative. By examining the global trajectories of Chinese wallpapers we are, as Gerritsen and Riello have described, able to see the accumulation of meanings that they have acquired as they have travelled, capturing not just their historical meaning but their changing values across space and time.¹⁶¹

The examples described in this chapter have shown how meaning in objects is created in layers, nested like Russian Dolls, and how different actors might temporarily appropriate objects and thereby bring new meaning and value.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 8,12.

¹⁶² *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 12.

They have described the use of Chinese wallpaper in a variety of American interiors, each with their own specific cultural narrative, demonstrating the multivalent and multi-layered character of this global material and the way in which specific moments in their history can be mobilised.

With their relatively recent adoption in twenty-first century China, Chinese wallpaper is continuing to find new markets and to follow global capital and economic development. The examples discussed in chapter four, which focus on the use of Chinese wallpaper in China and the cultural narratives to which it contributes, describe the re-discovery of many of the Chinese cultural values inherent in this global export product.

Chapter 4 A Global Transposition: Locating Chinese Export Wallpaper in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Macau

Chinese wallpapers were developed in China specifically for export markets in Europe in the late seventeenth century. Production continued in China throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for markets in Europe and North America. Today, in the twenty first century, Europe and North America continue to represent the largest markets for these luxury goods, but new markets are also emerging in other parts of the world; in the Middle East and notably in China where, despite being a Chinese product, Chinese wallpapers are being used for the first time.¹

This chapter examines where and *how* Chinese wallpapers are being used in China today and investigates the values and ideas ascribed to them in a variety of contrasting design contexts, ranging from shops and casinos, to fashion houses, hotels, restaurants and private residences.

¹ Chinese export style wallpapers are a regular feature in international design magazines including, *Architectural Digest*, *Elle Decoration*, *The World of Interiors*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Chinese wallpapers made by London based design company de Gournay, have been the subject of special features in *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, September 2016, *Architectural Digest, Middle East*, Oct 2016, *AD China*, Sept 2015, *AD China*, Oct 2015, *Vogue China*, Dec 2015, *Elle Decoration China*, Nov 2016, *Elle Decoration China*, Nov 2017 and *Harper's Bazaar China*, Feb 2018. The promotion of Chinese wallpapers in these publications and the opening of two showrooms by de Gournay in Shanghai (2015) and Beijing (2016) support the idea that Chinese wallpapers have an increasing presence in these regions.

The use of Chinese wallpaper in China complicates its global story; it was historically made for export but, unlike porcelain, lacquer and tea, appears to have had no local market in China. However, after circulating the globe for over 300 years, Chinese wallpaper has finally found a market 'at home' in China. Chinese wallpaper is a cultural and material hybrid with an extended global trajectory; it exhibits Chinese and European characteristics, cultural traditions, histories and values, as described in previous chapters of this thesis. This chapter probes deeper the contrasting values and ideas that have been constructed around this multivalent, intercultural, hybrid object to assess how Chinese export wallpapers are used and understood in local Chinese markets. In this way, this chapter offers a fresh scholarly perspective on Chinese wallpaper.

Jonathan Hay, Professor of Fine Arts at NYU, argues the need for more nuanced, multidirectional approaches to Chinese export art in an influential journal editorial entitled, 'Intercultural China' in 1999.² In it, Hay argues that the broader significance of Chinese export art has historically been overlooked by Eurocentric approaches to this body of material, which privilege one directional accounts of the adaption and adoption of Chinese goods in the context of the western material landscape. As such, Hay argues the need for a more sophisticated analytical model of intercultural exchange and interaction; '[...] one that looks at the space between cultures and at the syncretism of cultures, rather than relying

² Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9.

on a model of exchange that assumes a bounded inside and outside for independent cultural groups.³

Hay postulates that there is no independent, monolithic, homogeneous Chinese culture or western culture, all are hybrid, mutually interdependent and subject to 'foreign' influence, which can become assimilated into the receiving group.⁴ He argues that elements from different cultural traditions can coexist, in a state of 'syncretic coexistence' within a specific artistic practice or art work.⁵ Chinese wallpaper represents just such an object in which multiple cultural traditions coexist and, as previous chapters have shown, this has facilitated their inclusion in a wide variety of decorative contexts and cultural narratives, as specific cultural characteristics and values inherent in them have been identified and singularized, according to the context of their use.

By breaking down these imaginary boundaries between cultures, Hay opens the way to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of trade and exchange moving in multiple directions – not just one direction, from maker to consumer.⁶

With the recent adoption of Chinese wallpaper in China there is a clear

³ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 5).

⁴ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 7).

⁵ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (pp. 6–7).

⁶ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 7).

opportunity to reflect on way in which hybrid objects, of which export art is an important and specific category, are interpreted from multiple perspectives.

This chapter investigates the values ascribed to Chinese wallpaper in local Chinese contexts and examines the cultural narratives that they support. The examples discussed include a private apartment in Shanghai's French concession, the Venetian casino in Macau, Chinese restaurants, *Zi Yat Heen* and Mott 32 in Macau and Hong Kong respectively, fashion shoots by Chinese designer, Guo Pei and the late Sir David Tang's exclusive members only China Clubs, in Beijing and Hong Kong.

Discussion of these examples and case studies is foregrounded by an examination of historical precedents for pictorial wallpapers in Chinese interiors. Despite the fact that Chinese export wallpapers were not historically used in China, there are in fact several decorative and artistic precedents which represent similar decorative effects including, decorative screens, large sets of painted hanging scrolls, *tieluo* paintings (which are directly pasted to the walls), bird and flower paintings and the extraordinary imperial murals at *Juanqinzhai* in the Qianlong Gardens at the Forbidden city in Beijing.

Central to this discussion of decorative precedents is an important account of the relationship between Chinese bird and flower painting and Chinese wallpaper, as it is clear that the designs seen on bird and flower Chinese wallpapers are directly modelled on the longstanding tradition of bird and flower painting. This genre was

established in China before the tenth century and its subjects are importantly invested with specific symbolic meaning.

In this chapter I argue that the appeal of Chinese wallpapers in China today is based, at least in part, on the recognition of the culturally specific symbolic language expressed by the bird and flower motifs used. Birds and flowers were the most prevalent design on eighteenth and nineteenth century Chinese export wallpapers and they remain the most popular designs in the present day global market for Chinese wallpaper, including in China where their symbolic meanings are perhaps best understood.⁷

Beyond the recognition of the specific cultural value of bird and flower motifs, the adoption of Chinese wallpapers in China can also be understood as an act of cultural re-appropriation; re-claiming a hugely successful global aesthetic and identifying it as specifically Chinese. These acts of cultural recognition and re-appropriation take on particular significance in the context of historical political relations between China and the west during the second half of the nineteenth century. This period was characterised by repeated acts of western aggression towards China, as well as internal political struggles and civil war (Taiping

⁷ Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015; Evans-Freke, Dominic. Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 9 October 2012; Cave, Jemma. Creative Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 3 April 2013; Deshayes, Lizzie and Butcher, Tim. Owners and Creative Directors, Fromental, London. Personal interview. 26 March 2013.

Rebellion, 1850-1864) in China, which led to the eventual collapse of Chinese imperial rule in 1911.

Beginning with China's defeat by Great Britain in the first 'Opium War' (1839-1842), China received successive blows to its sovereignty in the years that followed, with repeated foreign incursions and the signing of several 'unequal' international treaties (Nanking (1842), Whampoa (1844), Wangxia (1844) Aigun (1858) and Shimonoseki (1895)).⁸ Pivotal among these events was the humiliating sacking of the imperial Summer Palace, *Yuanmingyuan* or 'Garden of Perfect Brightness', outside Beijing, in 1860, by British and French forces, in retaliation for the torture and murder of a British delegation, sent to negotiate with Chinese imperial representatives.⁹ During the sustained attack on the *Yuanmingyuan*, which lasted several days, a vast imperial collection of artworks and books were looted and taken back to Europe or destroyed and the buildings themselves were razed to the ground. These violent acts erased a unique and hugely significant

⁸ Many of the treaties that China signed with Western nations during the nineteenth century later became known as 'unequal treaties' in early twentieth century China, reflecting a rising nationalist fervour in China at that time and a sense of injustice at the aggressive ways in which China had been manipulated. For in depth discussion on this topic see David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840-1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 2009); Stephen R. Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018).

⁹ Geremie Barmé, 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins', *East Asian History*, June.11 (1996), 111–58 <[https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/145853/2/Morrison Oration 57.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/145853/2/Morrison%20Oration%2057.pdf)>.

cultural monument and dispersed a vast treasury of Chinese art throughout the world, inflicting a lasting wound on China's collective national consciousness.¹⁰

In the twenty first century, China is celebrating its revival as a global economic and political power and forging new cultural identities for China while claiming back Chinese material culture from the West.¹¹ With China's meteoric rise to global political and economic power over the last thirty years and with it the growing personal wealth of the Chinese population, the international art markets attests, not only to this trend for re-claiming Chinese material culture, but also the growing purchasing power of Chinese buyers who have pushed prices for Chinese painting, porcelain and jade carvings to achieve new international records.¹²

Recent years have also witnessed a growing interest in Chinese export art among Chinese art collectors and the general museum-going Chinese public, who are just

¹⁰ See Geremie Barmé, 'The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins', *East Asian History*, June.11 (1996), 111–58 <[https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/145853/2/Morrison Oration 57.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/145853/2/Morrison%20Oration%2057.pdf)>.

¹¹ Edward Lucas, 'China Has the Whip Hand over the West', *The Times* (London, 16 February 2018) <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/china-has-the-whip-hand-over-the-west-wzgk0c7d>>.

¹² Amy Qin, 'Chinese Art Work Brings Auction Record Of \$45 Million', *The New York Times*, 26 November 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/27/arts/design/chinese-artwork-brings-auction-record-of-45-million.html>>., Benjamin Haas, 'Paintings by Chinese Artist Qi Baishi Sell for Record £105m', *The Guardian* (London, 18 December 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/qi-baishi-chinese-artist-paintings-twelve-landscape-screens-sell-record-auction>>. The international art market has also been a site for Chinese protest against the perceived unlawful sale of looted artworks from the Summer Palace as seen at the sale of two bronze zodiac heads at Christie's in Paris in 2009. The zodiac heads were eventually gifted back to the Chinese nation by then owner, Francois-Henri Pinault in 2013. See Terril Yue Jones, 'Two Bronze Animal Heads, Stolen 153 Years Ago, Returned to China', *Reuters*, 28 June 2013 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-sculptures/two-bronze-animal-heads-stolen-153-years-ago-returned-to-china-idUSBRE95R0HW20130628>>.

beginning to engage with the existence of this body of material, encouraged by recent museum exhibitions and museum collecting practices in China.

In July 2012, The National Museum of China in Beijing hosted an exhibition of Chinese ceramics drawn from the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British museum in London entitled; *A Passion for Porcelain*, which described the story of trade and cultural links between Europe and China through this globally influential material. A significant proportion of the items displayed were created in China for European export markets and their forms and designs were altered accordingly to suit historic European life styles, resulting in objects such as a punch bowl decorated with scenes from a Hogarth print and dinner services decorated with armorials. In an interview with *The Financial Times*, curator at the National Museum of China, Geng Dongsheng, commented, “These ceramics are not known here. (...) Until now the public could only see them outside China.”¹³ This is also true of the wider body of export art which is generally little known in China. Despite a growing interest in export porcelain, antique Chinese wallpapers remain largely ignored by Chinese buyers who prefer to commission new wallpapers from the many existing producers based in China today. This preference marks a distinct difference between Chinese, European and American markets for Chinese wallpaper today, as antique wallpapers are still so sought after in western markets and achieve prices well in excess of those charged

¹³ Rosie Goldsmith, ‘Homecoming Heroes’, *The Financial Times* (London, 27 July 2012) <<https://www.ft.com/content/eeb05174-c4fc-11e1-b6fd-00144feabdc0>>.

for reproductions. Nevertheless, examples of historic, eighteenth century Chinese wallpaper are beginning to establish a presence in Chinese *museums*, if not Chinese homes and interiors.

In 2011, Guangdong Provincial Museum acquired a set of twelve eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper panels (Figure 4-1) adding to an existing collection of two other pieces of eighteenth century Chinese wallpaper. This large set was once hung in Harewood House, near Leeds, where another set of eighteenth century Chinese wallpaper still hangs (described in chapter two). The wallpaper was acquired at auction in London in 2011 and is presented in the museum as an important part of the local history of the Guangdong region and one which reflects local craft traditions as well as the global markets in which it was traded. Initially manufactured in Guangdong in the eighteenth century, this set of wallpapers has now circulated through global trade networks back to its point of origin to represent Chinese crafts skills and products of global trade.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Chinese wallpapers in the collection at Guangdong museum are possibly the only example of historic Chinese export wallpapers in China. Interestingly, when I visited the museum in 2015 none of the twelve wallpaper panels was on display in the museum galleries, where there was instead a large, rather poor digital print reproduction of one of the panels on display. However, this set of wallpapers was recently the subject of a Chinese television programme produced as part of a series entitled 国家宝藏 or 'National Treasures' produced and distributed by China's national television network CCTV, which examined the broader phenomenon of Chinese export wallpapers providing further evidence of the growing interest in this material in China. See *National Treasures 国家宝藏 - 外销 壁纸* (China: CCTV, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXSNRVhJDEg&list=PLyJ1nUfiitDgyAhn9yPUqrSGp24S47_oe&index=3>. With thanks to Emile de Bruijn for bringing this programme to my attention.



Figure 4-1 Chinese wallpapers formerly hung at Harewood House in Leeds in a museum storage facility at Guangdong Provincial museum, Guangdong, China. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

What these examples describe is an awareness among Chinese people of the significant presence and impact of Chinese material culture throughout the world and a desire among Chinese collectors and the Chinese public to engage with and in some cases re-appropriate China's material past.

Decorative Precedents for Chinese wallpaper in Imperial China

While Chinese wallpapers were not historically used in China there were, at the time of their initial development in the late seventeenth century, numerous decorative and artistic precedents, which offered similar decorative effects including, decorative screens, large sets of painted hanging scrolls, *tieluo* paintings and murals.

Typical houses in imperial China were timber framed structures with flexible interior spaces. There were no fixed spatial divisions between private and public spaces and degrees of privacy could be constructed using portable partitions for the purposes of specific events or activities.¹⁵ When it was necessary to partition a space a portable screen was employed.¹⁶ Screens were also used on formal occasions, placed behind the host or guest of honour, as a sign of high status. These moveable interior screens were painted (Figure 4-3), lacquered (Figure 4-2), carved or embroidered with representational subjects including figures, birds, flowers and landscapes and they were one of the primary painting formats for the majority of great artists until the thirteenth century.¹⁷ Such decorative screens could be very large. Each of the twelve panels which make up the lacquered

¹⁵ Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 13.

¹⁶ Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 13.

¹⁷ Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 14.

screen shown in Figure 4-2 measure 270 cm high and 53.3 cm wide, these dimensions gave such screens enormous visual impact in a manner that was similar to the visual impact of Chinese export wallpapers. This screen also exhibits a continuous design which was also a notable characteristic of many Chinese export wallpapers.



Figure 4-2 Twelve fold 'kuan cai' lacquer screen, ca. 1670-1690, China, museum number 130-1885. [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]



Figure 4-3 Twelve-fold screen with paintings in coloured ink on silk framed with carved huang huali wood, late seventeenth century, China. [Source: Minneapolis Art Institute, museum no. 96.124.1A-L, <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4976/folding-screen-china>.]

In the homes of wealthy people, carved architectural features including ceilings, lintels and removable room dividers contributed to the decorative character of the interiors, as well as paintings.¹⁸ Paintings were mounted in a variety of formats including screens and scrolls. Painted hanging scrolls were hung and displayed on a rotating basis, often dictated by the seasons as well as other special occasions such as birthdays and marriages, displaying images that were appropriate for such occasions, such as peaches symbolising longevity for a birthday. In wealthier households, large sets of hanging scrolls featuring continuous designs (Figure 4-5) provided comparable decorative effects to those created by Chinese export wallpapers in European interiors, dominating the environment and creating large scale, holistic decorative effects.

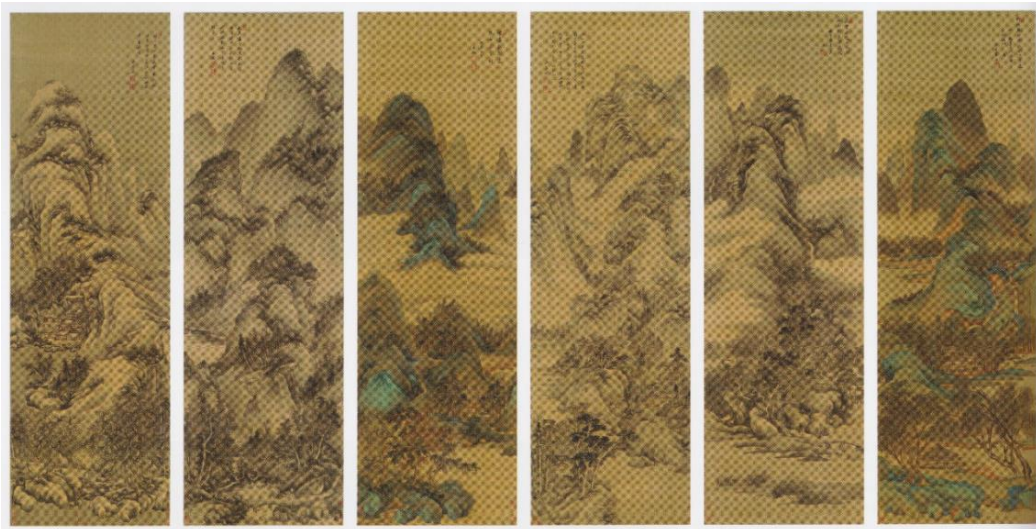


Figure 4-4 Wang Jian (1598-1677) *Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters*, 1669-73, set of 12 hanging scrolls, ink and colour on silk, Shanghai Museum. [Source: Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, 2013, p.284]

¹⁸ For detailed illustrated descriptions of traditional Chinese houses see Ronald G. Knapp, Jonathan D. Spence, and Chester A. Ong, *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation* (New York: Tuttle Publishing, 2005).

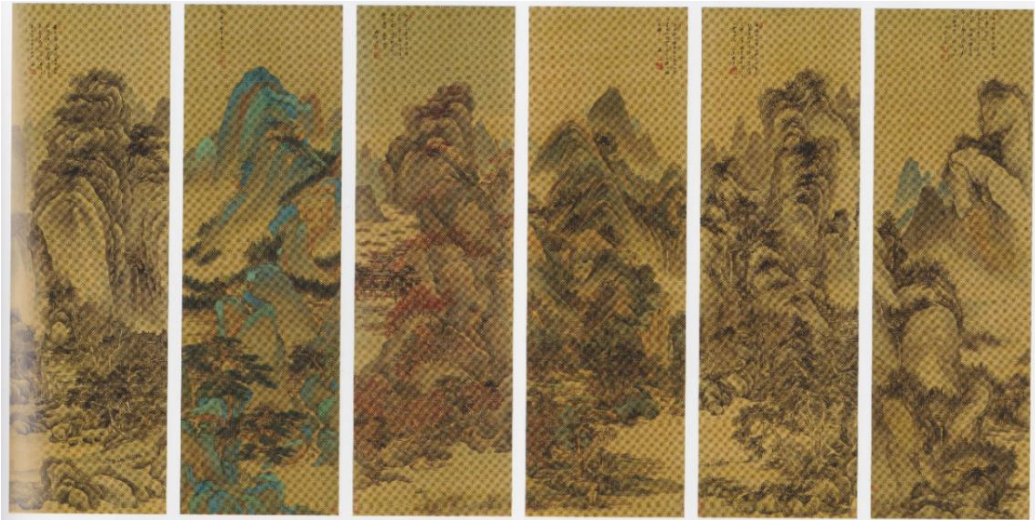


Figure 4-5 Wang Jian (1598-1677) Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters, 1669-73, set of 12 hanging scrolls, ink and colour on silk, Shanghai Museum. [Source: Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, 2013, p.284]

Some paintings, known as *tieluo* (affixed hangings) were pasted directly to the walls in a manner that is reminiscent of the techniques of wallpapering. However, *tieluo* functioned as decorative artworks rather than wallcoverings in most cases (Figure 4-6) and their use was predominantly a court practice.



Figure 4-6 Tieluo painting in the Hall of Great Supremacy, Forbidden City, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015]

The walls in Chinese houses were generally left plain, often whitened with lime, made from shells or papered with plain white or coloured paper (Figure 4-6).¹⁹

Several descriptions of Chinese interiors dating to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries provide evidence for these practices. In 1697, French Jesuit, Louis Le Comte (1655-1728), observed that while some Chinese decorated their

¹⁹ Tsien Tsuen-Hsuei, 'Science and Civilisation in China. Vol. 5, Chemistry and Chemical Technology', ed. by Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China (Cambridge University Press, 1985), v, 116–32.

rooms with painted silk hangings, 'others only whiten the chamber, or glew paper upon it.'²⁰ Another French Jesuit, Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743), in his *Description de la Chine* (1735) noted that the Chinese were 'very skilful' in papering walls.²¹ However, it seems that the kind of paper that was used to paper walls was plain or decorated with printed geometric designs, rather than pictorial designs. In 1757, English architect, William Chambers (1723-1796), described the interior of a merchant's house in Guangdong, where the walls of the 'large room or saloon' are 'neatly covered, either with white, crimson or gilt paper: [...]'.²² From these accounts it seems that plain walls were common in Qing China (1644-1911), even among the wealthier merchants, but simple block printed, patterned wallpapers were also used. The use of simple block printed wallpapers with geometric designs is evidenced by wallpapers hung in buildings situated in the imperial Qianlong gardens and the concubine's living quarters at the Forbidden City in Beijing. These examples are block printed with stylized, repeating designs such as dragon, phoenix and lotus flowers (Figure 4-7 and Figure 4-8). Painted

²⁰ Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Country Life Ltd, 1950), p. 25. Quoted, Le Comte, L., *Memoirs & Observations Made on a Late Journey through the Empire of China* (1697) p. 160.

²¹ J.-B. Du Halde, *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary, Together with the Kingdoms of Korea, and Tibet [...]* (London: Printed by T. Gardner in Bartholomew-Close, for Edward Cave, at St. John's Gate, 1738) <<https://archive.org/details/descriptionofemp00duha>>. Cited in Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Country Life Ltd, 1950), p. 25.

²² William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils: To Which Is Annexed a Description of Their Temples, Houses, Gardens, &c* (London: Published by the author and sold by him next door to Tom's Coffee House, Russell Street, Covent Garden, 1757), p. 8.

hanging scrolls and *tieluo* paintings were then hung or pasted directly on top of these (Figure 4-9).



Figure 4-7 Block printed wallpaper, Hall of Mental Cultivation, Forbidden City, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]



Figure 4-8 Reproduction woodblock for printing wallpaper, painting conservation studios, Forbidden City, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]



Figure 4-9 Plain printed wallpaper in the Hall of Mental Cultivation, Forbidden City, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015]

The interior decoration of *Juanqinzhai* (Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service, sometimes called Lodge of Retirement) in the Forbidden City represents a spectacular and unusual Chinese interior, decorated with stunning *trompe l'oeil* wall coverings. One of twenty-seven buildings in the Qianlong gardens *Juanqinzhai* was commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (r.1735-1796) for use as a retirement pavilion and was completed in 1779. The intimate interior of this small, two storey pavilion is characterised by exquisitely detailed decoration throughout and acts as a showcase for eighteenth century Chinese craft skills; bamboo carving and marquetry, embroidery and painting. The centre piece is the theatre hall which features floor to ceiling, hand painted, *trompe l'oeil* wallcoverings, painted on silk,

hung on the ceiling and the north and west walls (Figure 4-10).²³ They depict the palace gardens, seen through a latticed bamboo fence, on a glorious spring day, replete with flowers and preening birds.



Figure 4-10 Theatre hall, west side of Juanqinzhai. [Source: Nancy Berliner, Bonnie Burnham, and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p.27]

The mural comprises twenty-six panels of painted silk mounted on paper and hung on a wooden lattice frame work, very similar to the methods employed for hanging Chinese export wallpapers in eighteenth century Europe.²⁴ Hung together, they form a continuous panorama which dominates the entire interior

²³ Nancy Berliner and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p. 24.

²⁴ Mural painting was practiced in China but was generally found in the context of tombs and temples rather than domestic contexts.

space, including the ceiling, which is painted with a trellis from which a flowering wisteria vine hangs. It is the largest *tongjing* (panoramic perspective scene) painting preserved in the Forbidden City.²⁵ According to recent research carried out on this specific site, panoramic perspective murals fall within the category of *tieluo* painting or ‘paintings that adhere to and can be taken down from’ walls as already discussed above.²⁶ This type of wall hanging was first painted on paper or thin silk, then mounted and adhered to the walls,²⁷ in a way that was strikingly similar to Chinese export wallpaper.

The physical format and visual effects of the mural decoration offer a rare and fascinating comparison to the decorative effects achieved by Chinese export style wallpapers, though the quality of the mural painting surpasses anything seen on Chinese export wallpaper. Their scale and realism is spectacular; their colours vibrant and their subjects elegantly rendered; they dominate the space and draw the viewer into an holistic experience, where the use of European perspective to

²⁵ Nancy Berliner and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p. 26. For detailed discussion and analysis of *Juanqinzhai* and other trompe l’oeil interior designs at the Forbidden City, see Kristina Kleutghen, ‘Intended to Deceive: Illusionistic Painting at the Eighteenth Century Chinese Court’, in *Beyond Boundaries: East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. by Michelle Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 125–37. and Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).

²⁶ Nancy Berliner and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p. 26.

²⁷ Nancy Berliner and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (London: Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p. 26.

create an illusion of three dimensional reality brings the imagery to life, creating a perfected vision of reality.

The mural was painted by Chinese court artists working under the auspices of Italian Jesuit artists employed at the Qing court. Curator, Nancy Berliner, who led a collaborative, international project to restore *Juanqinzhai* between 2001 and 2008 writes, 'With the use of Chinese brushes and colors on silk, utilizing European perspective, the mural is an inimitable and masterful amalgamation of two distinct painting traditions'.²⁸ These spectacular murals formed part of the Qianlong Emperor's personal fascination with European science, art and culture and they form an important part of the legacy of the Jesuit influence at the Qing Court.²⁹ Indeed, the murals at *Juanqinzhai* exemplify the reciprocal cultural exchange that was influencing the material landscape in both China and Europe during the eighteenth century, a process which also saw the development of Chinese export wallpaper and the integration of a wide range of Chinese decorative arts in European interiors.³⁰

²⁸ Nancy Berliner and others, *The Emperor's Private Paradise: Treasures from the Forbidden City* (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 183.

²⁹ Nancy Berliner and others, *The Emperor's Private Paradise: Treasures from the Forbidden City* (Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁰ For detailed discussion and analysis of *Juanqinzhai* and other trompe l'oeil interior designs at the Forbidden City, see Kristina Kleutghen, 'Intended to Deceive: Illusionistic Painting at the Eighteenth Century Chinese Court', in *Beyond Boundaries: East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. by Michelle Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 125–37. and Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015). Among the Qianlong emperor's collection were numerous examples of European art and decorative art including a set of tapestries made in Beauvais in 1742 entitled 'Teinture Chinoise', designed by François Boucher and presented to the Qianlong Emperor by

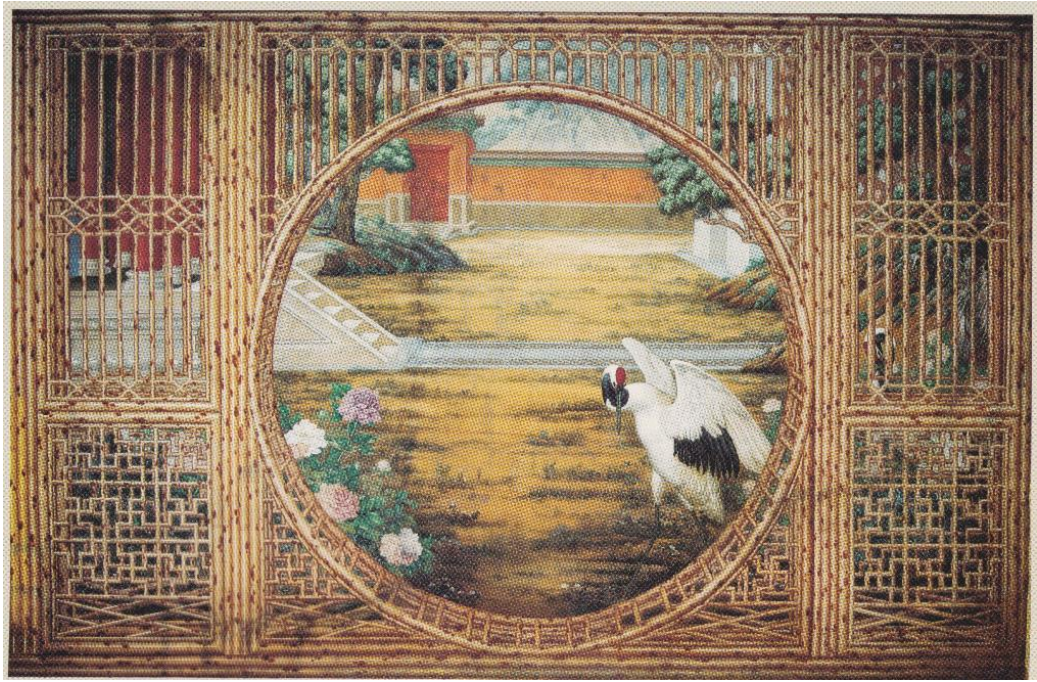


Figure 4-11 Detail of mural, north wall of theatre hall, Juanqinzhai. [Source: Nancy Berliner, Bonnie Burnham, and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p.28.]

The subject matter of the murals at *Juanqinzhai* were carefully chosen to befit a retirement pavilion. The painting depicts a garden on a perfect spring day, full of signs of new life, which appropriately represented a new beginning and a new chapter in the emperor's life, beyond official duty. The wisteria is in the full bloom of spring and is a potent symbol of new life. Seen through a speckled bamboo fence, which mirrors a real bamboo structure on the opposite side of the room, an elegant, preening crane represents longevity, the magpies are harbingers of happiness (and can still be seen in the palace garden today) and peonies, as the 'king' of flowers, represent wealth and rank. All are framed against a backdrop of

French Jesuits in behalf of Louis XV. Qianlong also possessed a large collection of European clocks and automata, see Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence & European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

distant mountains and perfectly bright blue skies, such that even in the cold winter months the emperor would be able to contemplate a perfect spring day.



Figure 4-12 Detail of mural, north wall of theatre hall, Juanqinzhai. [Source: Nancy Berliner, Bonnie Burnham, and others, *Juanqinzhai in the Qianlong Garden, The Forbidden City, Beijing*, ed. by Nancy Berliner (Scala Publishers Ltd, 2008), p.29.]

A Potent Visual Language: Auspicious Imagery in Chinese Design

Within broader Chinese traditions of painting and decorative art, individual motifs were carefully chosen and grouped together to evoke specific auspicious meanings, relating to concepts such as rank, scholarly success, happiness in marriage and longevity, taking on clearly defined social relevance. The choice of imagery was often based on literary allusions, word play (homonyms), and parallels drawn between the natural characteristics of particular plants and

animals and human values and principles, particularly those of the literati.³¹

Bamboo represents strength, flexibility and resilience (Figure 4-13) and is often depicted alongside the pine tree (steadfast) and the plum blossom (perseverance); together they are recognised as ‘the three friends of winter’ and epitomise the three virtues of a Confucian scholar-gentleman. Chrysanthemums and geese alluded to tales of reclusive scholars and butterflies represent wealth and happiness (Figure 4-14).



Figure 4-13 Wang Yuan (active 1310-1350) *Pure Serenity of Green Bamboo*, 1342. Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk. [Source: Princeton University Art Museum, <http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/23591>]

³¹ Maggie Bickford, ‘Three Rams and Three Friends: The Working Life of Chinese Auspicious Motifs’, *Asia Major*, 12 (1999), 127–58.

In this way each element of a pictorial composition was invested with specific cultural meaning and each was part of a semantic whole. Art historian Maggie Bickford has written extensively on the subject of Chinese painting and in particular on the concept of auspicious visuality in Chinese art, describing the powerful symbolic language inherent in Chinese visual culture; much of which retains cultural relevance in China and Chinese communities across the world today.³² Bickford describes the powerful and pervasive nature of this metaphorical visual culture across all media, writing:

The elite arts of traditional China, both visual and verbal, exhibit an impressive economy of expression. Poets, calligraphers, and painters draw from a stock of received textual and visual elements: images, phrases, metaphors, and topoi; script-types, stroke-types, motifs, and form-types. They use these over and over again, through verbal and visual quotation or allusion, which are inflected by significant variation and transformed through recombination and through particularities of execution that vary among different executants and that change across formal, political, and personal situations.³³

While this symbolic language had its roots in the elite literary and artistic culture of the scholar official class in traditional China this symbolic visual language,

³² Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar Painting Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Maggie Bickford and Charles Hartman, 'The Purloined Plum and the Heart of Iron: A Contribution to the History of Flowering Plum Imagery in the Sung and Yuan Dynasties', *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies*, 26 (1996), 1–54; Maggie Bickford, 'Three Rams and Three Friends: The Working Life of Chinese Auspicious Motifs', *Asia Major*, 12 (1999), 127–58; Maggie Bickford, 'The Painting of Flowers and Birds in Sung-Yuan China', in *Arts of the Sung and Yuan: Papers Prepared for an International Symposium Organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in Conjunction with the Exhibition Splendors of Imperial China: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Publications, 1996), pp. 293–315.

³³ Maggie Bickford, 'Three Rams and Three Friends: The Working Life of Chinese Auspicious Motifs', *Asia Major*, 12 (1999), 127–58 (p. 127).

including symbols such as bats, grape vines, peonies and gold fish, has become so commonized as to inhabit the full spectrum of Chinese art and design, from fine art to consumer products, including plastic dinner wares found in Chinese grocery shops and tourist trinkets which can be found on market stalls and shops in China towns throughout the world today. Bickford writes:

These multitudinous images are in fact survivors, emulations, and adaptations of something far bigger - the overwhelming presence of auspicious graphic devices in the visual daily life of traditional China. Behind auspicious imagery stand traditions that extend with remarkable continuity back to Han and Warring-States materials that bear explicitly auspicious inscriptions, and, doubtless, further to the material record of ancient China, which requires more speculative interpretation. Auspicious images constitute the longest and most comprehensive visual tradition in the history of Chinese art and culture.³⁴

It is on this established visual tradition of meaningful signs and symbols, that the designs on Chinese export wallpapers are based and which, at least in part, contributes to their appeal and suitability in Chinese markets today. But more specifically, Chinese wallpapers rely on the established tradition of bird and flower painting.

De-coding New Luxuries: The Language of Birds and Flowers

The designs used to decorate Chinese export wallpapers are clearly modelled on longstanding Chinese traditions of painting and print making, as already discussed

³⁴ Maggie Bickford, 'Three Rams and Three Friends: The Working Life of Chinese Auspicious Motifs', *Asia Major*, 12 (1999), 127–58 (p. 128).

in chapter two in relation to works including the *Gengzhi tu*, but Chinese wallpapers clearly also took specific inspiration from the influential genre of bird and flower painting.³⁵ Although birds and flowers were the subjects of Chinese art from early times, the specific genre of bird and flower painting developed into an important tradition in the eighth century.³⁶ This category of painting was generally produced by professional painters and court artists, who painted for profit and whose painting styles were precise and realist in nature in direct contrast to the philosophical and expressive artistic endeavours of scholar officials or literati.³⁷ The bird and flower genre became fully established with the development of the Northern Song dynasty court painting academy under Emperor Huizong (1101-1125), from which time onwards birds and flowers came to inhabit the full spectrum of Chinese fine and decorative arts.³⁸ During the Ming and Qing dynasties, birds and flowers continued to be popular subjects within the field of

³⁵ The use of designs inspired by the *Gengzhi tu* and other Chinese works depicting Chinese industries such as the *Taoye tu* has already been discussed in chapter two.

³⁶ Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 78.

³⁷ Both material and documentary evidence indicates that there was no distinction between painting and the other arts, or indeed between any arts and crafts, in the early periods of Chinese history; until the emergence of the academies in the tenth and eleventh centuries, painting was regarded as just another lowly profession for an artisan. According to the structure of traditional Chinese society, artisans ranked lower than scholars or farmers, but above merchants and traders. Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 26.

³⁸ Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 114–18.

decorative arts as well as re-emerging as a strong painting tradition (Figure 4-14).³⁹



Figure 4-14 Dai Jin, *Hollyhock, Rock and Butterflies*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper. Ming Dynasty, Palace Museum, Beijing. [Source: Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997.)

³⁹ Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 114–15, 203–8, 285–89.

Chinese wallpapers featuring birds, flowers and insects in garden landscapes were the earliest type of Chinese wallpaper and were the most common Chinese wallpaper design type throughout the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ Figure 4-15 shows a detail from the Chinese wallpaper which hangs at Newhailes house in Scotland. It is thought to be one of the earliest surviving examples of Chinese wallpaper, dating to around 1740.⁴¹ In the central area of the composition in particular this wallpaper displays clear similarities, in style and composition as well as subject matter, to bird and flower paintings. Indeed, it is notable that many of the compositions found on Chinese bird and flower design wallpapers, particularly those dating to the mid- eighteenth century, follow the compositions used in Chinese paintings very closely.

⁴⁰ In their 2014 survey of Chinese wallpapers in National Trust Houses Helen Clifford, Emile de Bruijn and Andrews Bush record that 'Of the Chinese wallpapers in Britain and Ireland identified so far about 60 per cent was decorated with flowering trees, birds, insects and rocks (..)' see Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush, and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, ed. by Emile de Bruijn (Swindon: National Trust Publishing, 2014), p. 5. And Evans-Freke, Dominic. Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 9 October 2012.

⁴¹ Emile de Bruijn, *Chinese Wallpaper in Britain and Ireland* (London & New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), p. 57.



Figure 4-15 One of three panels of Chinese wallpaper in the Dressing Room at Newhailes House, Midlothian, Scotland. Ca. 1740 [Source: Country Life Picture Library]

Figure 4-16 shows a fifteenth century painting entitled, *Mountain birds, Cassia and Chrysanthemums* by Ming Dynasty (1366-1644) artist Lü Ji (1477-unknown) and Figure 4-17 shows a panel of Chinese export wallpaper dating to the middle of the eighteenth century, formerly hung at Eltham Lodge in south east London. Comparisons between the two illustrate the close visual relationship between Chinese painting and Chinese export wallpapers; not only in terms of the subject matter but also the composition and rhythm of individual pictorial elements, such as the tree branches.



Figure 4-16 Hanging scroll, *Cassia, Chrysanthemums and Mountain Birds*, Lü Ji, Ming dynasty (1366-1644) Palace Museum, Beijing. [Source: Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.210.]



Figure 4-17 One of ten Chinese wallpaper panels, ca. 1750. Formerly hung in Eltham Lodge, Greenwich, now in the collections of the V&A Museum, Museum object number E.2084-1914. [Source: @Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

Art historian, Jessica Rawson's research supports the idea that Chinese wallpapers were directly inspired by Chinese painting. In an article comparing classical Chinese and European ornamental traditions Rawson argues that, 'An eighteenth

century painting of two cranes by Shen Quan (1682-1760) (Figure 4-18) belongs to the category of painting on which Chinese wallpaper in Europe was modelled.⁴²



Figure 4-18 Pine, Plum and Cranes, 1759, by Shen Quan (1682-1760). Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk. The Palace Museum, Beijing. [Source: Richard Barnhart et al., *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, 1997, Yale University Press, Figure 274, page 250.]

Rawson goes on to provide further examples of the kinds of Chinese painting that directly inspired Chinese wallpaper designs, arguing that the design of the Chinese wallpapers in the State Bedroom at Nostell Priory in Yorkshire, installed in 1771

⁴² Jessica Rawson, 'Ornament As System: Chinese Bird and Flower Design', *The Burlington Magazine*, 148.1239 (2006), 380–89 (p. 381).

(Figure 4-19), were probably inspired by a celebrated painting theme known in Chinese as *Bai niao tu*, 'Picture of One Hundred Birds.'⁴³



Figure 4-19 State bedroom, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire, ca. 1771. [Source: ©National Trust Images, Andreas von Einsiedel.]

Birds and flowers were essential components of the auspicious visual language that was evident across the full spectrum of Chinese art and design. As such, each element of a bird and flower composition was invested with specific symbolic meaning which conveyed a particular visual message based on the specific combination of subjects. These positive visual messages were encoded in Chinese

⁴³ Jessica Rawson, 'Ornament As System: Chinese Bird and Flower Design', *The Burlington Magazine*, 148.1239 (2006), 380–89 (p. 381). The imagery of one hundred birds was an auspicious symbol of peace in the world, represented by the harmonious co-existence of the birds. See Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 203.

wallpapers and other Chinese objects when they were sent for use in Europe. Whilst Europeans appreciated Chinese bird and flower motifs for their unusual aesthetic and exotic flora and fauna, their deeper symbolic meanings were most likely seldom understood.⁴⁴ Instead, European consumers of Chinese wallpaper invested the same imagery with alternative meanings and significance relating to their own particular identities and narratives, as already discussed in previous chapters.

Although the use of pictorial wallpapers decorated with birds and flowers represents a relatively new decorative trend in China, the appreciation for bird and flower imagery is longstanding. Interviews with sales staff, Mary Ma and Richard Song at British wallpaper purveyor de Gournay's Chinese showrooms in Shanghai and Beijing respectively, suggested that longstanding familiarity with bird and flower designs and their symbolic meanings is one of the key attractions for Chinese buyers of export style wallpaper today. Both Ma and Song told me that many clients even request the inclusion of specific birds and flowers according to the auspicious meanings that they wish to evoke.⁴⁵ The peony is especially popular, representing wealth and high status.⁴⁶ It seems the market for

⁴⁴ For a handbook on symbolic motifs and their meanings in Chinese art see Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 2006).

⁴⁵ Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015; Song, Richard. Manager, De Gournay showroom, Beijing, China. Personal Interview. 6 April 2015.

⁴⁶ Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015.

Chinese export-style wallpapers in China is based, at least in part, on familiarity with the designs and the specific meanings attached to particular motifs used, as well as general aesthetic preferences. In this way, the symbols that were originally encoded in Chinese wallpapers for export in the eighteenth century are finally being de-coded as they are re-circulated back to China.

While the idea that Chinese export style wallpapers were originally inspired by Chinese paintings and prints has been widely asserted by those who have written on the subject of Chinese wallpaper it is only now, as the market for Chinese wallpaper in China opens up, that it has become possible to observe the extent to which that relationship is influencing present day markets for Chinese export style wallpaper in China.

Trade and Tradition: Making Chinese Wallpaper in Twenty-first Century China

While designs on Chinese wallpaper are clearly based on longstanding Chinese traditions of visual culture the materials and techniques used to make them are also based on Chinese traditions. Chinese wallpapers are still made in China today using traditional Chinese materials, tools and techniques (Figure 4-20). This process of production offers tantalising insight into the historic practices that were most likely followed by the Chinese artisans who first produced decorative pictorial Chinese wallpapers in the late seventeenth century, but of whom there is little historical record.

The first stage of production sees bolts of pre-dyed silk cut and sized with a traditional Chinese preparation of fish skin and bones (Figure 4-20). This creates an optimal painting surface which is both strong and evenly absorbent. Once the fine, semi-opaque silk has dried the designs are traced on to it from a template, using a soft pencil (Figure 4-21). The silk panels are then ready for painting.



Figure 4-20 Artisans preparing silk for painting. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay]



Figure 4-21 Artisan sketching a design outline on treated silk. [Source: Photograph taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015 with permission from de Gournay.]

In the painting studios rows of artisans, including master painters and copy artists, work together on executing specific elements of the composition on an efficient production line. The artists divide the painting tasks between them depending on the level of skill and specialism of each artist. Those who are less experienced paint in the background and base layers and the more experienced paint detailed elements of the composition from trees and foliage to birds, flowers and figures. Using semi opaque Chinese watercolours, similar to gouache, the artists first paint in a white base for many of the decorative elements before applying colours which are then graded out with water, following the traditional practices of the Chinese, *gongbi* or 'meticulous' painting style (Figure 4-22). This term refers to a realist painting tradition exemplified by the bird and flower paintings of the

Northern Song period.⁴⁷ It is characterised by the use of fine, detailed brush strokes to outline the main pictorial elements before building up washes of colour to create finely detailed representations of birds, flowers and plants. As each panel is completed, an extraordinary scene begins to emerge from the surface of the silk with the promise of transforming the mundane into the spectacular.



Figure 4-22 A painter working at de Gournay workshops, Wuxi, China. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015 with permission from de Gournay.]

While new and updated designs are constantly being developed the majority of the so-called 'chinoiserie' designs produced by de Gournay and their direct competitors Fromental are based on eighteenth and nineteenth century Chinese wallpaper designs, which were, themselves, based on Chinese paintings and

⁴⁷ Richard Barnhart and others, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 91–92.

prints. The terminology used to describe Chinese wallpapers by sales and workshop staff at de Gournay and Fromental's workshops and showrooms in China varied, expressing degrees of connection to traditional practices of Chinese painting.

In an interview with de Gournay workshop operations manager Shirley Zhou, she referred to Chinese export style wallpaper as 中式 '*Zhong shi*', literally meaning 'Chinese style'.⁴⁸ However sales manager Mary Ma, at de Gournay's Shanghai showroom perceived more of the hybrid quality of Chinese export style wallpapers sold by de Gournay, describing them as 中国番壁纸 '*Zhong guo fan bizhi*' literally, 'Chinese-foreign wallpapers'.⁴⁹ Curatorial staff at Guangdong Museum used the term 外销壁纸 '*Waixiao bizhi*' literally meaning 'export wallpaper', thereby also recognising the history of Chinese wallpaper as a product created for foreign export markets.⁵⁰

Despite the European aesthetic which was perceived by the majority of sales and workshop staff I interviewed in China, it seems that Chinese wallpapers are still

⁴⁸ Zhou, Shirley. De Gournay Product Manager, Wuxi, China. Personal interview. 3 April 2015.

⁴⁹ Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015.

⁵⁰ Ren Wenling. Curator of Painting and Calligraphy, Guangdong Museum, China. Personal interview. 1 April 2015. Also see *National Treasures 国家宝藏 - 外销 壁纸* (China: CCTV, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXSNRVhJDEg&list=PLyJ1nUfiitDgyAhn9yPUqrSGp24S47_oe&index=3>.

identified as 'Chinese style' to some degree.⁵¹ This does not necessarily indicate that Chinese wallpapers are considered to be representative of Chinese traditions, but may be more indicative of a contrast between these and the other products, made and sold by de Gournay and Fromental in China, such as reproduction French scenic wallpapers following models by makers such as Zuber et Cie, and the more contemporary Chinese, Japanese and Korean ranges offered by both companies.

Nevertheless, it seems that despite their long association with European interiors and appreciation as a European decorative aesthetic, Chinese wallpapers are in many respects intrinsically Chinese products in terms of their materials, techniques and motifs, and in the emerging market for these hybrid products in China the Chinese elements that are evident in them are now being identified, singularized and put to use as striking visual references to Chinese culture.

Locating Chinese Export Style Wallpapers in Contemporary China: The Venetian, Macau

The market for Chinese wallpapers in China today is predicated, at least in part, on the persistent cultural value of auspicious imagery which is an inherent and clearly recognisable part of the design of Chinese export style wallpapers. Among the

⁵¹ Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015; Zhou, Shirley. De Gournay Product Manager, Wuxi, China. Personal interview. 3 April 2015; Wang, Allen. Fromental Product Manager, Wuxi, China. Personal interview. 3 April 2015.

locations in which they are used in China is casinos in Macau, where their auspicious themes create a fitting atmosphere for the gambling activities that take place there.

Macau holds an important place in the history of the European China trade. Leased to Portugal in 1557 it acted as a major regional trading centre due to its convenient placement along three major international trade routes. As such, it was an important locus for cultural exchange throughout the early modern period and many of the goods that were traded from China to Europe at this time, passed through Macau.

The territory was returned to China in 1999 after which time the casino and hotel industry came to dominate the local economy and landscape. After 2002, when local monopoly restrictions were lifted, several international business groups established casinos in Macau including Wynn, Las Vegas Sands, Galaxy and MGM.

The Venetian Casino, owned and operated by Las Vegas Sands, opened on Macau's Cotai Strip in August 2007 and is annexed to the luxury Four Seasons hotel. The Venetian in Macau is an almost exact replica of the Venetian casino in Las Vegas, USA. It is an exaggerated, theme park style recreation of Venice (Figure 4-23), which replicates key landmarks such as the Doge's palace and the famous Campanile at the Piazza San Marco, as well as characteristic architectural features of the city such as bridges over real waterways (Figure 4-24). The hyper real

quality of the Venetian experience is in some ways reminiscent of *Juanqinzhai*, offering a 'perfected' version of reality.



Figure 4-23 The Armillary Sphere, Venetian Casino, Macau. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015.]



Figure 4-24 Piazza San Marco at the Venetian, Macau. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

Although the design of the Venetian is inspired by Venice, Italian architecture and decorative themes, the fact of its location in Macau, and the fact that the majority of the clientele is Chinese is reflected in the East Asian inflected interior design schemes, including Chinese wallpapers in some areas of the complex. Chinese wallpapers are applied as wall decoration and also as framed artworks in several areas reserved for VIPs, high limits gaming and executive club members; a clear indication that they are used to visually demarcate spaces for clientele with significant funds and particular guest privileges.⁵²

The hand painted wallpapers used at the Venetian are made by Gracie Studio in New York, already described in chapter three as an important supplier of antique Chinese wallpapers to the American market throughout the twentieth century. Wallpapers decorated with gold fish on a deep red ground were used on the walls surrounding a high stakes baccarat table. Gold fish are a visual metaphor for wealth and red is a celebratory colour. Additionally, in a cordoned off VIP gaming area, fulsome, pale pink peonies were painted on wallpapers with a silver ground, representing wealth and status. This positive imagery was entirely appropriate for the activities that took place in these areas and was most likely appreciated as such, consciously or subconsciously, by the Chinese clientele using these spaces. Due to casino rules it was not possible to obtain pictures of the wallpapers but

⁵² Chinese wallpapers made by Fromental were also used to decorate gaming areas at Galaxy casino in Macau.

(Figure 4-25) shows an example of a wallpaper from Gracie Studio's main collections which is similar to the peony design used at the casino.



Figure 4-25 Gracie Studio Chinese wallpaper design SY-507, Chinese scenic on silver. [Source: <https://www.graciestudio.com/wallpaper/handpainted-wallpapers/chinese-scenics/>]

Figure 4-26 shows the use of Chinese wallpapers in Chinese restaurant, *Zi Yat Heen*, located in the Four Seasons hotel which is annexed to the Venetian casino.

This high-end restaurant serves traditional Cantonese food in a contemporary interior with a distinctly Chinese character.

Chinese wallpapers are used boldly on one large accent wall in the main dining room (Figure 4-26). The design, painted on silk, depicts pale pink peony flowers and light green foliage on twisting branches against a contrasting dark brown ground. It is juxtaposed with lacquer effect wall tiles, decorated with a traditional

cloud scroll design, adding to the Chinese cultural references in the decorative scheme. These decorative devices work to define a space of Chinese cultural activity (the eating of Chinese food) and the Chinese wallpapers are used in a way that makes little or no reference to the historical European contexts in which such Chinese wallpapers were once used. Instead the Chinese wallpapers contribute to the subtle evocation of a Chinese cultural aesthetic in the space.



Figure 4-26 Zi Yat Heen, Cantonese restaurant, Four Seasons, Macau. [Source: Image taken Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

The Venetian casino interiors were designed by Dallas based American interior design company, Wilson Associates; whose creative mission is, 'Creating new definitions of luxury'.⁵³ Chinese wallpaper is certainly not a new definition of

⁵³ <https://www.wilsonassociates.com/about/#testimonial-2> With thanks to Mike Gracie of Gracie Studio, New York for sharing information about this design scheme. Gracie supplied the Chinese wallpapers used in the Venetian casino.

luxury in Europe, but is becoming so in China where it is being used to demarcate spaces of exclusivity and luxury, but also to make specific cultural reference to the geographical location in which it is placed, i.e. China. Seemingly divorced from its prior use contexts in historic European interiors the use of Chinese export style wallpapers in Macau's casinos represents a re-casting of Chinese wallpapers as a carrier of auspicious Chinese imagery, a signifier of Chinese culture and a marker of luxury.

It is important to recognise the influence of interior designers in bringing Chinese export wallpapers into contemporary Chinese interiors as they appear to be the most significant driving force in their application. In many cases, such as at the Venetian in Macau the interior design was managed by an international design firm, whose designers brought their own set of cultural ideas and preconceptions to bear on the Chinese projects they worked on. It was not possible to determine who or what was the definitive driving force behind the decision to install Chinese wallpapers at the Venetian casino and at *Zi Yat Heen* and thereby to determine whether this was a case in which American designers played out their own western ideas of what a Chinese interior should look like or whether the designs were chosen based on the idea that the iconography was appealing and relevant to Chinese visitors.

Glamour, History and Nostalgia: Re-animating the Past with Chinese Wallpaper in Hong Kong: Mott 32, Standard Chartered Bank Building, 4-4A Des Voeux Rd, Central, Hong Kong, 2014

Chinese restaurant Mott 32 opened to critical acclaim for both its food and its interior design in the Central business district of Hong Kong in spring 2014.⁵⁴ The restaurant was collaboratively designed by Hong Kong based restaurant group Maximal Concepts and interior designer Joyce Wang and it is named after the first Chinese convenience store in New York City, at 32 Mott Street, which provided the nucleus for the city's China town in the late nineteenth century. This idea sets the tone for the design treatment in the restaurant, which is a reflection on Chinese cultural spaces; the pseudo extraterritorial spaces of China towns throughout the world and shared colonial spaces such as Hong Kong; 'It tells the story of Hong Kong's past, with hints and clues to the lives of the building's imaginary former occupants.'⁵⁵ The concept of mutual cultural influence is reflected in the interiors as well as in the restaurant menu, which offers a fusion experience of Chinese and Iberian dishes such as barbecue pluma Iberico pork and apple wood roasted Peking duck.

Housed in the basement of the monolithic Standard Chartered Bank building, the restaurant interior is dark and atmospheric, characterised by an amalgam of contemporary industrial and Art Deco aesthetics. The mirrored Art Deco staircase

⁵⁴ Winner of the Inside Festival 2014 World Interior of the Year Award

⁵⁵ <https://www.mott32.com/design>

entrance is hung with large clusters of bare light bulbs suspended from heavy, industrial chains which cascade through the centre of the stair well. The restaurant space comprises an open kitchen and bar area integrated with the main dining room, with two smaller dining rooms leading off this.

Each space is decorated with distinct markers of Chinese culture. Indeed, the restaurant's website states explicitly, 'Our contemporary Chinese restaurant located in the heart of Central is a celebration of Hong Kong culture and cuisine' and this is reflected in the decorative treatment of the space.⁵⁶ In one of the smaller dining rooms, with a vaulted ceiling, the walls and ceiling are lined with shiny red lacquer effect tiles over which rows of elegant calligraphy brushes of all shapes and sizes are hung (Figure 4-27). Low tables in black wood and sumptuously plump, red velvet sofas are placed in rows along the walls reminiscent of a luxury railway carriage. The effects of these decorations are extended with the use of a huge mirror wall at the end of the room.

⁵⁶ <https://www.mott32.com/>

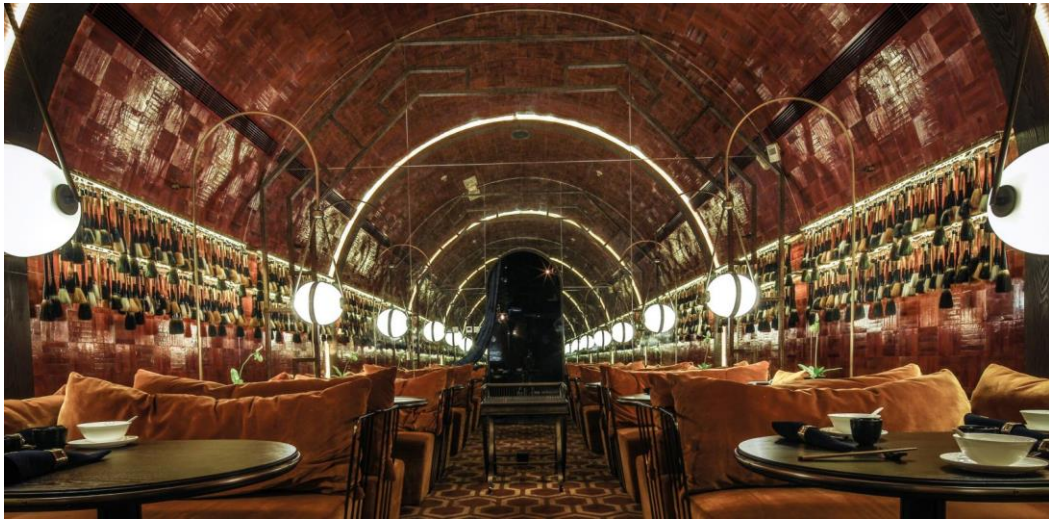


Figure 4-27 One of three dining rooms at Mott, 32, Hong Kong. [Source: Mott 32 <https://www.mott32.com/>]

In the other small dining room distressed concrete walls are decorated with street style spray painted images of butterflies and bamboo and a large image of woman's face and shoulders (Figure 4-28). The woman wears a qipao and her hair and general styling make nostalgic reference to the kinds of images of beautiful women that adorned advertisements and packaging for various consumer goods such as tea, cosmetics and cigarettes in Hong Kong and mainland China during the 1920s and 30s (Figure 4-29).



Figure 4-28 One of three dining rooms at restaurant Mott 32, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]



Figure 4-29 Display of Chinese tea caddies, ca. 1925-1935, Hong Kong Heritage Museum. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

On the opposite wall, a large collection of blue and white porcelain vases in traditional forms, such as a moon flask, are displayed in tight clusters (Figure 4-30) in a manner that is reminiscent of an eighteenth century European China cabinet or *porzellanzimmer*, adding to the sense of cultural hybridity and temporal flux in the space. The ceiling is decorated with a wooden structure that replicates an over-size abacus, threaded with large wooden beads and bare light bulbs. These playful decorative elements function like a check list of visual cues for popular images of Chinese culture and make a clear attempt to evoke a sense of nostalgia around the idea of China and Chinese material culture. Moreover, the design scheme denotes a space of Chinese cultural experience.



Figure 4-30 One of three dining rooms at Mott 32, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

In the main dining room several full height panels of Chinese export style wallpaper, made by British design company Fromental, are displayed in combination with contemporary lighting pendants and sleek leather banquettes, where they create a striking and elegant design statement. The wallpaper is hung just above the banquettes and is painted on a subtle blue-grey ground with designs of bamboo, plum blossoms, peonies, birds and butterflies, embellished with metallic embroidered details in pale green, pink and buff hues. The silk embroidered details, concentrated in the lower register of the panels, which are several meters high, shimmer in the low light of the restaurant, heightening the luxurious effects of the wallpaper. The use of hand embroidered details was an innovative embellishment recently introduced to Chinese export style wallpaper by Fromental, as a luxurious addition to their core 'chinoiserie' designs.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Wang, Allen. Fromental Product Manager, Wuxi, China. Personal interview. 3 April 2015. There was in fact, a close historical relationship between the crafts of painting and embroidery in China up until the Tang period (618-907) when painters and embroiderers often worked closely together to apply colour to silk fabrics, painting also acted as a substitute for more expensive embroideries. See Hongxing Zhang and others, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting, 700-1900*, ed. by Hongxing Zhang (V&A Publishing, 2013), p. 26. The connection between these two crafts is reiterated by the embroidered flourishes on Fromental's Chinese wallpapers which are all painted on silk.



Figure 4-31 Chinese wallpaper in the main dining room at Mott 32, Hong Kong. [Source: Mott 32 <https://www.mott32.com/>]

As further examples in this chapter will also demonstrate, Chinese wallpapers in present day China have come to be associated with an imperial Chinese aesthetic, though wallpapers of this style were never part of imperial interiors. The décor, according to the designers of the space at Mott 32, blends, ‘industrial style with Chinese imperial elements seamlessly, imbuing the space with sleekness and elegance, punctuated by unexpected and pretentious details.’⁵⁸

⁵⁸ <https://www.mott32.com/design>



Figure 4-32 Chinese wallpaper in the main dining room at Mott 32, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015]

In addition to their perceived imperial aesthetic, it is clear that the choice of Chinese wallpapers for this design scheme is based on their close visual relationship to Chinese bird and flower painting traditions. Calligraphy, painting and porcelain represent three major Chinese artistic traditions which have permeated global material culture and contributed to defining images of China, both within China and around the world. The designers of this space could have chosen to use Chinese bird and flower paintings in a traditional hanging scroll format or in the form of screens, but they would not have achieved the same decorative impact as they have with Chinese wallpapers, with their extravagantly large scale and an aesthetic that can be simultaneously traditional and

contemporary. In short, Chinese wallpapers function as a more contemporary and more visually impactful substitute for Chinese paintings, but carry the same visual messages and ideas that relate to long standing traditions of Chinese visual culture.

As a whole, the design scheme at Mott 32 reflects the broader fusion theme of the restaurant, conflating different time periods and decorative styles (Art Deco, chinoiserie and traditional Chinese artistic and craft practices). The effect is one of distortion and disorientation, an amalgam of various visual cues relating to different periods of the past, but unified by the concept of China and Chinese culture, facilitating a nostalgic reflection on Chinese material culture and history.

Glamour, History and Nostalgia: Re-animating the Past with Chinese Wallpaper in Hong Kong: The China Club, Bank of China Building, 2A Des Voeux Road, Central, Hong Kong

A practice of nostalgia also provides the context for the use of Chinese wallpapers in the exclusive members only China Club in Hong Kong. The China Club opened on September 8th, 1991 on the top three floors (13th, 14th & 15th) of the Art Deco style, Old Bank of China Building in Hong Kong's Central business district (Figure 4-33). Membership of the China Club was initially by invitation only for corporate members, but now American express 'black card' holders are permitted to dine

there.⁵⁹ There is no obvious signage on the building to indicate the presence of the China Club inside, just one very small, dull bronze plaque at a modern side entrance, preserving the anonymity of this exclusive space which is used by Hong Kong's elite business community for meetings and social events. The interiors evoke a luxury Shanghai modern aesthetic inflected with western decorative accents which reflect Hong Kong's colonial history and hybrid Sino-British culture.



Figure 4-33 Entrance to the old Bank of China Building, 2A Des Voeux Road Central, Hong Kong [Source: image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

The interior design of the China Club similarly evokes a sense of nostalgia for cosmopolitan Chinese cities in the 1920s and 30s, like aspects of the design theme

⁵⁹ Interview with Helena Koo, Asia regional manager of private wealth, Goldman Sachs, a corporate member of the China Club. The Centurion Card or 'Black card' is invitation-only after appropriate net worth with American Express, credit, and spending criteria are met

at Mott 32 already described above. This period is an important locus for nostalgic reflections on China as a time when China was still rich in material culture and also engaged with global style movements. It brings to life a time before the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) destroyed large swathes of Chinese material culture and before China became politically isolated from the West.⁶⁰ Art Deco was one means by which China expressed modernity and a particular brand of East Asian Art Deco emerged in China's major cities, especially in the southern Jiangnan region, including Shanghai, which expressed itself in architecture, fashion (Figure 4-34) and product design (Figure 4-29).⁶¹

⁶⁰ Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) unleashed a vicious attack on Chinese culture in all its forms; old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits, collectively referred to as 'The Four Olds', in order to bring education, art and literature in line with Communist ideology. As a result, the Cultural Revolution brought about a devastating rupture in the history of Chinese culture with the obliteration of, not only vast swathes of historic material culture, but also of many long standing craft practices and traditions. This rupture has created a tangible void in China's material landscape and generated a corresponding, nostalgic longing for the past, driving a desire to re-imagine and reanimate a specifically Chinese cultural past in present day China. See Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, Paperback, 2017; Galen Poor, 'Reimagining the Past at the Beijing Olympics' (MA thesis, Univeristy of Victoria, Australia, 2012) <http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/3911/Poor_Galen_MA_2012.pdf>; Mei Mei Rado, 'Imagery of Chinese Dress', in *China: Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Yale Univeristy Press, 2015), pp. 31–41.

⁶¹ For a fascinating and hugely detailed account of the material culture of China's key cities from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1949 see, Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Pub.) Ltd., 2007).



Figure 4-34 Ladies jacket, ca.1920, China, woven silk with sequin edging, V&A Museum Collections. Object number FE.61-1995. [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

The China Club interiors were designed by the late Hong Kong born designer and entrepreneur, Sir David Tang, KBE (1954-2017), renowned for his flamboyant personality, luxurious, connoisseurial tastes, business acumen and influential personal connections. He ran a hugely successful business empire which encompassed journalism, lifestyle boutiques (Shanghai Tang) (Figure 4-35 and Figure 4-36), restaurants and private clubs. In each of his ventures his signature eccentric style, which persistently referenced Chinese material culture, was evident. He repeatedly used Chinese wallpapers in his projects across the globe, including in the China Clubs in Hong Kong, Beijing and Singapore, the China Exchange in London's China town, China Tang restaurant at the Dorchester hotel in London and in his Shanghai Tang fashion and lifestyle stores (founded in 1994 and sold in 1998). In each of these locales, Chinese wallpapers function as a bold

design statement and define spaces of Chinese cultural activity and nostalgic reflection.



Figure 4-35 Chinese wallpapers mounted on fitting room doors at Shanghai Tang store, Pacific Place Mall, Central, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015.]



Figure 4-36 Chinese wallpapers in the fitting rooms at Shanghai Tang flagship store, Duddell Street, Hong Kong [Source: <https://www.shanghaitang.com/en-us/store/shanghai-tang-mansion-hong-kong>.]



Figure 4-37 Main dining room at the China Club, Hong Kong. Source: [Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015]

The China club in Hong Kong is characterised by a pervasive feeling of nostalgia. The main dining room is styled after a traditional tea house; it features antique hardwood Chinese furniture, period light fittings and ceiling fans, but the walls are festooned with contemporary Chinese art, contributing to an eclectic, but not incongruous effect. The upper floors of the building contain private dining rooms, a bar and a library, the décor of which are meditations on Chinese material culture, past and present, punctuated throughout with a rich collection contemporary Chinese art, much of which is itself a commentary on Chinese history and material culture, such as the ceramic sculpture by Chinese artist Liu Jianhua, in the entrance hall (Figure 4-38). It is a large Yuan dynasty style blue and white porcelain plate scattered with macabre headless and armless female torsos dressed in qipao, with legs sticking out inelegantly at rakish angles. The piece is

part of Liu's 'Merriment' series of ceramic art works produced in 2001. In its elegant setting, at the bottom of a sweeping wrought iron staircase, it appears at first glance to be a typical example of traditional blue and white porcelain, but on closer inspection its irreverent forms reveal something more incongruous and playful. It sets the tone for the decoration throughout the club, which is inflected with a sense of irony and irreverent playfulness.



Figure 4-38 . Ceramic art work by Liu Jianhua in the entrance hall at the China Club, Hong Kong.
Source: [Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015]

Chinese wallpaper is used in several rooms throughout the club where they contribute to contrasting decorative effects. In the library, the walls are decorated with bird and flower design Chinese wallpapers, depicting colourful birds perched among tall, wavering, pale green bamboos, interspersed with vines bearing bright pink, blue and white blossoms all on a bright yellow ground (Figure 4-39 and Figure 4-40).



Figure 4-39 The library at the China Club, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]



Figure 4-40 The library at the China Club, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

In the lower register, luxurious flowering peonies are depicted in white surrounded by smaller blooms in bright pink, yellow and blue. The room is lit with wall sconces which have paper shades decorated with coordinating hand painted birds and flowers. Presented in combination with a fireplace - with a carriage clock on the mantel, leather arm chairs, book cases of English language reference books on China and a wrought iron spiral staircase leading to a book lined mezzanine,

the room appears to be modelled on an English Country house or an English colonial dwelling. The use of Chinese wallpapers in this overtly European design scheme is perhaps a reference to Hong Kong's colonial past, a legacy that is felt particularly strongly in Chater square, where the club is located, with its elegant colonial architecture (Figure 4-41). In this way the Chinese wallpaper appears to contribute to the creation of a pseudo extraterritorial European space.



Figure 4-41 Neo-classical Court of Final Appeal and Former Legislative Council Building, completed in 1912, Chater Square, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

By contrast, the Chinese wallpapers hung in the entrance to the Club's Long Bar evoke a dramatic Art Deco aesthetic with a bird and flower design depicted, as if in silhouette, on a black ground in bright turquoise blue. A circular porthole window looks into the bar itself, reminiscent of an early twentieth century cruise ship, which adds to the sense of glamour and the almost theatrical experience, as though it is part of a movie or theatre set (Figure 4-42).



Figure 4-42 Entrance to The Long Bar, The China Club, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

The stunning colour contrast of turquoise on black creates an effect similar to the kingfisher feathers historically used in imperial Chinese dress (jewellery and headpieces) and decorative art. The bold contrast makes the designs pop from the wall and it appears that the colours were deliberately chosen to co-ordinate with the colours of a large framed Pop Art print of Chairman Mao, hung against the wallpapers (Figure 4-43). The print adds another layer to the cultural and temporal confusion that characterises this space; a pleasurable visual and sensory mash up of disparate decorative elements and temporal references. Through all of Tang's playful decorative experiments the overarching theme is clearly and unremittingly China.



Figure 4-43 Entrance to The Long Bar, The China Club, Hong Kong. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March, 2015.]

In an interview with *The South China Morning Post* in 2017, Hong Kong Chinese designer Alan Chan discussed the interior design of the China Club Hong Kong, wherein he expressed admiration for the immense attention to detail throughout the design scheme. Chan also makes specific comment on the way in which Tang re-created aspects of the past through his design, “(...) the entire setting has been completely recreated out of nothing – people think it’s been here for ages. So I think that’s the beauty about what David has done to this place,” explains Chan.

“It’s a fake setting but it feels like it’s been here for a while.”⁶² Of the contemporary art on display Chan says, “It showcases the depth of contemporary

⁶² <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/interiors-living/article/2110327/inside-david-tangs-exclusive-china-club-hong-kong-long> Bernice Chan interview with designer Alan Chan, Saturday, 09 September, 2017

Chinese art since the Cultural Revolution. Everything you want to know is captured here.”⁶³ There is throughout the interior of the China club a clear and pervasive dialogue between China’s past and its present; an historical commentary made through material culture and in this Hong Kong location this dialogue is inflected with particular local histories of Hong Kong as a former British colony (1841-1997). As such, this thoughtfully curated space is a display of Chinese material culture and an expression of local Chinese cultural experiences and endeavours with a reflective and nostalgic gaze.

A Study in Imperial Luxury: The China Club, Beijing

Chinese export style wallpapers are used even more extensively in The China Club in Beijing where their placement in an historic Chinese architectural setting creates an unexpected and visually arresting juxtaposition. This branch of the China Club is located in the historic Xi Rongxian Hutong in Beijing’s Xidan district, near the Forbidden City and comprises a bar, restaurant, with 14 private dining rooms and 10 guest rooms. It is based in a traditional Chinese courtyard house (*siheyuan*) comprised of 5 linked courtyards, each flanked by single story brick buildings (Figure 4-44).⁶⁴ The building dates to the seventeenth century and was once the mansion of Prince Xun, a *beizi*, or prince of the third rank. He was the

⁶³ <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/interiors-living/article/2110327/inside-david-tangs-exclusive-china-club-hong-kong-long> Bernice Chan interview with designer Alan Chan, Saturday, 09 September, 2017

⁶⁴ The complex also houses a modern annex built in a relatively sympathetic architectural style which houses the majority of the guest rooms.

great-grandson of Prince Cheng, Yinmi, the twenty-fourth son of the Kangxi Emperor (r.1661-1722); it is one of Beijing's few surviving princely mansions.⁶⁵



Figure 4-44 Main courtyard at The China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]

According to research by sinologists Geremie Barmé and Sang Ye, during the Republican era (1912-1949) the house was privately owned by Zhou Zoumin, director of the Jincheng Bank, who used it as his family home.⁶⁶ In 1952, ownership passed to the Communist government and the building was used as

⁶⁵ Geremie Barmé and Sang. Ye, 'Hidden Mansions: Beijing from the Air (Part 1)', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2008
<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=016_hiddenmansions.inc&issue=016>.

⁶⁶ Geremie Barmé and Sang. Ye, 'Hidden Mansions: Beijing from the Air (Part 1)', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2008
<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=016_hiddenmansions.inc&issue=016>.

offices for the State Ministry of the Procurator, but later transformed into the Sichuan Restaurant (*Sichuan Fandian*), which became known as one of the finest restaurants in Beijing.⁶⁷ As Geremie Barmé and Sang Ye describe it, '(...) it was frequented by Party-state leaders and fellow travellers (in particular those with a Sichuan connection: Zhu De, Chen Yi, Deng Xiaoping and Guo Moruo) for whom it became something of a private club.'⁶⁸ As such, it has a rich and colourful history as a locus in which many of China's influential historical figures met and socialised.

In 1995 the Sichuan Restaurant went into partnership with David Tang to create The China Club, which continued to provide a venue for high level cadres and international business people to meet and socialise as well forge business relationships, in luxurious surroundings. 'As a private club', Geremie Barmé and Sang Ye note, '(...) it has to all effects and purposes been returned to the off-limits world in which it existed in the dynastic, Republican and high-Maoist eras.'⁶⁹

In 2007, the interior was re-designed in preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and, as part of this refurbishment, Tang chose to install hand painted Chinese

⁶⁷ Geremie Barmé and Sang. Ye, 'Hidden Mansions: Beijing from the Air (Part 1)', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2008
<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=016_hiddenmansions.inc&issue=016>.

⁶⁸ Geremie Barmé and Sang. Ye, 'Hidden Mansions: Beijing from the Air (Part 1)', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2008
<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=016_hiddenmansions.inc&issue=016>.

⁶⁹ Geremie Barmé and Sang. Ye, 'Hidden Mansions: Beijing from the Air (Part 1)', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2008
<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=016_hiddenmansions.inc&issue=016>.

export style wallpapers with bird and flower designs, made by Fromental, in each of the guest rooms as well as in several of the private dining rooms.⁷⁰ Prior to this refurbishment, the interiors of the club followed historic Chinese decorative precedents, largely in keeping with the period of the architecture. In these refurbished spaces the wallpapers are juxtaposed with historic Chinese architectural features and traditional, dark wood Chinese furniture as well as some European style furniture and fabrics, accessorized with items such as a Bakelite telephone, and a Deco mantel clock, inflecting the interior with nostalgic references to early twentieth century material culture. It is unusual to see export style wallpaper in a traditional Chinese architectural space, partly because these kinds of spaces are now themselves so rare. But also, in China the general trend for using Chinese export wallpapers seems to be concentrated in contemporary architectural spaces; shops, restaurants and hotels where the dimensions of the spaces are generally much larger and the space more contemporary, such as at the restaurant and bar at the contemporary glass and chrome, 5-star, Ritz Carlton hotel in Beijing (Figure 4-45).

⁷⁰ The club was used as team headquarters for the Swiss Olympic team during the 2008 Olympic Games.



Figure 4-45 Ritz Carlton hotel, Financial Street, Beijing. [Source: de Gournay, London.]

The rooms in the China Club are small in proportion with low ceilings and intricate carved wood architectural features, such as decorative lintels. In one private dining room, a wallpaper design of tall tree peonies in full bloom, with ornamental rocks set amongst gently undulating grassy hillocks and multi coloured birds perched and in flight, is picked out in a visually striking combination of white, cobalt blue and pale greens on a bright red ground (Figure 4-46).



Figure 4-46 Private dining room at The China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]

The room features a large, round dining table with contemporary black wood dining chairs and paper lantern shaded, free-standing lights set around it. Traditional decorative elements include a carved wood and painted glass, pendant light with silk tassels above the table, a recessed and curtained *kang* bed and carved lintels, inset with a calligraphic *heng pi* and prints from the renowned *Mustard Seed Garden Manual (Jiezi Hua Yuan)*, a widely disseminated painting manual, first published in 1679. The decorative design was clearly intended to convey a Chinese aesthetic, but also to be exuberant and flamboyant and, in this way, to be traditional, but also visually novel, exciting and extraordinary.

Each of the guest rooms and the hallways leading to the rooms feature the same bird and flower design wallpapers depicted in different colour ways, such that

each has its own character (Figure 4-47 and Figure 4-48). The designs feature tall, sparse bamboos intertwined with flowering vines, with colourful birds perched amongst them, full and luxurious peony bushes in the lower register and fluttering butterflies, embellished with hand embroidered details in the upper register.

They are more sparsely decorated when compared to eighteenth century bird and flower design wallpapers, but the relationship between the two remains clear.

This pared down design lends the wallpapers a more contemporary aesthetic and consequently they appear both novel and familiar, traditional and contemporary.

The general styling of the guest rooms reflects a nostalgic early twentieth century aesthetic and includes many traditional features such as carved wooden window

frames, a *kang* style raised bed with curtains and other pieces of traditional

Chinese furniture, but they also feature early twentieth century furniture designs (Figure 4-47, Figure 4-48 and Figure 4-49). In this way the furnishings bring to life

early twentieth century design as it was experienced in East Asia, combining

traditional vernacular design with modern global design influences.



Figure 4-47 A guest room at the China Club, Beijing. [Source: China Club, Beijing]



Figure 4-48 A guest room at the China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]



Figure 4-49 A guest room at The China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]

One of the guest suites which is rented out on a long term basis is styled as a Chinese scholar's studio (Figure 4-50).⁷¹ A study area is set out in the suite; furnished with a long and narrow, heavy, dark wood table set up for calligraphy. There are brushes, paper and framed Chinese paintings hung on the white walls behind the calligraphy table. There is also a small library of books and shelves specially designed to display collector's items including ceramics.

⁷¹ The styling of this part of the space reflects twenty-first century trends in Chinese fashion, interior design and general self fashioning, which references and emulates Chinese cultural practices of the past. In particular, the cultivation of the image of a Confucian scholar gentleman. See Jeses Solý-Farzs, *New Confucianism in Twenty-First Century China: The Construction of a Discourse* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315880457>>.



Figure 4-50 Guest suite at The China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]

The adjacent sitting area is decorated with Chinese bird and flower wallpapers on a dark, chocolate coloured ground (Figure 4-51). The bamboos are picked out in cool greens and flowers, birds and butterflies in bright fuchsia pink, blue and yellow, allowing them to stand out, as if in relief. The wooden latticed windows are sheathed with gauze blinds, painted and embroidered with the same bird and flower designs, again creating a modern yet traditional design aesthetic.



Figure 4-51 Sitting area in a guest suite at The China Club, Beijing. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, April, 2015.]

The presence of the calligraphy table and other scholars items, such as the porcelain collection on display, demarcate a space of specifically Chinese cultural activity, such that their combination with Chinese export wallpapers might seem oddly incongruous; the epitome of Chinese cultural refinement juxtaposed with export products for the western market. Yet, as seen in the previous examples

discussed in this chapter, it seems that the use of Chinese wallpapers in the design schemes at the China Club do not represent the use of an export product at all, but rather were intended to act as a visual reference to traditions of Chinese visual culture, providing an updated, yet appropriate, backdrop for the contemporary Chinese scholar's studio.

In spite of this, the installation of Chinese export style wallpapers at the China Club was, according to manager Tony Chiu, criticized by some Chinese members of the club when they were first installed, because they were perceived as incongruous to the historic Chinese architectural setting.⁷² Chiu explained that while some Chinese club members initially questioned the appropriateness of the wall decorations the wallpapers are generally admired by the majority of members and guests at the club. Chiu described how much he enjoys directing attention to the fact that the wallpapers are hand-painted and embroidered on silk, encouraging guests to touch them and better appreciate the craftsmanship and quality of the materials used. Chiu also described how much he personally liked the aesthetic, so much so that he had bird and flower Chinese wallpapers installed in his own Hong Kong apartment.⁷³

It seems that the overall design intention and general perception of the China Club is as a space of Chinese design and aesthetic character. Shortly after the 2007

⁷² Chiu, Tony. General Manager, The China Club, Beijing. Personal interview. 6 April 2015.

⁷³ Chiu, Tony. General Manager, The China Club, Beijing. Personal interview. 6 April 2015.

refurbishment, the China Club was chosen as the venue for the Chinese press launch of the V&A's spring 2008 exhibition, 'China Design Now' (China Tang at the Dorchester was chosen for the UK launch). The club was clearly identified as a space in which Chinese design, past and present was exhibited together, as well as being a suitably interesting, glamorous, but above all, overtly Chinese venue. A description of the China Club, Beijing on a luxury travel website called *Elite traveller* is also indicative of perceptions of the club as an 'authentic' Chinese space: 'Set in a 400-year-old palace built for the 24th son of the Emperor Kangxi, this one-time favourite haunt of Communist Party Leader Deng Xiaoping is a place for those with a penchant for luxury and all things authentically Chinese'.⁷⁴ As noted in this description, a sense of luxury and privilege pervades the China club, so much so that it became a target of President Xi Jinping's recent crackdown on corruption within the Communist Party, which targeted the inappropriately lavish lifestyles of some party officials.⁷⁵ As a result, in late 2016, the China Club was quietly shut down and its furniture and fittings auctioned.

The interiors of the China Club in Beijing reflect David Tang's signature eccentric and flamboyant style; full of explosive colour, textures and immense attention to detail, inflected with nostalgia, romance and playfulness. Chiu speculated that

⁷⁴ Andy Hayler, 'Beijing Restaurants: The China Club', *Elite Traveller*, 2015 <<https://www.elitetraveler.com/finest-dining/restaurant-guide/beijing-restaurants/the-china-club>> [accessed 16 June 2016].

⁷⁵ <http://www.ejinsight.com/20161130-david-tang-s-premier-clubhouse-in-beijing-demolished/> <https://www.weekinchina.com/2016/12/out-of-the-club/>

David Tang chose to use Chinese export style wallpapers as a reflection of his own cultural background; as a Hong Kong Chinese, educated in England and in order to add something quintessentially English to the design scheme but, unlike the library in the Hong Kong China Club, there is nothing else in the scheme to suggest this.⁷⁶ The choice of Chinese wallpapers for this project seems, as at Mott 32, to be more about incorporating a familiar design (birds and flowers), a clear visual reference to Chinese cultural traditions in its subject matter, but one which offers more dramatic visual impact; they are more conspicuous and more contemporary, with their large scale format and daring colour combinations, than traditional Chinese paintings. They offer drama and interest but are in line with the traditional Chinese themes and materials of the whole decorative treatment and architectural design of the China Club space.

Since they were first produced Chinese wallpapers have undergone a complex process of cultural translation and re-contextualisation as they have travelled across the globe. The Chinese motifs that originally made them appear so exotic and appealing to European consumers are still recognisable in China, where they are attributed with specific symbolic meanings, providing one reason for their popularity in China today. Tang's use of Chinese wallpapers at the China Exchange in London, where he was Chairman, also supports the idea that they can act as a

⁷⁶ Chiu, Tony. General Manager, The China Club, Beijing. Personal interview. 6 April 2015.

visual short hand for Chinese culture; a Chinese signifier with a more contemporary aesthetic.

The China exchange was launched in 2015 and is located on Gerrard Street in the heart of London's China town. It hosts exhibitions, lectures and panel discussions on all aspects of Chinese life and culture. Created by Sir David Tang, 'China Exchange serves as a home for ideas, discussion, and creative expression that stimulate greater understanding of and curiosity about China's impact on the world.'⁷⁷ Among the venue's main spaces, both the Prudential Hall (Figure 4-53) and the Chung Yen Sing Hall (Figure 4-52) are decorated with Chinese bird and flower wallpapers, made by Fromental.



Figure 4-52 Chinese wallpaper in the Chung Yen Sing Hall at The China Exchange, London. [Source: <http://chinaexchange.uk>]

⁷⁷ <http://chinaexchange.uk/about/>



Figure 4-53 Sir David Tang and Lord Norwich speaking in the Prudential Hall at the China Exchange, London, 4th April, 2017. [Source: <http://chinaexchange.uk>]

These two rooms are otherwise characterised by a restrained minimalism; white walls, bare wood floors and glass doors. In the largest space, the Prudential Hall, speakers are framed against the backdrop of the Chinese wallpaper, reminiscent of the Chinese screens, discussed earlier in this chapter, that were used in imperial China to foreground the host or guest of honour. They also serve as a visual reminder of the Chinese cultural space in which the activities take place. The use of Chinese export style wallpaper in this space, in the heart of London's China town is indicative of the diverse range of ideas that have come to be invested in this material, which has such a distinctive and recognisable aesthetic. In a reversal of circumstance, the use of Chinese wallpaper in this China town venue in London has come to define a *Chinese* pseudo extraterritorial space, in direct contrast to the library in the China Club, Hong Kong, described earlier in this chapter, where Chinese wallpapers contributed to the creation of a European, pseudo extraterritorial space.

It is clear from these analyses of the use of Chinese wallpapers in David Tang's projects that they are not intended to be incongruous, but rather to act as contemporary carriers of culturally significant bird and flower imagery. They signify a space of Chinese cultural activity and as such, act as a visual short hand for Chinese culture and depending on context also convey the idea of a luxury.

Re-casting Chinese Export Wallpapers as an Imperial Aesthetic in Present Day China

Narratives relating to history and nostalgia are intricately interwoven with the concept of luxury and often converge upon imperial China as a recurring focus and theme in contemporary Chinese fashions and interior design. In 2015, celebrity Chinese fashion designer, Guo Pei used de Gournay's Shanghai showrooms for a fashion shoot; juxtaposing her own re-imagined Manchu ladies' court dress with French rococo style furniture against the backdrop of a stunning blue ground Chinese export style wallpaper painted with birds and flowers in a rainbow of jewel like colours; conflating the visual languages of imperial China and European chinoiserie to dramatic visual effect.

Guo Pei is one of China's most prominent fashion designers. She studied fashion in Beijing during the nineteen-eighties and graduated in 1986 at a time when China was experiencing a period of economic political reform which opened China to foreign investment and influence. When Guo Pei graduated from fashion school she went on to design for one of China's first independent clothing companies. By

1997 she was able to set up her own couture business where she designed creations for many of China's celebrities, including many Chinese singers and actresses. Guo Pei shot to international fame when pop star Rhianna wore one of her more spectacular creations for the 2015 Metropolitan Museum of Art's annual fundraising ball (Figure 4-54).



Figure 4-54 Rhianna wearing Guo Pei's 'Yellow Empress' cape, Met Gala, 2015. [Source: Harper's Bazaar, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/red-carpet-dresses/a10786/rihanna-2015-met-gala/>]

The extraordinary 'Yellow Empress' cape has a heavily embroidered train which measures sixteen feet long and the whole gown weighs twenty-five kilos.⁷⁸ It took

⁷⁸ Bre Graham, 'Guo Pei: The Chinese Designer Who Made Rihanna's Omelette Dress', *The Guardian*, 18 October 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/oct/18/guo-pe-chinese-designer-who-made-rihanna-omelette-dress>>.

over 50,000 hours to embroider by hand and took two years to complete.⁷⁹ In both its extravagant style and the extraordinary labour investment involved in its creation it references Chinese imperial dress.

The couture dress designed by Guo Pei, pictured in Figure 4-56, is more directly modelled on a specific form of historic Chinese imperial dress – the dragon robe; distinguished by its central dragon design and stylized waves at the hem (**Error! Reference source not found.**), making a more direct reference to a distinctly Chinese and elite form of dress.



Figure 4-55 Couture dress by Guo Pei, shot on location at de Gournay showrooms, Shanghai 14 August 2015. [Source: <https://twitter.com/guopeiofficial/status/632176752643563524>]

⁷⁹ Bre Graham, 'Guo Pei: The Chinese Designer Who Made Rihanna's Omelette Dress', *The Guardian*, 18 October 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/oct/18/guo-pe-chinese-designer-who-made-rihanna-omelette-dress>>.



Figure 4-56 Winter dragon robe for a woman, twill-weave silk, embroidered with gilt metal thread and coloured silks, lined with fur, China, eighteenth century, Victoria and Albert Museum, object number, 870-1901. [Source: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

Guo Pei's creations are inspired by reflections on China's material past and on extravagant and unadulterated beauty. In a 2015 interview with the BBC's China correspondent, John Sudworth, Guo Pei described the greyness and the monotony of her childhood growing up in Communist China and her longing for colour and beauty.⁸⁰ She also reflects on the changes that came to China during the 1980s with political and economic reforms and a gradual opening up of China, recounting: "China had become a very different place and you could feel that

⁸⁰ John Sudworth, 'Guo Pei: Pop Star Rihanna's Fashion Designer of Choice', *BBC News Online*, 2015 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-33239852>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

people had new desires. They were looking for beautiful things and they were accepting of change. It was a great time to be a designer."⁸¹

Guo's designs are a celebration of form, beauty, colour and luxury but they also provide an important reflection on China's historical material culture which is increasingly salient in twenty-first century China at a time when many Chinese are attempting to re-assert Chinese cultural identities in a global context. In her essay, 'Imagery of Chinese Dress', curator Mei Mei Rado argues that, 'Traditional garments became both a material trace and a symbol of a lost history. Which in turn, aided in the contemporary reflections of the modern.'⁸² Chinese wallpapers, in this context of nostalgia for the imperial past, have come to be imagined as part of an image of the imperial and play a role in re-imagining a lost history in the present.

The extraordinary visual impact, immediate perception of luxury and the recognisably Chinese ornamental language presented by Chinese wallpapers makes them seem like a fitting choice for imagining or re-imagining the imperial past in the present day. A recent photoshoot for a feature and cover page of *Harper's Bazaar China* reiterates the ongoing interest in imperial dress and decoration as the ultimate image of luxury, again, supported by the presence of

⁸¹ John Sudworth, 'Guo Pei: Pop Star Rihanna's Fashion Designer of Choice', *BBC News Online*, 2015 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-33239852>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

⁸² Mei Mei Rado, 'Imagery of Chinese Dress', in *China: Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 31–41 (pp. 52–53).

Chinese export style wallpapers.⁸³ The images shown below were shot by renowned Chinese photographer, Yin Chao and featured female cast members from a period Chinese television drama, *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, first aired in 2017. The drama chronicles the relationship between the Qianlong Emperor and Ulanara, 'The Step Empress', second consort of the Qianlong Emperor. Yin Chao shot sumptuous images on location in historic Chinese buildings but also used de Gournay's Shanghai showrooms with hand painted Chinese export style wallpapers featured as backdrops, with the actresses wearing costumes inspired by traditional Chinese court dress (Figure 4-57 and Figure 4-58). The hand painted wallpapers used for the photoshoot include de Gournay's 'Coco Coromandel' design on custom blue painted *xuan* paper and the 'Earlham' design on Sung (sic) blue. It is clear that the wallpapers were intended to evoke the imperial aesthetic that is the drama's setting.

⁸³ 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace', *Harper's Bazaar*, February 2018.



Figure 4-57 Photograph by Yinchao for Harper's Bazaar, China editorial, 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace'. [Source: Harper's Bazaar, China, February 2018]

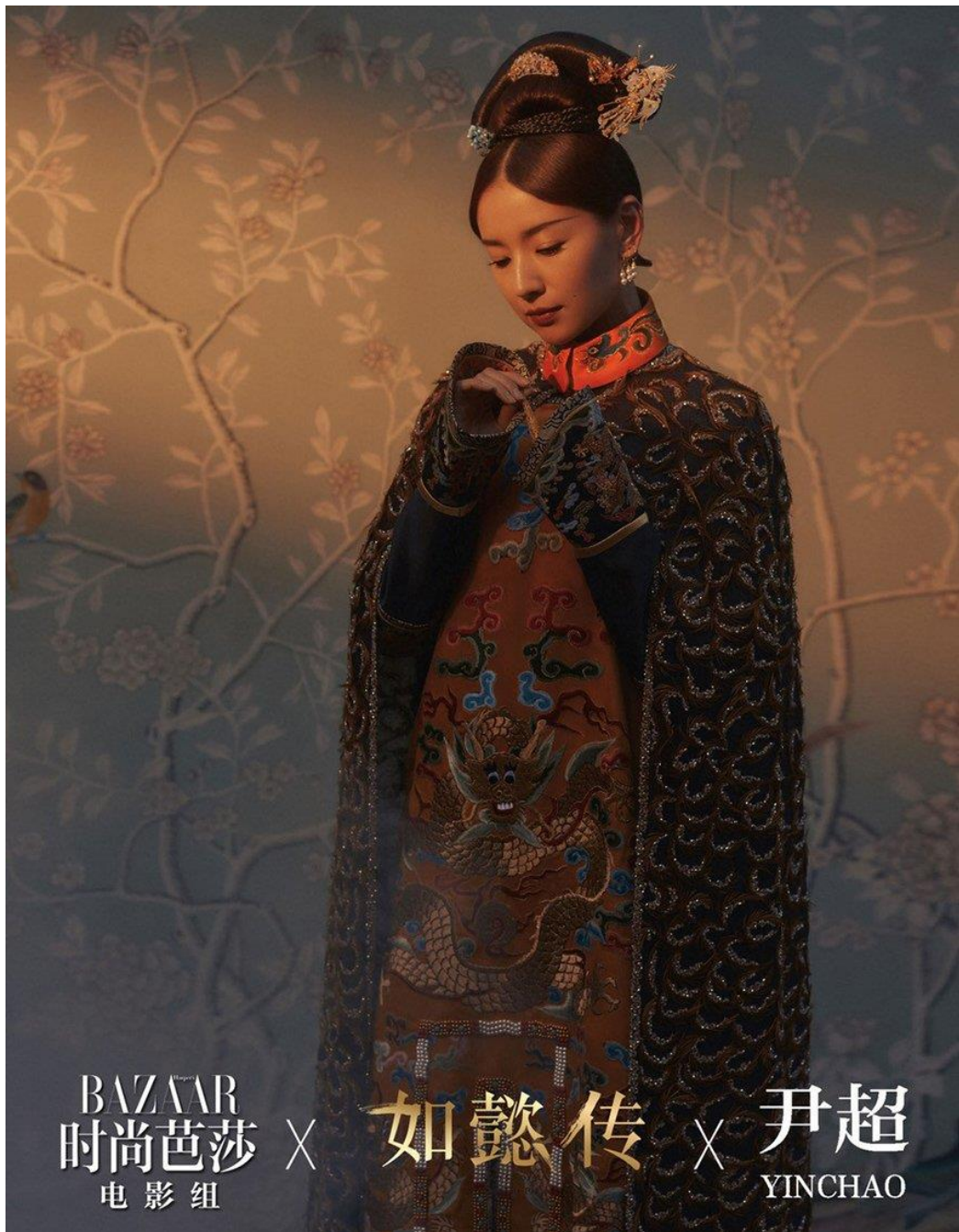


Figure 4-58 Photograph by Yin Chao for Harper's Bazaar, China editorial, 'Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace'. [Source: Harper's Bazaar, China, February 2018]

The power of imperial imagery is closely linked to nostalgia relating to China's past. Chinese material culture suffered huge losses during the Cultural Revolution and before that, from the destructive military actions of British and French forces, exemplified by the devastating sacking and looting of the Summer Palace on the

outskirts of Beijing, in 1860. In China today, visions of imperial China are being used to rebuild a sense of uniquely Chinese cultural identity in a global context, but also to convey luxury and status.

Chinese wallpaper clearly presents an attractive visual concept for the Chinese market. It sends all the right messages regarding wealth and status and sets the right tone of luxury, but also importantly represents a recognisably Chinese visual language, in this way it is ideal for contemporary re-imaginings of imperial China and Chinese identities more generally.

Today, international luxury brands are crowding into the Chinese market place, keen to exploit the new wealth that is growing there.⁸⁴ Indeed, two new de Gournay showrooms have opened in China (in Shanghai and Beijing) in recent years, selling a wide range of luxury wall coverings, including export style Chinese wallpaper.⁸⁵ An article published in *The New York Times* in 2010 describes the growing market for luxury goods in China.⁸⁶ The article documents research into Chinese consumer trends, noting; ‘Young people with decent jobs were the driving force, a McKinsey study found, and unlike people who had lived through the

⁸⁴ For a useful summary report on China’s upward economic growth trend over the last forty years see, Wayne M. Morrison, ‘China’s Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States’ (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2018) <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>>.

⁸⁵ De Gournay have two showrooms in China at No. 11, Lane 612, West Nanjing Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai, and No. 13 Beiqianchuan Hutong, Xicheng District, Beijing, which opened in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

⁸⁶ (https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/01/year-of-the-couturiere/?_r=2)

Cultural Revolution, they had no problem spending three times their monthly salary on a bag if it showed they were well off.⁸⁷ The same philosophies appear to apply to interior design and decoration and companies like de Gournay are finding a ready market for their products in China, not only in hotels, restaurants and commercial spaces, but also in private houses.

Chinese Wallpapers in Twenty-First Century Domestic Chinese Interiors

Interviews with sales staff at de Gournay in China and London as well as with Hong Kong based interior designer, Lee Hsu, suggested that current Chinese interior design trends favour minimalist, contemporary interiors; an idea that is supported by the content of Chinese interior design publications.⁸⁸ In spite of this, it seems that even highly decorative Chinese wallpapers can be successfully integrated with contemporary interior designs, where they provide elegant and contrasting focal points, as well as clear cultural inflection.

Figure 4-59 shows a design set published in *Elle Decoration China* in November 2017, where an eclectic mix of East Asian furnishings are combined with modern and contemporary western furniture and Chinese export wallpapers to create an interior with a perceptibly East Asian aesthetic. The gold ground wallpaper,

⁸⁷ (https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/01/year-of-the-couturiere/?_r=2)

⁸⁸ Evans-Freke, Dominic. Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 9 October 2012; Cave, Jemma. Creative Director, De Gournay, London. Personal interview. 3 April 2013; Ma, Mary. Manager and Senior Sales Assistant. De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. Personal interview. 2 April 2015; Song, Richard. Manager, De Gournay showroom, Beijing, China. Personal Interview. 6 April 2015.; Lee Hsu. Director, Di'zain, Hong Kong. Telephone interview. 5 May. 2015.

decorated with a dynamic design of tree peonies in full bloom in shades of white and pale pink, looks entirely at home in the design scheme, providing an elegant and luxurious central focus and a specifically East Asian accent for the space.



Figure 4-59 Room set featuring Chinese export style wallpapers by de Gournay. [Source: Elle Decoration, China. November, 2017.]

Chinese export style wallpapers are dominant decorative features in both of de Gournay's Chinese showrooms in Shanghai and Beijing, where it is also possible to buy many other styles of wallpaper. Their central presence in the showrooms (Figure 4-60 and Figure 4-61) indicates that there is a growing market for Chinese export style wallpapers or one that is at least being cultivated.



Figure 4-60 De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015.]



Figure 4-61 De Gournay showroom, Shanghai. [Source: Image taken by Anna Wu, March 2015.]

In 2012, Chinese wallpapers with a design of bamboo, peonies, plum blossom and birds depicted in silver, gold and white on a bright red ground were made by de Gournay for an accent wall in the entrance hall of a luxurious apartment located in the prestigious, 1929, Art Deco, Belmont Apartments in Shanghai's French concession. (Figure 4-62 and Figure 4-63). The Art Deco heritage of the apartment is expressed in period architectural features, including elegant doors carved with geometric designs, though the general styling of the space is contemporary, with white walls and contemporary art works. It is clear that this apartment was conceived of as a contemporary *Chinese* space, similar in character to the room set illustrated above (Figure 4-59), in *Elle Decoration*.



Figure 4-62 Chinese export style wallpapers by de Gournay in an Art Deco apartment at the Belmont Apartments, 254 South Xiangyang Road, Shanghai. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay, London.]



Figure 4-63 Chinese export style wallpapers by de Gournay in an Art Deco apartment at the Belmont Apartments, 254 South Xiangyang Road, Shanghai. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay, London.]

In the living room, traditional Chinese furniture, including a low, hard wood couch and matching couch table, is combined with contemporary western style

furniture, white walls and other contemporary furnishings (Figure 4-64). A strategically placed mirror in the hallway reflects the image of the red bird and flower wallpapers from the opposite wall into the living room, bringing the wallpaper into dialogue with other Chinese design elements in the space. The wallpapers make a significant design statement and are a central focal point in the apartment. There is a clear sense that this a contemporary Chinese space and that the Chinese wallpapers make an essential contribution to this aesthetic. There is nothing about the décor to suggest an attempted emulation or recreation of European chinoiserie styles.



Figure 4-64 Living room in an apartment inside the Belmont Apartments, Shanghai. [Source: Image courtesy of de Gournay, London.]

Conclusion

In present day China, Chinese export style wallpapers are valued as carriers of culturally symbolic decorative motifs. These motifs and their specific compositions are drawn from longstanding traditions of bird and flower painting, but can be traced even further back to the Han dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD). Recognition of this meaningful imagery enables Chinese wallpapers to act as signifiers of Chinese culture and they are consciously employed as such, as evidenced by the interiors at Mott 32 and at the China Club in Beijing and the China Exchange in London, where they are used to define a space of specifically Chinese cultural activity or relevance.

As a cultural hybrid Chinese export wallpapers reflect Chinese traditions of visual culture but are applied to a European wallpaper format. This large scale format has given the symbolic motifs typically found in bird and flower paintings increased visual impact in a way that could not be achieved with traditional Chinese painting formats. The format and scale of Chinese wallpapers allows for greater visual impact and dramatic new colourways heighten these effects further – moving them away from more traditional painting palettes for a more contemporary effects. With the use of contemporary colour palettes, Chinese export wallpapers are able to offer a decorative aesthetic that is both traditional and contemporary and this is central to the appeal of Chinese wallpapers in present day China.

There is little evidence to suggest that Chinese wallpapers are being used in China to emulate historical European interior designs following chinoiserie or more restrained classical European aesthetics. Chinese wallpapers are not generally employed as a reference to historic western interiors or to chinoiserie styles (the library at the China Club Hong Kong seems to be the exception rather than the rule). Interestingly, this essential part of the history of Chinese export wallpapers is almost entirely bypassed in Chinese markets.

The use of Chinese wallpapers is not about mimicry or emulation but rather represents a series of exchanges, which have contributed to the production of multiple layers of value. The production of Chinese wallpaper in China is not, to use Jonathan Hay's terminology, a 'foreign practice', but rather an intercultural practice that reflects contact between cultures and mutual influence.⁸⁹ This examination of Chinese wallpapers reveals a dynamic of influence that is quite different to the hegemonic, imperialist dynamic between Europe and Asia, proposed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, rather it shows a set of images and materials brought together through cultural interaction, to create a material object that is free floating, transcultural or intercultural; open to interpretation and singularization in the contexts in which it finds itself.

Indeed, the examples discussed in this chapter have demonstrated that in addition acting as signifiers of Chinese culture, Chinese export wallpapers also act

⁸⁹ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 6).

as a locus for practices of nostalgia relating to both early twentieth century China but also imperial China, as evidenced by Guo Pei and Yin Chao's fashion shoots. China has an exceptionally rich material past and many Chinese are attempting to re-connect with and re-invent or re-interpret it in modern design after a period of darkness in China's political history when a significant proportion of China's material culture was destroyed and traditional craft skills were lost or severely compromised.

In addition to their specific cultural relevance, the use of Chinese export wallpapers in China is also heavily predicated on their recognition as luxury products; as signifiers of wealth and status but also as a superlative decorative statement. They are valued as hand crafted luxuries; indeed, the method of their production by hand attributes value and prestige as it represents an investment in time, not only to make the object, but to train to make it.⁹⁰ Combined with their large scale and impressive visual impact, they communicate the very idea of the extraordinary, the non-essential, the exclusive, all key characteristics of luxury items.⁹¹

This export commodity has, somewhat paradoxically, become a reductive symbol of Chinese culture and the 'Made in China' narrative, inherent in the design and

⁹⁰ Victoria and Albert Museum, 'What Is Luxury?' (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015) <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/what-is-luxury/>>.

⁹¹ Victoria and Albert Museum, 'What Is Luxury?' (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015) <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/what-is-luxury/>>.

materials of Chinese wallpapers is singularized most evidently in the emerging market for luxury decorative goods in China, where they function as symbols of modern luxury as well as traditional Chinese tastes and ideals. This is predicated on its hybrid character - Chinese consumers are able to de-construct, recognise and extract the culturally relevant parts of this product and put it to use. Chinese wallpapers are a cultural hybrid: a unique collaborative creation between China and Europe and a product of inter-cultural trade. As such, they represent a confluence of cultural traditions, a fact which has contributed to the persistent appeal and adaptability of this dynamic global product.

In Europe, Chinese wallpapers represent the visual language of the past, the exotic and chinoiserie and act as a reductive signifier of those ideas, among other things. In China, Chinese export style wallpaper represents bird and flower painting traditions and the symbolic visual language associated with them. These ideas co-exist in the same object in what Hay describes as 'syncretic co-existence', with elements from different cultural traditions finding form within the same artistic practice or art work'⁹²

This chapter highlights the developmental trajectory of Chinese wallpaper as a cultural hybrid and a global commodity, informed by local visual culture and craft practices and adapted to suit global markets. It has been disseminated through global networks and has now returned to its local source again, invested with new

⁹² Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 7).

meaning, but retaining recognisable designs, materials and techniques of production.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This thesis has constructed a broad cultural, geographical and temporal account of Chinese wallpaper, examining its impact and value in Great Britain, North America and China. In so doing, it challenges a long tradition of Eurocentric approaches to Chinese export wallpaper and export art more generally. By placing Chinese wallpaper in the context of a network of mutual cultural influences it provides a nuanced global perspective on this intercultural hybrid product.

Since their introduction to Europe in the late seventeenth century, the designs, materials and techniques of production which characterise Chinese wallpaper have changed very little; from the images of Chinese industry seen on the eighteenth century Chinese wallpapers at Coutts & Co. in London to the colour popping Chinese export style wallpapers seen in David Tang's China clubs, the designs and general aesthetic of Chinese wallpaper have remained constant and recognisable. Other aspects of their object 'careers' have also remained unfailingly constant. In particular, their close association with the social elite, for whom they functioned as a reductive symbol of luxury, privilege and affluence.

While Chinese wallpapers are characterised by many constants, they have also been subject to a variety of interpretations, as the case studies in this thesis have shown, in terms of the local values and ideas ascribed to them and the variety of cultural narratives to which they have contributed. These layers of value and

association have added to their complexity and interest as expressions of a highly adaptable and cosmopolitan decorative aesthetic.

When Chinese wallpapers were first introduced to Europe they were startling, novel and other. They represented China and its valuable trade commodities and fulfilled a desire for images of China and knowledge about China, but they also represented an unfamiliar and alluring visual and ornamental language, rooted in Chinese artistic traditions. Additionally, as case studies presented in this thesis have shown, Chinese wallpapers also absorbed further value from their own particular object biographies; their local histories and associations with specific people, places and events such that, by the late nineteenth century, the Chinese origins and exotic aesthetic of Chinese wallpaper represented just *some* of the values ascribed to them.

In eighteenth-century North America, Chinese wallpaper represented, not only China and its desirable trade products, but an elite European decorative idiom which expressed the aspirations of the early American social elite to find equal footing with their European counterparts. These ideas were carried into the nineteenth century. The meanings and values attributed to Chinese wallpaper were developed further in the early twentieth century, in the context of the Colonial Revival movement. Within Colonial Revival interiors, such as the Powell House room and The Governor's Palace, described in chapter three, Chinese wallpapers were regarded as historic objects that facilitated nostalgic reflections

on America's own past, in particular the material lives of the first generation of America's political and social elite.

At the same time, Chinese wallpapers were also re-invented as a choice element of fashionable, modern American interiors. Some of these interior designs were based on historic European decorative models and others saw the re-discovery of the exotic potential of Chinese wallpaper in flamboyant, orientalist interiors, including Henry Sleeper's China Trade Room, described in chapter three. Sleeper's designs expressed romantic ideas and a sense of nostalgia for imperial China, with its long and storied past and its alluring and unfamiliar treasures. In this way, Chinese wallpapers simultaneously contributed to the creation of ideal visions of the past, but also indulged and facilitated the creation of modern orientalist fantasies. So, while Chinese wallpapers were not modernist they became part of modern American interiors.

In present day China, Chinese wallpapers have also become part of modern interior design schemes. Yet at the same time, they are also regarded with a sense of nostalgia, driven by a desire to reconnect with a disrupted past and re-establish a sense of cultural connection with China's visual and material history. The examples discussed in chapter four have demonstrated that in addition to acting as signifiers of Chinese culture, through the conscious deployment of culturally symbolic bird and flower motifs, Chinese export wallpapers also act as a locus for nostalgic longings relating to both early twentieth century China and imperial China, evidenced by the interior design of Mott 32 in Hong Kong and the styling of

photographer, Yin Chao's fashion shoots. In direct contrast to the moment of their introduction to Europe, evidence presented in this thesis suggests that, at the moment of their introduction to China in the twenty-first century, Chinese wallpaper represents the familiar, not the cultural 'other', despite their long historical association with European interiors. As such, the use of Chinese wallpapers in China is not about mimicry or emulation of a 'foreign' aesthetic, but rather represents a specific expression of Chinese visual culture and a statement of modern luxury. Indeed, with their large scale bird and flower motifs, and the use of contemporary colour palettes, Chinese export wallpapers are able to offer a decorative aesthetic that is both traditional and contemporary and this is central to the appeal of Chinese wallpapers in present day China.

This investigation of Chinese wallpaper has described an extended global trajectory characterised by a series of cultural and material exchanges, which have contributed to the production of multiple layers of value. In each of the case studies examined, the production and use of Chinese wallpaper has been shown to be, not a 'foreign practice' but rather, an intercultural practice that reflects contact and mutual influence among cultures.¹ As such, the investigation of Chinese wallpapers presented in this thesis reveals a dynamic of influence that is more complex than a bi-directional exchange between Chinese producer and Western consumer, each situated within bounded, monolithic regions. Rather, it

¹ Jonathan Hay, 'Intercultural China', *Special Issue of RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Spring.35 (1999), 5–9 (p. 6).

describes a hybrid form of visual and material culture that is free floating, transcultural or intercultural and open to interpretation and singularization in the contexts in which it finds itself.

Beyond articulating the diverse values attributable to Chinese wallpaper and the wide range of cultural narratives to which it has contributed, a broader pattern of consumption has also emerged from this study, which closely links the use of Chinese wallpaper to changing economic and political power dynamics; its adoption mirroring the rising global influence of Great Britain, the United States of America and the Republic of China, successively. The case studies described in this thesis have shown that Chinese wallpapers have been most evident at moments in which those regions were experiencing a period of economic and political ascendancy; at a time of growing influence for the British Empire in the late eighteenth century, during America's 'Gilded Age', from the last decades of the nineteenth century through to the turn of the century, and in twenty-first century China. It seems that throughout their long career, Chinese wallpapers have persistently followed a flow of global capital and have played a part in satisfying an inward and outward looking search for definitions of personal, cultural and national identity for the people in those respective regions, who have drawn out values from Chinese wallpaper that had specific relevance to their own cultural narratives.

Overall, this study has described and illustrated the multivalent character of Chinese wallpaper and its significance in both local and global contexts, past and

present. Furthermore, it has placed Chinese wallpaper in a global context, in which its cumulative and relational social, cultural and artistic values are made clearer and the process of the construction of those values across time and space is better understood. It has described how and why people have used Chinese wallpaper, how Chinese wallpapers develop meaning through human interaction and how they have been shaped by mutual interactions between local and global market forces thereby articulating, at least part of, their global story.² It has explored their decorative function, but has also acknowledged their broader significance as treasured possessions, personal, social and cultural markers, conduits of knowledge and records of a continuing process of global cultural interaction.³ Furthermore, this investigation has challenged Eurocentric approaches to Chinese export wallpaper, and Chinese export art more generally, by constructing a nuanced account of their global presence and appeal, describing their fluid character and highlighting the multi-directional currents of influence and connection that have come to define this global product.

² Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 7.

³ British cultural historian Peter Burke has argued the value of a material culture approach to studying the significance of objects in his contribution to the Fitzwilliam Museum's Exhibition catalogue, *Treasured Possessions*, arguing that the importance of 'things' is in their function as clues to a whole culture, or rather in the case of Chinese wallpaper the interactions between cultures. He also recognises that '(...) it may be illuminating to consider the variety of meanings attributed to these objects in the course of their long career.' See Peter Burke, 'The Meaning of Things in the Early Modern World', in *Treasured Possessions from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Victoria Avery, Melissa Calaresu, and Mary Laven (Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015), pp. 2–12 (p. 3).

Future research

This study of Chinese wallpaper makes a contribution to new scholarly approaches to Chinese export art and should be understood as part of broader scholarly efforts to address Chinese export as a much larger field of enquiry. Studies of Chinese wallpaper can be richly informative of how 'global' products were developed in the early modern period. In particular, the relationship between Chinese wallpaper and other export products could yield important information regarding the complex processes of global, intercultural product development.

There is a clear, but so far not well understood, relationship between the designs of Chinese wallpaper, Indian chintz and European imitations of chintz designs. Many elite eighteenth-century interiors in Europe paired Chinese wallpapers with chintz hangings. In addition to their use in the same space there is, in some instances, a clear relationship between the two materials in terms of the shared use of specific designs, in particular the 'tree of life' flowering tree design (Figure 5-1).



Figure 5-1 Painted and dyed cotton chintz palampore, Coromandel Coast, Eighteenth century, IS.45-1950. [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

Similar flowering tree designs were also seen on Chinese silk hangings (Figure 5-2) dating to the eighteenth century, demonstrating a dialogue between all three products; chintz, Chinese painted silks and Chinese wallpaper. Historian, Helen Clifford has argued that chintz patterns were sometimes drawn from Chinese wallpaper, citing the Indian chintz valence made for David Garrick's bed, held in the collections of the V&A as evidence.⁴ However, it is not always clear what

⁴ Helen Clifford, 'Chinese Wallpaper: An Elusive Element in the British Country House', *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, 2014, pp. 1–28 (p. 4) <<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/files/2014/07/EIC-Chinese-Wallpaper-PDF-Final-19.08.14.pdf>> [accessed 25 July 2015].

direction design influences were moving as intercultural trade and influences were exerting simultaneous effects during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



Figure 5-2 Painted silk coverlet, Guangzhou, 1760-1800, Museum number T.3-1948. [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

By the second half of the eighteenth century, design elements with a distinctly Chinese aesthetic, particularly flowering tree patterns, were evident on the Indian chintz fabrics sent to Europe. The hanging shown in Figure 5-3 depicts Chinese rocks, pheasants and peony flowers in a design that is clearly related to, if not directly based on, Chinese wallpapers.



Figure 5-3 Painted and dyed cotton chintz palampore, Coromandel Coast, 1775-1800, IS.46-1950. [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

A chintz hanging dating to the middle of the eighteenth century in the collection of the British museum (Figure 5-4) provides further evidence of the influence of Chinese designs on Indian chintz fabrics, with the use of Chinese figural subjects as well as sprays of bamboo, interspersed with birds and flowers, depicted in a way that directly reflects the aesthetic of Chinese wallpapers being produced around the same time. The exact same female figures are also seen on a chintz palampore in the V&A collections (Figure 5-5), dating to the second half of the eighteenth century, suggesting the use of a common template or production in the same workshop.



Figure 5-4 Detail from a painted and glazed cotton chintz palampore, Coromandel Coast, mid-eighteenth century, museum number 1998,0505,0.1. [Source: The British Museum ©The Trustees of the British Museum]

An examination of the networks through which these objects have moved and in particular an examination of how they were mutually influencing one another would provide the basis for a richly informative study about the mechanisms of global product development in the early modern period and could reveal important information regarding the impact of Chinese wallpaper and the influences which affected its development.



Figure 5-5 Painted and dyed cotton chintz palampore, Coromandel Coast, 1750-1780, IS.152-1950. [Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

The interrelationship between Chinese export products is also a valuable subject of further research. There are clear relationships between Chinese wallpaper, Chinese export watercolours and silk textiles (Figure 5-2). It is not known whether or not any of these products were produced in the same workshops, though it seems likely. It is also clear that some of the designs seen on seventeenth and eighteenth century Chinese lacquer screens were also closely related to those seen on wallpapers, silk textiles and later watercolours. Lacquer screens would certainly have been made in different workshops as they required different skills, but the relationship in designs suggests that designs were in wide circulation. Research into the circulation of craft skills, as well as designs, in workshops where

products were made for export would undoubtedly provide a richer context for the understanding of Chinese wallpapers, particularly with regard to how they developed and evolved.

This thesis has revealed the need to study the materials of the China trade both in depth and in relationship to one another. Such studies would ideally take place in the context of a collaborative project involving scholars in China, Europe, America and other parts of the world where the impact of Chinese export art was felt. In particular, Chinese researchers with the requisite language skills and local access to relevant research materials would be well placed to uncover data relating to the export trade in China itself, an area in which there is currently a dearth of information and a significant gap in knowledge.

Beyond this historical research the collection and broader understanding of Chinese export art in China today is also a worthy subject of study, as Chinese museums build on their collections of export art and recognise its historical influence, as a body of material that has represented China and Chinese culture in many cultures across the world. Export art has historically been overlooked by many scholars within the field of Chinese art history, but it is within the context of interdisciplinary studies and collaborative research that the most can be gained from investigations of this body of material which connects so many cultures.

The investigation of Chinese export wallpapers presented in this thesis has highlighted the importance of studying Chinese wallpaper, and export art more

generally, as a means to mapping and understanding the complex, entangled network of relationships and influences - political, economic, intellectual and artistic - that play a part in the process of intercultural trade and exchange. It has also demonstrated *how* this global network of connections creates value and meaning in objects, as well as creating global objects themselves.

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