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The Movement of Chinese Ceramics: Appropriation in Global History

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TRADITIONAL HISTORIES of Chinese ceramics made for export (or exported—the two are often conflated) usually feature several common assumptions that have come to be accepted as “facts”: first, that the appropriation of Chinese ceramics in cultures beyond China was inevitable, particularly once porcelain as a material was encountered; second, that this would, also inevitably, lead to a taste for Chinese designs (as seen through ceramics); and third, that Chinese ceramics actively influence passively recipient foreign consumers, a form of cultural imperialism that is not usually noted as such. A classic example of this type of historiography is that found in the somewhat idealized narrative of blue-and-white porcelain and its worldwide consumption and imitation.¹ In texts written by nonspecialists in Chinese

¹ One of the most widely read texts on this subject is John Carswell's *Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and Its Impact on the Western World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), which in many ways provides new and useful insights into the subject, but by its very title gives the impression that Chinese blue-and-white porcelain “changed the world.” This text, in turn, is frequently cited and has been used as key source material by scholars working in fields other than ceramic history (and to some extent, other than Sinology), so its influence has been significant. For example, it features quite prominently in the research for Robert Finlay's *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), as one would expect, but also in more generalist texts such as *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art*, ed. Gerald W. R. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and William Atwell, “Ming China and the Emerging World Economy,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 376–416.

ceramic archaeology, Chinese blue-and-white is said to have originated in the fourteenth century at Jingdezhen, the so-called “porcelain city” in southeast China where much porcelain was made from the tenth century onward. It further was not entirely a domestic “innovation,” because it required the active decision of “Muslim traders” to import Persian cobalt into China so that it could be used as a ceramic pigment. “Muslim merchants from [the] Islamic heartland shipped cobalt pigment to Jingdezhen, where, during the last generation of the Yuan dynasty, potters began using it to decorate wares for domestic and international markets.”² In this narrative, after Chinese blue-and-white is produced at Jingdezhen, it then travels outward to be avidly consumed by any nation or culture which encounters it. “[Blue-and-white porcelain] went on to triumph far and wide, reshaping [and sometimes destroying] pottery traditions in virtually every society it touched, from the Philippines to Portugal.”³ This “naturally” popular Chinese product can thus supplant local wares in vulnerable countries without strong indigenous pottery traditions, often at the same time spreading Chinese designs with irreversible consequences.⁴

Broadly speaking, the satisfyingly linear history of Chinese export ceramics that sees the material move outward from China to locations that appreciated and imitated its material qualities and design (but not necessarily its national origins) also assumes that this process followed a similar pattern in all locations where Chinese ceramics were appropriated. In Europe and the Middle East, for example, we learn that first there was a new taste for white ceramics inspired by porcelain, then for Chinese-style designs, then a “decadent” overpopularity of Chinese

² Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, p. 140. The sources for this supposition are not given in this text but in an earlier version published in this journal (“The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History,” *Journal of World History* 9, no. 2 [1998]: 141–187); the sources are given as Margaret Medley, *The Chinese Potter: A Practical History of Chinese Ceramics* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), and Duncan Macintosh, “Beloved Blue and White: An Introduction to the Porcelains of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties,” *Orientalism* 4 (1973): 36–38. Medley’s *The Chinese Potter* was the standard text on the wider subject of Chinese ceramics for twenty years but is now somewhat out of date. Macintosh wrote the first grand narrative of blue-and-white, which inspired the thinking of many subsequent scholars but has also been superseded by later research and fieldwork.

³ Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, p. 140.

⁴ One of the primary examples of this which is often cited is the impact of Chinese ceramics in the Middle East. See, for example, Finlay, “Pilgrim Art,” pp. 153–154; Shelagh Vainker, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* (London: British Museum Press, 2005), p. 141; Carswell, *Blue and White*, p. 143; and the art history survey textbook by Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005), p. 349. Part of the problem with this traditional narrative is that consumption is seen as a consequence of dissemination, with perceptions (usually new) assumed to arise from both, when in fact, they are not the same and should be distinguished.

styles, and finally the inevitable abandonment of the category when such styles fell out of favor. This interpretation has its roots in both histories of design and histories of global exchange and consumption. In design history, the linear narrative of Chinese ceramic export was first addressed in the histories of a design movement that is given the same name in studies of both European and Middle Eastern design history: chinoiserie.⁵ In England in particular, chinoiserie came to be associated with the extravagant and somewhat old-fashioned design obsessions of the Prince Regent (the future George IV, 1762–1830), embodied in the Oriental fantasy architecture of Brighton Pavilion.⁶ While there is some truth to aspects of this history, it is clear that such an interpretation is the result of being derived primarily from the visual characteristics of the objects—the individual ceramics surviving today—which is a methodology used traditionally in object studies and related fields such as art history. However, the same objects, and therefore related literature, are also increasingly being used as a model for studies of global connections in history and economics, whether from the perspective of the interactions of exchange networks or consumer cultures in world history.⁷ This began with discussions in economic history of what has been called “the Asian age”⁸ in which China was identified as a key locus for the production of highly desirable goods that could not be

⁵ There are numerous histories of chinoiserie in Europe, the most straightforward being Dawn Jacobsen, *Chinoiserie* (London: Phaidon, 1993). For the design trajectory toward decadence and “decline,” see also Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: John Murray, 1961), and Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977). Studies of chinoiserie in the Middle East are less comprehensive, concerned primarily with ceramics, but include L. Golombek, R. Mason, and G. Bailey, *Tamerlane’s Tableware: A New Approach to the Chinoiserie Ceramics of Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Iran*, *Islamic Art and Architecture* 6 (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1996), and Yolande Crowe, *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1501–1738* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002). A recently published study looks at chinoiserie in ceramics and other materials as practiced in one location in the Middle East: Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁶ A very useful summary of this can be found in Steven Parissien, “European Fantasies of Asia,” in *Encounters: The Meeting of Europe and Asia 1500–1800*, ed. A. Jackson and A. Jaffer (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2004), pp. 358–359.

⁷ Recent examples include Robert Batchelor, “On the Movement of Porcelains: Rethinking the Birth of Consumer Society as Interactions of Exchange Networks, 1600–1750,” in *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges*, ed. J. Brewer and F. Trentmann (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 95–121; Maxine Berg, “Asian Luxuries and the Making of the European Consumer Revolution,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. M. Berg and E. Eger (London: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 228–244.

⁸ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

or were not produced elsewhere, and which could therefore easily be exchanged for other goods or currency, thus contributing to a “world economic system” in which Asia held center stage.⁹ Within this, trade and its consequences were seen as the driving force in a “Sinocentric international order” in the early modern world.¹⁰ As globally traded commodities, Chinese ceramics, particularly porcelains, proved to be useful exemplars for these discussions of the development of the history of international trade, which in turn were used as evidence by historians of world history. In consequence, Chinese porcelains, especially those from the factory town of Jingdezhen, were defined narrowly as commodities, and thus this medium was and is often viewed from a single, globalized “foreign” consumer perspective that assumes a consistent and generally positive response to encounters with these objects or media.¹¹

Considering Chinese ceramics simply as commodities is somewhat one-dimensional as it does not recognize another fundamental aspect of both the circulation and consumption of these goods, which is that they were traded in bulk but consumed by individuals, thus they were experienced as objects or “material culture.” As such, the ceramics would have been a form of cultural as well as economic exchange enabling individuals to experience another culture and to become aware of it, in the process developing notions of self-identity and “otherness” or alterity.¹²

It is possible, therefore, to consider Chinese ceramics and their global movement in a more nuanced, less universalizing manner, in which Chinese ceramics are considered not as just objects made from what was considered a special medium almost everywhere but China, nor as bulk goods in trade statistics, but as both a concept and a product with localized patterns of consumption and appropriation, in addition to those that have been identified globally. Such an approach requires

⁹ Frank, *ReOrient*, p. xv. See also: S. A. M. Adshead, *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400–1800: The Rise of Consumerism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Frank, *ReOrient*, p. 116.

¹¹ Chinese porcelain, and Jingdezhen in particular, continues to be a fashionable material culture model for studies of global connections in the premodern and early modern periods. The most recent example is Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, which expands on his earlier (1998) work of the same title.

¹² The development of identity through awareness of alterity is a critical concept addressed in both cultural anthropology and art history, particularly in postcolonial studies. A good overview of the subject is given in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996).

looking away from surviving, selected objects toward the traces that these objects left behind—literary and pictorial references, changes in local approaches to ceramic production, and importantly the physical spaces for Chinese ceramics in different cultures, for example, their storage and display. There are of course dangers associated with focusing on remaining individual objects, and these include the temptation to treat them as individual works of art, which is a useful exercise for connoisseurship but not for attempts at objective historical reconstruction. Another problem with focusing on individual porcelains is exemplified by the often misguided analysis of shipwreck evidence. The remains of an individual ship (if undisturbed) can only tell us about that one ship and its cargo. Very often this is extrapolated to define an entire trade route or pattern.¹³ Seen through this lens, Chinese porcelain would of course seem to have conquered the world. The use of Chinese porcelain as a model in studies of global connections and global consumption (as well as “world art”) therefore is problematic because it is presented as having had a universal impact (with varying degrees) on all the societies or cultures that consumed it, and those in which this impact could be demonstrated in textual as well as material culture have been given

¹³ For example, the so-called Sinan wreck, which was discovered off the coast of Korea in 1974 and whose contents were dated by wooden tag evidence to ca. 1323. Ministry of Culture and Information, *Relics Salvaged from the Seabed off Sinan* (Seoul: Bureau of Cultural Properties, 1985). In studies of Chinese ceramic history, this wreck is often used as a benchmark for the production of blue-and-white porcelain because none was found in the wreck. For example, Oliver Impey, “Chinese Porcelain Exported to Japan,” *Oriental Art* 45, no. 1 (spring 1999): 15–21. It was of course but a single shipment from China to Japan (which failed before reaching its destination, and which may not have been the final destination, or was possibly a transshipment to other locations) and thus represents a single order or combined orders shipped together for a single market, possibly within Japan. Other areas of Japan or other consumers may well have purchased or ordered blue-and-white porcelain from China—this one shipwreck cannot tell us this, however. Indeed, a number of blue-and-white wares from this same time period have been found in the remains of Kasai Castle. See Nicole Rousmaniere, “Dining on China in Japan: Shifting Taste for Chinese Ceramics in 15th- to 17th-Century Japan” in *Transfer: The Influence of China on World Ceramics*, ed. S. Pierson, *Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia* 24 (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 2009), pp. 47–58; Richard L. Wilson, “Notes on Chinese Ceramics Excavated in Japan,” in Judith G. Smith, ed., *Tradition and Transformation: Studies in Chinese Art in Honor of Chu-tsing Li* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 472–493; Koizumi Hiroshi, “Stand of Blue and White Ware from Kasai Castle Site,” *Trade Ceramic Studies*, no. 4 (1984): 133–137. More recent excavations in China have proved that blue-and-white porcelain was made earlier and elsewhere to Jingdezhen, but this information is still being ignored or misunderstood because the “evidence” of the Sinan wreck supports the popular assumption that blue-and-white porcelain was produced in China primarily for Arab markets in the fourteenth century. See Finlay, “Pilgrim Art,” pp. 154–157; Adshad, *Material Culture*, p. 130; M. Medley, “Islam, Chinese Porcelain and Ardabil,” *Iran* 13 (1975): 31–37; J. Emerson, J. Chen, and M. G. Gates, *Porcelain Stories: From China to Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), p. 89.

undue and sometimes selective attention. In such studies of the impact of Chinese porcelain in England, for example, the negative responses to the material are interpreted as being related to its composition and its luxury status in that culture, but in fact the responses are often more about social and political anxiety than individual objects.¹⁴ A similar selectiveness can be seen in the narratives of Chinese porcelain in the Middle East, which will be discussed in the second part of this article.¹⁵

Thus with reference to the worldwide movement and consumption of Chinese ceramics, the current mode of globalized narrative is predicated on the assumption that there was no alternative but to appropriate Chinese ceramics in the manners suggested above, with little opposition to it as a consumer good or product, a single pattern of consumption, and, most importantly, no interest in the cultural origins of this material, that is, China. The popularity of this standard interpretation can partly be attributed to the desire to create a grand narrative of what was far from a unified market or experience, because this reinforces ideas about global connections. In most regions that encountered and imitated Chinese ceramics, however, there were different consumer groups within nations and cultures, different local responses to the material, and consequently different patterns of consumption and appropriation. Importantly, the process of this consumption was also carried out in different time periods, even in the same location and sometimes with the same objects, a crucial factor that is not generally recognized.

Thus, when this appropriative process is reconsidered from a different, more conceptual and localized perspective, it is noticeable that the history of the movement, consumption, and appropriation of Chinese ceramics is far from linear and not in any way inevitable. To assess the validity of such an approach, this paper will examine the appropriative process in two locations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: England and Iran. In each of these locations Chinese ceramics were appropriated and consumed in different ways: sometimes as a material, at other times as a design source, and still others as an expensive for-

¹⁴ This is exemplified by the "rejection" of Chinese porcelain in the early nineteenth century, when China the nation was no longer seen as powerful and admirable but "stagnant, unchanging and even childlike." James L. Hevia, "Diplomatic Encounters: Europe and East Asia" in Jackson and Jaffer, *Encounters*, p. 95. The fact that the material was from China was therefore important.

¹⁵ Carswell, *Blue and White*, p. 66; Adshead, *Material Culture*, p. 131; Emerson et al., *Porcelain Stories*, p. 95. The discouragement of production of Chinese-inspired ceramics is noted by Lisa Golombek ("Introduction," in Golombek et al., *Tamerlane's Tableware*, pp. 1–6), but this activity is not usually noted in the globalized narratives.

eign object for display, an important form of appropriation that is often misinterpreted.¹⁶ This article will illustrate not only some of the different conceptions of Chinese ceramics outside China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but also the different forms and chronologies of reception of Chinese ceramics within foreign cultures, with a view to presenting a history that moves beyond self-limiting, object-based narratives. To do this, the sources used here will include those commonly addressed in other narratives of the global consumption of Chinese ceramics (references in vernacular literature, painted images, East India Company data, collections of Chinese porcelain outside China, inventories and probate records, evidence of technological experiment and change, etc.) but viewed from a localized, rather than global, perspective. Emphasis will be placed on evidence for the display of Chinese ceramics, as this form of consumption is sometimes noted but not appreciated for what it demonstrates about conceptions of Chinese ceramic identity in various nations and cultures. We will also look at the dates of the ceramics used in such displays and evidence for their first arrival in a given location to illustrate their continuous use over extended time periods. Consumption of Chinese ceramics was often as much about antiques as contemporarily manufactured wares, and this can tell us much about attitudes toward such materials.

CHINESE CERAMICS IN SIXTEENTH- AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

To explore this alternative perspective on exported Chinese ceramics, we will start with an examination of a well-documented location of foreign consumption: England. In this location, Chinese ceramics were first encountered in significant quantities in the mid sixteenth century. There are records of Chinese ceramics in palace collections of the time, as well as surviving examples with dated mounts, such as the “Lennard cup,” which is now in the Percival David Collection (Fig. 1). This “cup” takes the form of a simple deep Chinese porcelain bowl that is decorated with equally simple designs in cobalt blue. In the

¹⁶ There are numerous studies of “porcelain rooms” in Europe and England, and *chinikhaneh* (China houses) in the Middle East are usually noted in studies of Chinese ceramics in that region, but few of these address the primary issue of display or architectural context. As a first attempt, this was briefly considered from the British perspective in Stacey Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560–1960* (Oxford: P. Lang, 2007), pp. 28–29, 35–36.

sixteenth century, it was present in England where it was embellished with and transformed by the addition of silver gilt mounts with the London hallmark for 1569–1570. The mounts themselves consisted of a high base and a domed and chased lid that transformed the bowl/cup into what is known as a *tazza* form. Because of these mounts, it is the earliest known example of Chinese porcelain with a dated mount,

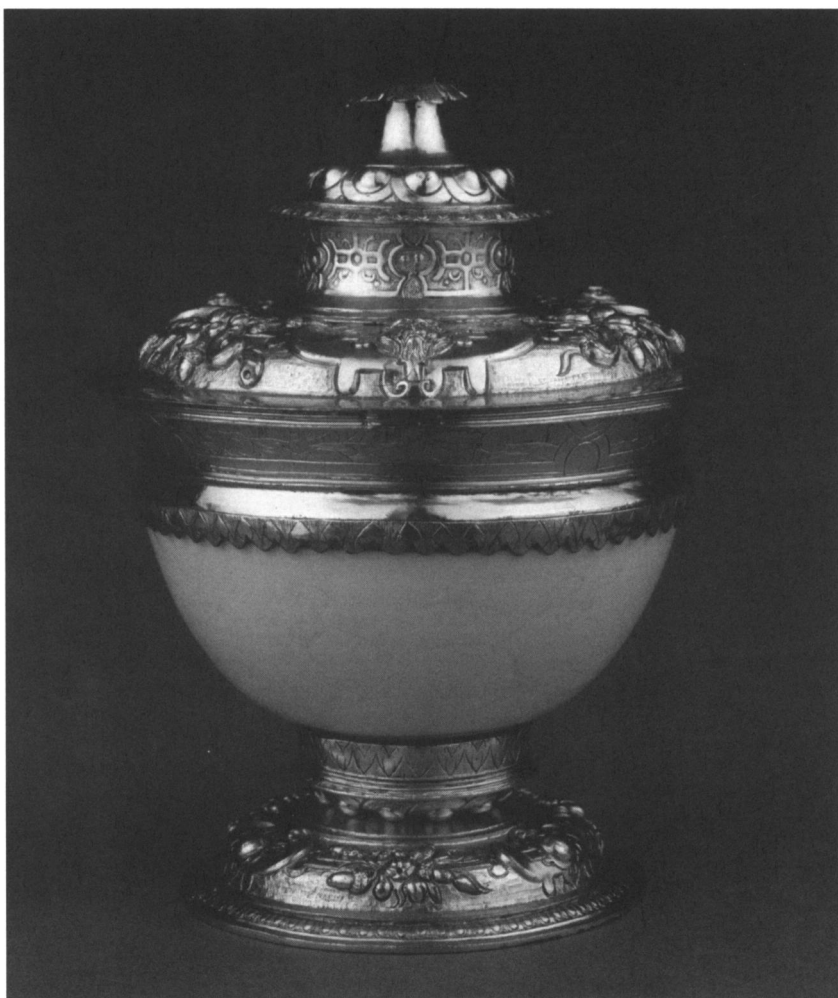


FIGURE 1. Chinese porcelain bowl, sixteenth century, with English silver gilt mounts dated 1569–1570. Percival David Collection, PDF 695. © SOAS.

and it was owned by Samuel Lennard (1553–1618), who was Lord of the Manor at Wickham Court in Kent.¹⁷ The mounts on this vessel were applied to both embellish and to transform it into a shape that was more readily acceptable in sixteenth-century England. This was a common approach to porcelain consumption in this period, when there was still some confusion about the nature of the material itself.¹⁸ The lack of knowledge about porcelain raw materials was due to the fact that the material was new, imported, and not produced in England at that time. Very few people would have even seen porcelain before the second half of the seventeenth century. In the 1560s and 1570s, English encounters with Chinese porcelains were still primarily indirect, because English ships were not systematically sent to China until after 1600.¹⁹ Accounts of early maritime encounters with Chinese porcelain have been published, but these for the most part are based on fictionalized accounts in Elizabethan travel literature.²⁰ In the sixteenth century, therefore, mounted porcelains, like the Lennard Cup, were very expensive and thus associated primarily with royal and aristocratic collections of “exotic” objects.²¹

By the early seventeenth century, however, Chinese ceramics, primarily porcelains but also some stonewares, were becoming reasonably familiar in England. This is evidenced by, among other examples, their mention in the texts of popular entertainments, their sale in shops in London, their dedicated display in elite homes, and their presence in well-known collections, such as those of Walter Cope and John Tradescant.²² In each of these English contexts, the same material was appropriated and represented in notably different ways. In the popular literature, for example, Chinese ceramics were symbols of consumer activity, reflecting the very real context of their availability in shops in London for sale as commodities. In “Britain’s Bourse,” an entertainment written

¹⁷ Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁹ In 1596, a fleet of ships commanded by Benjamin Wood was commissioned to go to China (“Cathay”) via the Strait of Magellan. The voyage was unsuccessful, and the ships were never seen again. Russell Miller, *The East Indiamen* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1980), p. 14.

²⁰ See Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, pp. 22–24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²² Arthur MacGregor, ed., *Tradescant’s Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum, 1683, with a Catalogue of the Surviving Early Collections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Clare Williams, trans., *Thomas Platter’s Travels in England 1599* (London: J. Cape, 1937). For information about porcelain and other goods sold in shops in the seventeenth century, see Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 28.

by Ben Jonson (1572–1637) for the opening of Robert Cecil's New Exchange in 1609, three shopkeeper characters welcome a royal party to the Exchange with offers of an array of goods from China, including "purslane dishes."²³ By 1623, in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, a reference to porcelain dishes ("China-dishes") makes it clear that they are deemed to be of higher value than other types of dishes at this time.²⁴ At the higher end of the scale, Chinese porcelain was acquired and presented as an expensive luxury product that was less often used in the context of eating and drinking, as in the Shakespeare reference, but rather displayed in the homes of the elite and aristocracy, where it was presented from very early in the century in dedicated rooms, such as the 154 items in the Posslyn House at Wardour Castle in Wiltshire.²⁵ These rooms were separate spaces for grouped porcelains displayed in an architectural context and setting, usually on the walls rather than laid out on tables. Beyond such dedicated rooms, Chinese ceramics were also displayed singularly as items of exotica or "curiosities" in collections of such material that began to be formed in the previous century.²⁶ One such collection that is well documented was that of John Tradescant the Younger, which eventually became the founding collection of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University.²⁷ In the mid seventeenth-century catalogue of this collection, there are references

²³ James Knowles, "'To raise a house of better frame': Jonson's Cecilian Entertainments," in *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils*, ed. Pauline Croft, Studies in British Art 8 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 182.

²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, act 2, scene 1 (see Brian Gibbons, ed., *Measure for Measure* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], p. 103). This reference opens the discussion of Chinese porcelain as material evidence for the role of exchange networks and fashion in the "birth of consumer society" in Batchelor, "Movement of Porcelains," p. 95.

²⁵ Listed as such in an inventory of 1605. Susan Bracken, "'Chyna' in England before 1614," *Oriental Art* 47, no. 2 (2001): 10.

²⁶ The literature of so-called "Cabinets of Curiosity" or "Wunderkammer" is extensive as it relates to studies of collecting in several fields, including art history, science, and museum studies. Some of the standard references in these areas include Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lorraine Dalston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Mark A. Meadows, "Merchants and Marvels: Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer," in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela Smith and Paula Findlen (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 182–200; and Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1995). A recent essay on the subject of European *Kunstkammern* was published in Jackson and Jaffer, *Encounters*: Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, "Rarities and Novelties," (pp. 34–41).

²⁷ MacGregor, *Tradescant's Rarities*.

to “Chinaware” and “China dishes.”²⁸ A description of another collection, that of Walter Cope (d. 1614) by the Swiss traveler Thomas Platter, noted: “Mr Cope inhabits a fine house . . . ; he led us into an apartment, stuffed with queer foreign objects in every corner, and amongst other things I saw there, the following seemed of interest. . . . 25. Artful little Chinese box 33. Porcelain from China.”²⁹

Later in this century, we further see the more widespread development of another type of Chinese porcelain consumption—in the form of tableware for drinking and dining purposes.³⁰ The use of Chinese ceramics in this way is noted in a variety of texts, from diaries of elite social activities (John Evelyn) to cookbooks (Hannah Wooley) and country house inventories (Burghley House).³¹ The diary of John Evelyn, written in the 1650s and published in the early eighteenth century, is considered to be a primary literary source for details about (upper class) life in seventeenth-century England. Evelyn was wealthy and influential, a founding member of the Royal Society, expert gardener, and friend of many people of prominence, including Samuel Pepys.³² In his diary, he describes a supper given in London by Lady Garrard at which all the serving dishes were porcelain, described by him as a “curiositie.”³³ Twenty years later, Chinese porcelain was well established as a form of tableware designated for use with certain dishes, such as sweetmeats, according to Hannah Wooley in her cookbook *The Queen-Like Closet*.³⁴ Interestingly, some of these tablewares in use in the seven-

²⁸ John Tradescant, *Musaeum Tradescantianum: Or, a Collection of Rarities Preserved at South Lambeth neer London*, (London, 1656), pp. 52–53. It has been suggested that the placement of porcelain in the category of “Utensils” in this catalogue indicates the beginning of a trend toward the domestication of Chinese porcelain in England. Stacey Sloboda, “Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland’s Museum,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 43, no. 4 (summer 2010): 458.

²⁹ Williams, *Thomas Platter’s Travels*, pp. 171–172.

³⁰ Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, pp. 32–34.

³¹ William Bray, ed., *The Diary of John Evelyn, Esq., F.R.S., from 1641 to 1705–6. With Memoir* (London, 1818); Ivan Day, ed., *Eat, Drink and Be Merry: The British at Table, 1600–2000* (London: P. Wilson, 2000), p. 44 [on Wooley]; *The Burghley Porcelains, an Exhibition from The Burghley House Collection and Based on the 1688 Inventory and 1690 Devonshire Schedule* (New York: Japan Society, 1980).

³² For Evelyn’s biography, see Gillian Darley, *John Evelyn: Living for Ingenuity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).

³³ “Invited by Lady Gerrard I went to London, where we had a greate supper; all the vessels, which were innumerable, were of Porcelan, she having the most ample and richest collection of that curiositie in England.” Bray, *Diary of John Evelyn*, pp. 219–220, 19 March 1652 entry.

³⁴ Hannah Wooley, *The Queen-Like Closet; or, Rich Cabinet: Stored with All Manner of Rich Receipts for Preserving, Candyng and Cookery* (1670; London: Richard Lowndes, 1672); Day, *Eat, Drink and Be Merry*, p. 44.

teenth century were new forms, such as punch bowls, but many others were not, and tablewares could have several functions beyond eating and drinking. The displays of porcelain at this time, for example, would also have utilized some tableware forms, such as bowls and dishes, as well as some figurines, which also became increasingly popular in the seventeenth century. There are references to Chinese (and Japanese) porcelain figurines in the inventories of Burghley House, Lincolnshire, which are dated to 1688 and 1690.³⁵ Thus even in the seventeenth century, similar forms were being used for different functions and conceptualized in different ways in England, demonstrating that in this one location outside China, Chinese ceramics were appropriated in a variety of different ways at different levels of society.

And it is with reference to the use of porcelain for decoration that we can see that once these tablewares and figurines were acquired, they stayed in circulation, moving between different functionalities—from tableware to decoration, for example, a pattern indicative of rather more than a single moment of consumption. In practical terms, porcelains displayed in specially designed interiors were usually dishes or upright, vertical forms that were later called “vases.”³⁶ They were also presented on either an architectural feature, such as a fireplace, or on the walls on shelves.³⁷ Thus they were arranged and presented in specially designed displays that transformed the ceramics into an architectural feature, becoming an integral part of the room. Through this transformation, the ceramics were experienced as part of the room and would come to be seen as an essential feature of certain types of room interiors in the next two centuries. The ceramics thus became English domestic objects, but in such interiors, the ceramics presented needed to be of foreign origin, because these were more difficult or expensive to acquire and visually were different, so that they best represented the wealth and lifestyle of the inhabitant.

Another aspect of the display of porcelain that should be consid-

³⁵ Among the earliest references to the consumption of Chinese porcelain figurines are those in the Burghley inventories. See *The Burghley Porcelains*, p. 95. Burghley House is noted for its ceramics collections, which have been widely published. For an introduction, see John Ayers, Oliver Impey, and J. V. G. Mallet, *Porcelain for Palaces: The Fashion for Japan in Europe, 1650–1750* (London: Oriental Ceramic Society, 1990), and *The Burghley Porcelains*.

³⁶ For a brief history of the word “vase,” see Vinnie Nørskov, *Greek Vases in New Contexts: The Collecting and Trading of Greek Vases—an Aspect of the Modern Reception of Antiquity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), p. 13.

³⁷ Michael Snodin and John Styles, *Design and the Decorative Arts: Britain, 1500–1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2001), p. 61; Bracken, “‘Chyna’ in England,” p. 9.

ered is the selection process that necessarily precedes the display or installation in the interior scheme. As selected groups of objects, these displays also represent collections by the standard definition of such activity.³⁸ Collecting was in fact the first way in which many Chinese ceramics were acquired in England—as individual objects, which in the sixteenth century, as we have seen, were usually then mounted and redesigned, a form of consumption that also resulted in the transformation of the object. In the seventeenth century, individuals (usually women) began to specialize in ceramics as a type of object for collecting, display, and dining and drinking purposes.³⁹ Thus the appropriation of Chinese ceramics was also gendered in England, an observation that has been the subject of several studies, with reference to the eighteenth century and later.⁴⁰ Vincentelli, for example, has argued that women have a special relationship with ceramics, and that certain social meanings are attached to ceramics as a result.⁴¹ This has been demonstrated by Sloboda in her study of the display of the Duchess of Portland's collections, which has resonances for the study presented here. In eighteenth-century England, "collecting china carried a complex set of meanings, signifying both polite taste and sociability and the debasement of that taste through a preoccupation with foreign trade goods."⁴² It was a gendered practice, which, along with botany, the Duchess's other passion, was considered "an appropriate and serious activity for serious and sober ladies."⁴³ In this example Sloboda also notes, interestingly, that the notion of display reflected an emphasis on individual items, which would indicate discernment on the part of the collector,⁴⁴ an approach that in earlier periods might have been seen as "male," as reflected in the porcelains classified as "curiosities" by male collectors such as Cope and Tradescant and by John Evelyn. But another approach to collecting was also current in the seventeenth century, that of acquiring in quantity and displaying collected objects in quantity. In this case, the material, porcelain, was no longer consid-

³⁸ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 3.

³⁹ Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, pp. 37–38.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, "Women, China and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 29, no. 2 (winter 1995–1996): 153–167; Moira Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Day, *Eat, Drink and Be Merry*, p. 114; Sloboda, "Displaying Materials."

⁴¹ Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics*, pp. 254–257.

⁴² Sloboda, "Displaying Materials," p. 457.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

ered exceptional, and objects made from it were not significant individually as is demonstrated by the decline of mounted vessel production at the same time, but the foreign origin of the porcelain was still an important characteristic of the objects—symbols of the ability to acquire luxury goods and thus display wealth and power, a concept that clearly continued in the eighteenth century.

As the example of the Duchess of Portland further confirms, in the traditional narrative of Chinese ceramics in England, Chinese ceramics tend to be discussed primarily with reference to a single consumer group, the aristocracy and the moneyed classes, through their associations with royal life (porcelain rooms) and as evidence for trade, in particular that of the East India Company (EIC) and the VOC (or Dutch East India Company).⁴⁵ This cultural bias in the analysis of porcelain consumption in England owes much to the fact that upper-class life tends to be better recorded and leaves behind more traces. Thanks to the EIC, the trade is also fairly well recorded. The several studies in other fields noted earlier that use Chinese porcelain as material evidence for global connections⁴⁶ or as an originary impetus for luxury consumption⁴⁷ also predicate their arguments on the assumption of a universal conception of Chinese porcelain in England that is dependent on a singular, usually positive reception of the material and its objects (or in Batchelor's argument, an anxious reception). When we look beyond this somewhat linear perspective, however, we can see that in England, Chinese ceramics were in fact a significant feature of different aspects of daily life across social levels and were also consumed and received in different ways at the same time.

One form of reception that is also significant but less influenced by notions of social prominence is that of technology, an interest that develops at the same time as porcelain is being put on walls. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, attempts were made to re-create the material of Chinese porcelain in England, to develop a local recipe, but this occurred long after first encounters, which contrasts with the chronology of imitation in other countries or regions, such as the Middle East, which will be discussed in the next section. The earliest attempts to re-create Chinese porcelain in England using similar

⁴⁵ Ayers et al., *Porcelain for Palaces*; Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia* (London: British Library, 2002); David Sanctuary Howard, *The Choice of the Private Trader: The Private Market in Chinese Export Porcelain as Illustrated from the Hodroff Collection* (London: Zwemmer, 1994).

⁴⁶ Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*; Batchelor, "Movement of Porcelains."

⁴⁷ Berg, "Asian Luxuries"; Peck, *Consuming Splendor*.

materials occurred sometime before 1768, when William Cookworthy (1705–1780) registered a patent for porcelain.⁴⁸ However, in earlier periods, attempts were made to imitate the appearance of Chinese porcelain using nonporcelain materials to create, first, “delftware,” a tin-glazed earthenware that was painted to resemble Chinese porcelain, and, then, what is known as “soft paste” porcelain. Delftware was first made in England after 1567 (named after its precursor in Holland), and Chinese designs appeared on it around 1620. One of the earliest surviving examples in a blue-and-white style known as *kraak* was made by the Pickleherring factory in Southwark in 1626–1630 and can be seen in the Museum of London (acc. no. 24368). A patent for porcelain was first registered in 1672, but porcelain was not manufactured at that time.⁴⁹ “Soft paste” porcelain, which is very white but not classified as “hard paste” like Chinese porcelain, was first manufactured on a large scale by the Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory around 1745.⁵⁰ This of course was nearly two hundred years after Chinese porcelain was first encountered in England. In the Middle East, in contrast, Chinese porcelain was first encountered during the ninth century, according to archaeological evidence, and shortly thereafter copies were made using local raw materials.⁵¹ The chronology in England thus begins when the ceramics were first encountered as “curiosities” and then altered to make them less curious. Next they were used in quantity as tablewares and decorative displays, and then much later they were copied materially in local production centers, about one hundred years after first arriving in England. The imitation of designs from Chinese ceramics on local ceramics began in the first quarter of the seventeenth century and continued into the next century, when chinoiserie became very fashionable in England, so it is clear that as objects, Chinese porcelains were collected long before they were first copied as ceramic materials

⁴⁸ Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, part 12, ed. R. Kerr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 758.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 756.

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive history of porcelain in England, see Hilary Young, *English Porcelain, 1745–95: Its Makers, Design, Marketing and Consumption* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999).

⁵¹ The porcelains acquired were not from Jingdezhen but from northern Chinese kilns such as those at Gongxian in Henan province. This was early Chinese blue-and-white, and the copying of this material at the time of encounter is discussed in Nigel Wood and Mike Tite, “Blue and White—the Early Years: Tang China and Abbasid Iraq Compared” in Pierson, *Transfer*, pp. 21–45. Traditionally, the narrative is then seen as a continuously progressive one from these early imitations onward. See Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, and Carswell, *Blue and White*, for example.

in the 1620s, and the design influence was spread over a long period of time. In this case, it can be argued, therefore, that the consumption and impact of Chinese porcelain in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does not fit the common model assumed in the globalized narrative of Chinese ceramics nor the “typical” chronological development of subsequent appropriation presented in the literature, which generally presents collections as being formed later, following on from daily use, and imitation as something occurring very soon after first encounters.⁵² Within this, it is not usually noted that the ceramics imitated are not necessarily those collected, and vice versa. Collections of Chinese ceramics began with contemporary materials (Ming ceramics of the sixteenth century that were then mounted in England in the same century), table settings were furnished initially with contemporary wares (seventeenth century), then collections were formed of antique wares (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and therefore copies or imitations could be of either. Thus, in England alone, Chinese ceramics had multiple identities as well as uses and consumers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and their impact, however this is measured, was far from immediate or linear in its development.

CHINESE CERAMICS IN SAFAVID IRAN (SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES)

A similar, if not greater, problem exists with the traditional narrative of Chinese ceramics in the Middle East. So many of the histories present the object encounters with the same developmental chronology: beginning with early trade, proceeding almost immediately to local copies, then wholesale adoption of Chinese motifs, and so forth.⁵³ According to archaeological evidence, both within China and outside, Chinese ceramics began to be exported on a significant scale to locations in the Middle East during its Tang dynasty (618–906).⁵⁴ Numerous examples

⁵² Berg (“Asian Luxuries”) notes that “The effect of Asian imports of ceramics was to inspire the rise of Europe’s great porcelain works . . . Tin-glazed approximations were available in various forms from the end of the sixteenth century” (p. 241). This would be very soon after first encounters. In England such tin-glazed wares with Chinese-style designs were made later, from about 1620 onward. Frank Britton, *London Delftware* (London: J. Horne, 1987), p. 109.

⁵³ For example, see Emerson et al., *Porcelain Stories*, p. 95.

⁵⁴ Carswell, *Blue and White*, p. 25; Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, p. 729; J. Rawson, M. Tite, and M. J. Hughes, “The Export of Tang Sancai Wares: Some Recent

of Chinese earthenwares, stonewares, and porcelains from this period have been found at sites in Fustat, Samarra, Siraf, and Hormuz, among others.⁵⁵ Around the same time, we learn, local copies of these various Chinese wares were made, and this continued with the later wares exported to this same region, which began to include fine white porcelains from South China.⁵⁶ This fine white porcelain was encountered and then apparently immediately copied, resulting in a form of what is known as “technology transfer.”⁵⁷ The next phase of interaction with Chinese ceramics is often characterized as the adoption of Chinese designs in painting, textiles, and ceramics.⁵⁸ The implication in these generalized histories is that Chinese ceramics arrived at set times, had an immediate impact, and were consumed as contemporary, singular products in the generalized region of the Middle East. However, the trade itself was not linear or singular (the markets, products, and routes were segmented), so the consumption patterns and appropriation were

Research,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 52 (1987): 39–61; Vainker, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, pp. 81–82.

⁵⁵ Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, p. 733; Wood and Tite, “Blue and White”; Peter Morgan, “New Thoughts on Old Hormuz: Chinese Ceramics in the Hormuz Region in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Iran* 29 (1991): 67–83. Chinese ceramics arrived in Iran by both sea and land, but there is little archaeological evidence to support this, only literary references. With reference to the Safavid royal collection, Pedro Carvalho, “Porcelains for the Shah: Ardabil and the Chinese Ceramics Trade in the Persian Gulf,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 66 (2002): 47–56, suggests that the ceramics would have arrived by a number of different routes, including as booty, by inheritance, as gifts from Chinese embassies, via overland trade, and by sea through Portuguese traders (pp. 49–50). Gauvin A. Bailey (“The Stimulus: Chinese Porcelain Production and Trade with Iran,” in Golombek et al., *Tamerlane’s Tableware*, pp. 7–15) states that in the Timurid period, official embassies between the two countries would have been accompanied by merchants (p. 9). Goods were exchanged within the Middle East through gifts and seizure, which would have included Chinese porcelains (p. 12). T. Misugi, *Chinese Porcelain Collections in the Near East: Ardebil and Topkapi* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1981), and John A. Pope, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1956), also note that both land and sea routes were used for transporting Chinese porcelain, citing literary references such as Zhao Rugua’s *Zhufan zhi* of the mid thirteenth century. See F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, trans., *Chau Ju-kua: On the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, entitled “Chu-Fan-Chi” (rpt.; New York: Paragon, 1966). Chinese ceramics were also apparently given as gifts by Iranian officials to their counterparts in Iraq. “The earliest written record of such imports dates to the 11th century, when a large shipment of Chinese porcelain was sent as a gift from the governor of Khurasan in Iran to Caliph Harun al-Rashid (in Iraq).” W. Ali, *The Arab Contribution to Islamic Art: From the Seventh to the Fifteenth Century* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), p. 65.

⁵⁶ Qingbai ware, which was copied in Iran, for example. Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, p. 44; Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, p. 736.

⁵⁷ Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, pp. 710–711.

⁵⁸ Golombek, “Introduction,” p. 1, and Gauvin A. Bailey, “The Response II: Transformation of Chinese Motifs,” in Golombek et al., *Tamerlane’s Tableware*, pp. 57–108 (pp. 58–59); Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, p. 242.

also varied, both within the wider region of the Middle East and locally, within subregions.⁵⁹ One location in which this is clearly demonstrated (and which interestingly parallels that of England) was sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran.⁶⁰ Iran's history, like that of many Middle Eastern nations, is complex, a circumstance that is underpinned in this case by successive dynastic rule with often radically different religious affiliations. As a nation, Iran's geographical scope encompasses the Iranian plateau, situated between the Zagros Mountains in the west, the Caspian Sea in the north, the Hormuz Strait and the Arabian Sea in the south, and the Indus River to the east. It is further said to encompass culturally what is known as Greater Iran, which would include further regions settled by Iranian tribes, such as Bactria or Central Asia.⁶¹ Politically, Iran's history is typically characterized by pre-Islamic and post-Islamic dynastic periods of monastic rule, with that of the Safavids (1505–1736), in consideration here, being one of the longest. The first Safavid ruler was Ismail I (r. 1501–1524), and the family originated in the Azerbaijanian area of Iran.⁶²

Chinese ceramics first arrived in significant quantities in Iran during the pre-Mongol period, through both maritime and land trade,⁶³ but quantities later increased, particularly after the area was added to the Mongol empire in 1220. Under Mongol rule, both Iran and Iraq were under the domain of the Il-Khanids, descendants of Qubilay Khan's brother. This was thus part of a wider Mongol empire, and contacts between Iran and China were close. For example, "the Ilkhanid rulers had financial interests in Yuan China, and the Yuan rulers had similar connections to parts of the Ilkhanid domain."⁶⁴ Trade in people and goods facilitated many forms of transfer at this time.

⁵⁹ R. J. Barendse, "Trade and the State in the Arabian Seas: A Survey from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 2 (2000): 224. Golombek, however also notes that "A potter residing in the Islamic world might copy a recent import, but he could just as well resort to older models such as might be preserved in a princely collection" ("Introduction," p. 3), which is a key argument in the present paper.

⁶⁰ Persia was the name for Iran until 1935, and it is today the Islamic Republic of Iran. For convenience, Iran will be the designation used throughout this paper.

⁶¹ For a broad overview, see W. B. Fisher, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

⁶² A. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), chap. 1.

⁶³ Carswell, *Blue and White*, p. 29; Morgan, "New Thoughts on Old Hormuz," p. 67.

⁶⁴ Pricilla Soucek, "Ceramic Production as Exemplar of Yuan–Ilkhanid Relations," *Res* 35 (spring 1999): 127. For a history of the Ilkhanid domain, see Judith Kolbas, *The Mongols in Iran: Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu, 1220–1309* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 378–379 on trade routes with China.

In ceramic terms, from this time onward, imported Chinese ceramics were used primarily as tablewares, according to texts and manuscript illustrations.⁶⁵ Chinese-style designs, which typically consisted of bands of turbulent waves, dragon and phoenix motifs, consecutive petal panels, and so forth, were popular in local ceramics in the late fourteenth century,⁶⁶ when Chinese ceramics were copied extensively, thus suggesting that contrary to popular interpretations told from the Chinese perspective, ceramics that looked Chinese were desired, not ceramics in “Islamic” style (see discussion below) made in China.⁶⁷ In the fourteenth century, the materials for making actual copies of Chinese ceramics were not available, so local materials were decorated to make them similar to Chinese examples that had been imported. These were clearly satisfactory for some purposes, but ceramics from China continued to be imported and consumed after this date, thus suggesting that it was both the appearance and the materiality (their material or physical nature) of Chinese ceramics that were valued. There is very little, if any, literature that addresses this latter issue, but the evidence in this case would be a useful model for further explorations of the subject. In studies of ceramic history and consumption, not just in China and the Middle East but also in other traditions worldwide, there is almost no mention of the fact that certain ceramic materials, for example, southern Chinese porcelain, were admired for their physical properties, much as we might admire and appreciate a diamond. We may copy it because of the high cost of the original material, but we still want the original, if we can afford it. People collect both real diamonds and their copies, and in the former case they are collecting the material, not necessarily the object made from it. Thus, Chinese porcelain certainly was the subject of wonder when first encountered,⁶⁸ and

⁶⁵ Golombek, “Introduction,” p. 1. Bing Zhao, in the present volume, cites an Arabic source that suggests that Chinese ceramics were already used as tablewares in the Persian Gulf in the ninth century (from Michèle Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, “Une Denrée recherchée: La céramique Chinoise importée dans le Golfe Arabo-Persique, IX^e–XIV^e siècles,” *Mirabilia Asiatica* 2 (2005): 77, n. 25).

⁶⁶ Lisa Golombek, “The Safavid Ceramic Industry at Kirman,” *Iran* 41 (2003): 253.

⁶⁷ A typical example is: “Yuan blue-and-white from Jingdezhen was therefore characterized by its Islamic taste expressed in rich and dense decoration” (Emerson et al., *Porcelain Stories*, p. 89). The source of this notion may be the paper by Margaret Medley (“Islam, Chinese Porcelain and Ardabil”), which is referenced in most texts on this subject: Carswell, *Blue and White*; Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*; Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*; and so on. Generally speaking, chinoiserie in ceramics and other materials in Iran is discussed by Bailey, “Transformation of Chinese Motifs,” and Soucek, “Ceramic Production,” and extensively in Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*.

⁶⁸ Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, p. 15.

it was copied to some extent, in varying degrees, but the fact of copying does not preclude continued deliberate consumption of both antique and contemporary Chinese ceramics alongside local copies. One does not supplant the other because of their different material natures.

It is in these local copies of Chinese ceramics that one finds the origins of another popular notion relating to the impact of “china” on Middle Eastern ceramics. Most histories of Chinese ceramics in the Middle East discuss the “sudden emergence” of both blue-and-white porcelain in China and a supposed new style of decoration on this blue-and-white that was apparently made to cater to “Muslim taste,” defined as a preference for dense designs (the dreaded *horror vacui*), geometric patterns, and “all-enveloping ornament.”⁶⁹ Beyond the awkwardness of assuming such a thing exists, and the lack of evidence beyond a visual interpretation of decoration, only reluctantly in this narrative is it acknowledged that blue-and-white porcelain was made in China as early as the ninth century, at the end of the Tang period, even though these consistently have been found in export situations.⁷⁰ Even for Sinologists and ceramic historians specializing in China, these Tang blue-and-white ceramics are often considered to have been produced exclusively for foreign markets, not local consumption, with the designs themselves considered evidence for foreign taste being catered to.⁷¹ However, more important for our discussion is the fact that the blue-and-white porcelain usually referred to in the histories of export to the Middle East is not the Tang material from Henan but rather the porcelain made at Jingdezhen, where blue-and-white as a style made its first appearance in the fourteenth century, even though this

⁶⁹ Finlay (*Pilgrim Art*, pp. 170–172) gives a useful description demonstrating the continuing currency of this notion.

⁷⁰ For recent studies of a cargo containing several whole ninth-century Chinese blue-and-white vessels, see Rosemary Scott, “A Remarkable Tang Cargo,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 67 (2004): 13–26, and Regina Krah and John Guy, eds., *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2011). The earliest examples of Tang-period blue-and-white were discovered in the 1970s at the port of Yangzhou. For a full discussion of these wares, including pigment analyses, see Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, pp. 658–674; Nigel Wood, *Chinese Glazes: Their Origins, Chemistry and Recreation* (London: A. and C. Black, 1999), p. 97. Recent finds from the kiln site in Henan province are illustrated in Guo Musen, Liu Lanhua, and Sun Xinmin, eds., *Huangye yao kaogu xin faxian* [New Archaeological Discoveries at Huangye Kiln Site] (Kaifeng: Daxiang chubanshe, 2005). Some specialists in Iranian ceramics do acknowledge the existence of this early type of Chinese blue-and-white, for example, Geza Fehervari, *Ceramics of the Islamic World in the Tareq Rajab Museum* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 40.

⁷¹ Medley, “Islam, Chinese Porcelain and Ardabil”; Vainker, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, p. 139.

Tang blue-and-white was used in the Middle East.⁷² At Jingdezhen, the fourteenth-century porcelains were decorated with numerous bands of Chinese motifs, including clouds, flowers, Buddhist emblems, and petal panels, all of which were copied in local Middle Eastern products, and thus were not a borrowed style from Middle Eastern designs that was applied to Chinese products, as some have suggested.⁷³

A final issue about Chinese blue-and-white and its worldwide trade and consumption that needs to be addressed is the one that is highlighted in the title of a popular source, Carswell's *Blue-and-White: Chinese Porcelain and Its Impact on the Western World*.⁷⁴ In many popular histories, as well as more scholarly ones, the technology of blue-and-white porcelain is presented and interpreted as something new and innovative in the fourteenth century (the date at which its emergence is usually assumed) in China. This also assumes that the technique of producing blue-and-white is also sophisticated and complex.⁷⁵ In fact, the technique is a simple one, involving painting cobalt pigment onto a dried porcelain body, covering it with a colorless glaze, and then firing to a high temperature. The resulting decoration is defined by ceramists as underglaze decoration.⁷⁶ As a technique, it is straightforward and gives a predictable result. Its history in China predates the fourteenth century by about a thousand years, with the earliest known examples using iron for the pigment, rather than cobalt.⁷⁷ The underglaze technique continued to be used at kilns across China but does seem to have been used rather late at Jingdezhen, in the fourteenth century. The use of cobalt as a ceramic pigment also has a long history, predating the fourteenth century. The earliest examples can be seen in northern Chinese ceramics of the Tang dynasty (618–906), as either a polychrome color or a monochrome glaze.⁷⁸ The idea presented in global histories

⁷² J. Hallett, "Iraq and China: Trade and Innovation in the Early Abbasid Period," *Taoci* no. 4 (Revue Annuelle de la Société française d'Étude de la Céramique orientale, Actes du colloque "Chine - Méditerranée: Routes et échanges de la céramique avant le XVI siècle," [Paris, 2005]): 21–39.

⁷³ One notable exception to the promotion of the traditional hypothesis is Soucek, "Ceramic Production."

⁷⁴ Carswell, *Blue and White*.

⁷⁵ For example, Finlay, "Pilgrim Art," pp. 153–155; Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*, p. 158.

⁷⁶ For basic definitions and recipes, see F. Hamer and J. Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques* (London: A. and C. Black, 2004); Wood, *Chinese Glazes*; Stacey Pierson, *Earth, Fire and Water: Chinese Ceramic Technology* (London: Percival David Foundation, 1996).

⁷⁷ These are widely published, and several examples are illustrated in *Greenwares from Zhejiang* (Zhejiang qingci) (Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Museum, 1993).

⁷⁸ These are discussed and illustrated in several English-language publications, including Wood, *Chinese Glazes*, p. 237.

that the Chinese blue-and-white technique was an innovation is simply incorrect. By Chinese standards, what was new in the fourteenth century was the large-scale production of it as a type of ware, one of several made at Jingdezhen at the same time.

The large scale of production of blue-and-white was matched by the production at the same time of what are known as celadons (green-glazed stonewares, mainly from kilns in the southeast of China), which have been shown to have been equally “influential” in Middle Eastern ceramics.⁷⁹ However, most of the discussions of the “influence” of Chinese ceramics on Middle Eastern ceramics (and those of other cultures) are based on porcelains and their trade, rather than stonewares.⁸⁰ It is undeniable, however, that Chinese porcelain was popular in the Middle East for a very long time, even after, as we have seen, it was possible to make reasonable local copies. Thus the original material itself was clearly valued. In addition, it is also clear that from an early date, Chinese ceramics of all types were desired for their foreign appearance, and this foreign design style was copied in other ceramic-producing locations. This can be seen very clearly on the ceramics from Kashan in Iran, where from as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Chinese shapes (in addition to decoration) were being copied quite closely, referencing Song dynasty (906–1279) ceramics,⁸¹ a period of imitation that has not been studied extensively. Thus, unlike in England, where copies were made relatively late, in Iran local ceramic designs inspired by Chinese examples, however they were perceived, were made from a relatively early date, and it helped that a body material that could give a similar appearance had already been developed here in the form of stonepaste or fritware.⁸² This body material has been interpreted as having been developed to imitate the whiteness and translucency of Song porcelains, especially those from Jingdezhen, which are known as *qingbai* wares.⁸³ In fact, during the Il-Khanid or Mongol period, there was what is described as a full-blown chinoiserie design movement in which many Chinese elements were borrowed from a variety of media,

⁷⁹ Morgan, “New Thoughts on Old Hormuz,” pp. 67–68.

⁸⁰ It should be noted, however, that at certain sites in the Gulf and East and North Africa during the early Ming period, celadons were much preferred as very few blue-and-white shards have been found here (see Bing Zhao’s article in the present volume).

⁸¹ Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, p. 44; Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, p. 736.

⁸² A mixture of quartz, powdered glass, and light-firing clays. The powdered glass was an alkaline glass frit. Kerr and Wood, *Science and Civilisation*, p. 735; R. B. Mason and M. S. Tite, “The Beginnings of Islamic Stonepaste Technology,” *Archaeometry* 36, no. 1 (February 1994): 77–91.

⁸³ Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, pp. 44–45.

including paintings.⁸⁴ These were not therefore borrowed from objects in what might be called a Mongol style, but were rather in a style that was still recognizably Chinese, so the borrowing of design elements was about China the place and its traditional culture, not the culture of that time in China.⁸⁵

This perspective is supported by the fact that beyond trade commodities, Chinese ceramics also had a long history in the Middle East as collected objects. Timur (aka Tamerlane) and his successors, who ruled Iran from circa 1370 to 1505, for example, were avid collectors, and this royal connection was reinforced by the acquisition of at least some of these ceramics as diplomatic gifts from Ming emperors.⁸⁶ Once accumulated in quantity, these collected Chinese ceramics could be repurposed for a special form of local consumption that is related to the architectural displays found in England in the seventeenth century. Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), the fifteenth-century Timurid ruler, is perhaps the instigator of what can be seen as a significant form of Chinese ceramic consumption at court, one that involved display in a special architectural setting which is known as a *chinikhaneh*, or “China house.”⁸⁷ In its best-known form from the seventeenth century, this type of display consisted of multiple shelves and niches installed on walls in which were placed ceramics for display, thus making the ceramics part of the architecture of the room, as was also the case in the examples in seventeenth-century England.⁸⁸

The earliest documented architectural space for the display of Chinese ceramics in Iran is that of Ulugh Beg’s observatory at Samarqand, which featured a garden pavilion that was faced with Chinese porcelain tiles.⁸⁹ The word *chinikhaneh* thus can be interpreted as referring to a

⁸⁴ Discussed extensively in Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, with reference to textiles, ceramics, and manuscript paintings.

⁸⁵ The survival of “Han” or what is characterized as indigenous Chinese culture during the Mongol period in China has been discussed extensively. A classic example from the history of art is presented in Sherman Lee and Wai-kam Ho, *Chinese Art under the Mongols: The Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968), and a new treatment, James C. Y. Watt, *The World of Khubilai Khan: Chinese Art in the Yuan Dynasty* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010).

⁸⁶ Bailey, “Chinese Porcelain Production,” p. 11.

⁸⁷ William S. Atwell, “Time, Money and the Weather: Ming China and the ‘Great Depression’ of the Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 1 (February 2002): 88.

⁸⁸ The Iranian porcelain rooms were, however, located in either religious or official institutions, not domestic interiors, as in England.

⁸⁹ There are numerous references in the ceramic and world history literature to this early *chinikhaneh*, but most do not list the source of information, e.g., Pope, *Chinese Porcelains*; Carvalho, “Porcelains for the Shah”; Finlay, *Pilgrim Art*. In the literature of Persian or

building or space faced with ceramic tiles or a space in which ceramics were displayed or even stored, the assumption usually being that niches implied intended viewing.⁹⁰ Ceramic tiles could act as decoration in the same way as installed vessels; both altered the visible surface of the architecture, and both could be foreign or domestically produced. There is pictorial evidence for the display of ceramic vessels rather than tiles in an architectural setting in the late fifteenth century,⁹¹ and in the late sixteenth century the Safavid palace at Isfahan (Ali Qapu) featured a treasury with niches for the secure storage of valuable things, including porcelain.⁹² Such treasuries were a standard feature of Safavid palaces and shrines because fine objects, whether manuscripts, metalwork, or ceramics, were an important part of the public activities of the Safavid court.⁹³ This display practice continued in the seventeenth century at the Safavid court at Ardebil, where the most famous of such China houses was created in 1607–1608 at the Ardebil Shrine. As this is the best known and best documented example of such a display space (and one of the few that survives), this section of the article will concentrate on both its contents and its interpretation, which reveal yet another form of “influence” that has been supposed for Chinese ceramics but in reality is more complex and thus more interesting.

The *chinikhaneh* at the Ardebil Shrine is widely published and is seen as an important example of the collecting and consumption of

Iranian architecture, however, the sources are more detailed, including excavated material. See L. Golombek and D. Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 177; Gulru Necipoglu, “From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles,” in Oleg Grabar, ed., *Muqarnas* 4 (1991): 137. The primary literary source for a description of this building, which does not survive, is the *Baburnama* (Memoirs of Babur, 1453–1530), which describes the *chinikhaneh* as being surfaced with porcelain. See an English translation at www.depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/babur/baburl.html (August 25, 2010). Both Golombek and Necipoglu note that excavations were carried out in this location in 1941 and that blue-and-white porcelain tiles were found here. They have been identified as imported Chinese tiles. Blue-and-white porcelain tiles, which could have been used as floor or wall tiles, were excavated at Jingdezhen and date to the early fifteenth century. These have been published in color in *Xuande Imperial Porcelain Excavated at Jingdezhen* (Taipei: Chang Foundation, 1998).

⁹⁰ K. Rizvi, “Sites of Pilgrimage and Objects of Devotion,” in *Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, ed. Sheila R. Canby (London: British Museum Press, 2009), p. 104.

⁹¹ An illustrated manuscript page dated to 1488 survives that shows courtly activities at Herat. The setting features a tower with a large window-like niche in which shelves have been fitted to contain what appear to be ceramics, including blue-and-white vessels. “A Party at the Court of Sultan Husayn Mirza,” from *Bustan* by Sa’di, Herat. National Egyptian Library, Cairo.

⁹² Rizvi, “Sites of Pilgrimage,” p. 104.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Chinese ceramics in the Middle East. As at Isfahan, the *chinikhaneh* here features niches in the upper walls that held ceramics, and the lower walls would have been faced with ceramic tiles, thus reflecting a long tradition of ceramic-decorated architecture in Iran.⁹⁴ The Chinese ceramics in the Ardebil Shrine were installed during renovations to existing structures, which included the redesign of a room formerly called the Dome of the Princes into what was described in the plans as a *chinikhaneh* to house some of the royal treasures belonging to the Safavid royal family.⁹⁵ The structures at Ardebil were originally built as a tomb for Shaykh Safi (d. 1334), a Sunni saint, and thus the space was transformed from one that commemorated martyrs to one that venerated and presented objects, with the intention of publicly demonstrating the power and prestige of Shah 'Abbas (r. 1587–1629), Shaykh Safi's Shiite descendant.⁹⁶ The renovations were completed in 1608, and the ceramics (mostly foreign) were installed with books in the same space. Both types of object represented "expensive collections associated with royalty"⁹⁷ that were a gift to the shrine complex. As such, these objects were from previously formed collections and were a certain type of gift, that of an endowment, or *waqf*.⁹⁸ They had previously been housed in the imperial treasury at the Isfahan palace, where, as we have seen, the ceramics had also been displayed in similarly designed niches built into an arch.⁹⁹ Like the shrine at Ardebil, the Isfahan palace had been rebuilt in the 1590s (a refurbishment of a preexisting palace),¹⁰⁰ and this included the gatehouse where the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 103. Interestingly, the niches are shaped for vertical forms such as bottles or jars but almost none of these survive. This was noted by Regina Krahli, "Chinese Ceramics in Early Safavid Iran," in *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501–1576*, ed. S. Canby and J. Thompson (New York: Asia Society, 2003), p. 258, but this has not been discussed elsewhere. It is surprising if one considers that most of the surviving ceramics from the Ardebil Shrine are large dishes.

⁹⁵ Rizvi, "Sites of Pilgrimage," p. 102.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

⁹⁷ Kishwar Rizvi, "The Imperial Setting: Shah 'Abbas at the Safavid Shrine of Shaykh Safi in Ardabil," in *Safavid Art and Architecture*, ed. Sheila R. Canby (London: British Museum Press, 2002), p. 14.

⁹⁸ A *waqf* is a form of a charitable donation with a long history in the Islamic world. Shrines all over Iran received valuable gifts that would bestow spiritual benefit on the person buried there, but farms and so forth were also given as *waqf* to help support the institutions. 'Abbas's gift was also to demonstrate the dynastic and purely Iranian nature of his Islamic belief—Sufi rather than Sunni, as with the other more orthodox shrines; the gifts were part of this as representations of earlier historical periods presented in an up-to-date space. Sheila R. Canby, "Introduction," in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*, p. 14.

⁹⁹ Rizvi, "Sites of Pilgrimage," p. 104.

¹⁰⁰ Sheila R. Canby, "Isfahan: The Public and Private Worlds of Shah 'Abbas," in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*, p. 22.

ceramics were housed. The ceramics, which were later moved to the shrine at Ardebil sometime before 1607, were movable treasures associated with the court and probably had been moved from yet other royal locations in earlier periods, as they are for the most part not contemporary with the reign of Shah 'Abbas. Thus it is not possible to determine where they all came from or when they were acquired.¹⁰¹ Most of the ceramics in the Ardebil Shrine that survive today (about 800 out of an original 1,100 or so in the 1607–1608 gift) date from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when there were substantial trade and diplomatic links between the two nations, but a significant number are from the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), when, as we have seen, there were close relations between the Yuan and Ilkhanid courts (both ruled by relations of Qubilay Khan).¹⁰² A few might be dated to the early seventeenth century, but in fact most of these Chinese ceramics were antique in 1607, and thus one has to question their significance as they were not newly acquired or recently encountered things. They are said to have influenced local ceramic traditions, and examples of Chinese-style blue-and-white wares were indeed made in seventeenth-century Iran (Fig. 2),¹⁰³ but these same types of Chinese ceramics (or feasibly even some of the same exact ones) clearly influenced local production during the earlier Timurid period.¹⁰⁴

At Ardebil, the ceramics were further and significantly combined with important books in their primary installation, and the space was in fact designed as a reading room.¹⁰⁵ The ceramics were thus seen to complement the books in some way—at least they were interpreted as belonging together in the same space, a perspective that is at odds with the almost universal tendency to treat this space as a gallery for ceramics. Crucially, this space was both a religious and a court setting, and, as noted earlier, there was a previous tradition of displaying blue-and-white ceramics in Iranian court settings, as is evidenced by images from the Timurid period. It further appears that the installed ceramics

¹⁰¹ A thorough attempt to trace their history and provenance has been made by Carvalho, "Porcelains for the Shah," following on from Pope, *Chinese Porcelains*.

¹⁰² For a complete list of the remaining ceramics see Pope, *Chinese Porcelains*.

¹⁰³ These have been the subject of a book-length study (Crowe, *Persia and China*), and several are published in Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*. Some have white decoration on a blue ground, which is a style known from fourteenth-century China, and others have more conventional blue decoration on a white ground, classic "blue-and-white," often with Chinese design elements such as waves or dragons.

¹⁰⁴ See Golombek et al., *Tamerlane's Tableware*, for a comprehensive discussion and typology of these.

¹⁰⁵ Rizvi, "Sites of Pilgrimage," p. 104.



FIGURE 2. Fritware dish with cobalt blue decoration, Iran, seventeenth century. V&A 1152-1876. Photo © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

were sometimes moved and used, a practice that has not been noted in seventeenth-century England. For example, according to accounts by visiting Europeans, the ceramics at Ardebil were brought out into the courtyard of the shrine during ceremonies.¹⁰⁶ At some of these ceremonies, the shah himself was not present, but these ceramics could mark his presence and display his power.¹⁰⁷ The ceramics were therefore a material substitute for an Iranian ruler, but most were not locally

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; Krah, "Chinese Ceramics in Early Safavid Iran," p. 258; Pope, *Chinese Porcelains*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Rizvi, "Sites of Pilgrimage," pp. 104–105.

produced in Iran; rather, they were Chinese, and not contemporary Chinese for the most part. A foreign object was chosen to ceremonially represent an Iranian ruler, in a culture for which objects that were considered precious and meaningful were an important part of rulership activities.¹⁰⁸ For those ceramics present in the gift from Shah 'Abbas of 1607, it was also clearly important that they had a previous history, were antique rather than new, and were part of Iran's cultural history, in spite of being foreign objects. This too would change, however, as in the time of Shah 'Abbas's successors further ceramics were later added to the shrine, and some of these may have been contemporary. We also should not forget that there are Chinese celadons in this collection as well as a Vietnamese blue-and-white piece, so other ceramics besides Jingdezhen blue-and-white and other Chinese examples were components of the gift and seen as important elements of it.¹⁰⁹

The repurposing of the ceramics in the Ardebil Shrine and their reconception as Iranian material culture parallel aspects of the English consumption of Chinese ceramics, where an exotic foreign material (in quotidian forms) came to be seen as an essential aspect of local interior design. In another parallel, beyond their new location in the Ardebil shrine, some of the Chinese ceramics in Safavid Iran further were given a new, local identity, in a manner that recalls the mounting of Chinese porcelains in England and Europe. The mounting of porcelains, as we have seen with the Lennard cup discussed earlier, transforms what were essentially very ordinary bowls, vases, and dishes from China into visibly expensive, singular objects that reflected European design history. The ceramics originally were mass-produced and were essentially "industrial ceramics," thus in China, with very rare exceptions, they were not conceived of as exceptional things. However, in England and Europe in the sixteenth century, these were exceptional things by virtue of their material and foreign source, and the mounting in gilt metal was an important part of the exceptionalizing process. The mounting also further acted to transform the ceramics from one shape to another, from a simple (but unfamiliar) bowl shape, for example, to a grand cup with a high foot and a domed lid, in European style. This physical transformation thus represented a very localized form of appropriation that gave these objects an entirely new identity in the process.

In Iran, a similar process of transformation can be seen to have been

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Examples of the other wares are published in Pope, *Chinese Porcelains*, and Canby, *Shah 'Abbas*.

effected through the process of inscription—writing on the ceramics. Some of the Chinese ceramics in the royal collection were inscribed with names in the form of what connoisseurs refer to as “marks,” such as that of “Qarachaghay,” who was governor of Ardebil from 1617 to 1619.¹¹⁰ Other pieces have the “mark” of Shah ‘Abbas, which is the *Waqfnameh* or donation inscription, which typically reads: “The slave of the King of Holiness [Imam Ali], ‘Abbas endowed [it] to the threshold of Shah Safi.”¹¹¹ Such inscriptions appear to record either the purpose or originator of the gift, as it has been suggested that Qarachaghay would have presented the pieces with his name to the shrine directly, thus complementing the gift from the shah and therefore being an action of some significance.¹¹² It is further significant that these ceramics were gifted on what appears to be a single occasion (they needed to be seen as such) but they had had different owners and this was recorded on them. Qarachaghay was what is known as a *ghulam*, or a converted Christian slave from the Caucasus,¹¹³ who can be seen enjoying porcelains in a manuscript illustration called *A Gathering of Grandees* of ca. 1620–1625, in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.¹¹⁴ In the case of the Chinese ceramics at Ardebil, the inscriptions that were applied sometime before or during the early seventeenth century provide physical evidence of intention, ownership, and patronage, with the ceramics acquiring in the process another new, very localized identity, one in a specific Safavid context, thus taking them further away from their origins in China.

This form of appropriation, which redefines the local identity of the ceramic and therefore its reception, represents a significant act of transfer that is conceptual rather than physical. The reidentified ceramics in the Ardebil Shrine became an important part of Iranian royal culture, even though their origins were foreign, just as similar Chinese ceram-

¹¹⁰ Or 1614–1616: two different dates have been given for this—see Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas*, pp. 142 and 147.

¹¹¹ Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas*, p. 146; Sussan Babaie et al., *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 123.

¹¹² Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas*, p. 142.

¹¹³ Mainly Armenians. On this group, see Canby, “Isfahan,” pp. 24–27, and Babaie et al., *Slaves of the Shah*.

¹¹⁴ Babaie et al. (*Slaves of the Shah*, p. 124) speculate that Qarachaghay would have inscribed his porcelains soon after acquiring them and would likely have given them to the Shah after learning of the intended official gift to the shrine. This would be part of a common practice intended to secure favors and special privileges. They also suggest that because of his position, Qarachaghay’s life and possessions belonged to the shah in principle, so he may have been ordered to relinquish the ceramics collection as a supplement to the royal endowment.

ics became part of English culture in the same period. The Chinese ceramics in Iran were older than those consumed in England (most of which were contemporary at that time), but they then carried with them another history as locally collected objects, rather than imported things. This part of the biography of these objects was not fixed either, as the ceramic displays at Ardebil were added to by Shah 'Abbas's successor and they became part of the continuous history of a place, one that was not in China.¹¹⁵ As part of this place, the Chinese ceramics represented and defined both the function of the shrine and its visual appearance, as they were presented to be seen, not read like the books they were installed with. Their display was incorporated in the new design of the space and thus is intrinsically linked to it. Today, they are part of the national museum collection of Iran and thus no longer function in the same way. In fact, many of the ceramics have been dispersed, but they are still part of the story of that nation and one of its former cultures.

Thus in Safavid Iran, as in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the moment of transfer was not a singular one, and the same ceramics would inspire design and production in later periods, a form of appropriation that has yet to be studied in detail. Often there is an almost immediate impact of encounters with new foreign goods, and that is usually the assumption, but just as often the appropriation takes place in different stages, even if with the same goods. If this were to be more widely understood and considered, the use of objects as exemplars for patterns of global exchanges and connections might be more meaningful. The two examples presented here demonstrate that objects move across times and spaces and acquire new identities and meanings as they do so. The cultures and environments in which the objects are consumed also evolve, such that objects have their own "social lives," which can illuminate those around them at any given time, and vice versa.¹¹⁶ The lessons learned by art historians from anthropologists who have applied a biographical form of analysis to material culture can, I believe, also be applied to material culture studies in the field of global history. In the present study alone, we have seen how Chinese ceramics were used in different ways as functional foreign objects in different periods within the same cultures, then as objects whose foreign

¹¹⁵ Rizvi, "Imperial Setting," n. 31.

¹¹⁶ This methodology was developed by Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and is now used as a standard approach in object studies.

origins were no longer the primary identifying feature, as well as how these same objects came to represent a concept of self-identity, such that the objects no longer had any relation or relevance to the culture that produced them. Considered in this way, this one particular type of object would force us to see global history itself as following a nonlinear and more localized trajectory, rather than a unified grand narrative. Of course, Chinese porcelain can be made to fit this conception of global exchanges, but it can easily and more accurately demonstrate the existence of parallel local histories within a global framework.