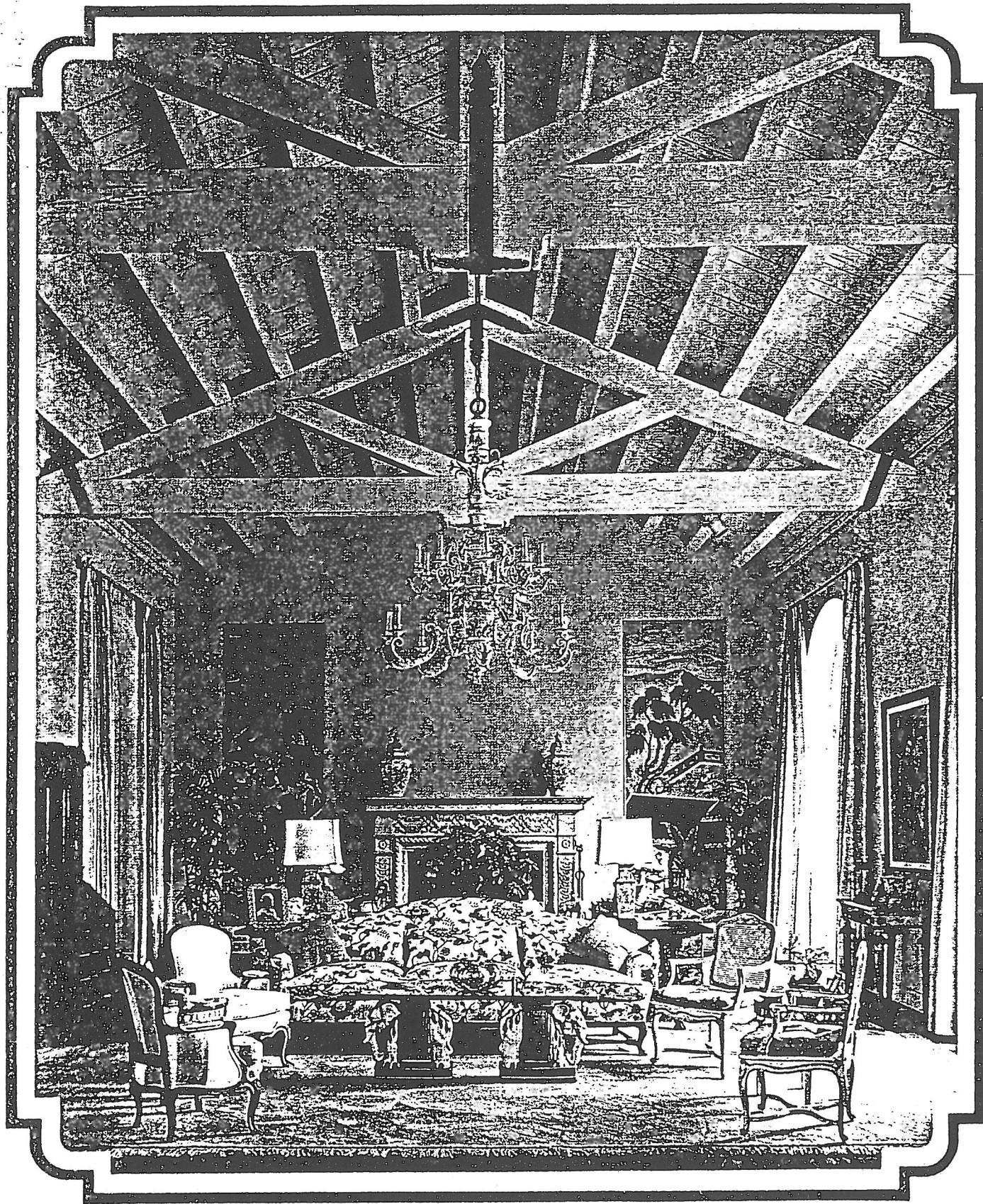


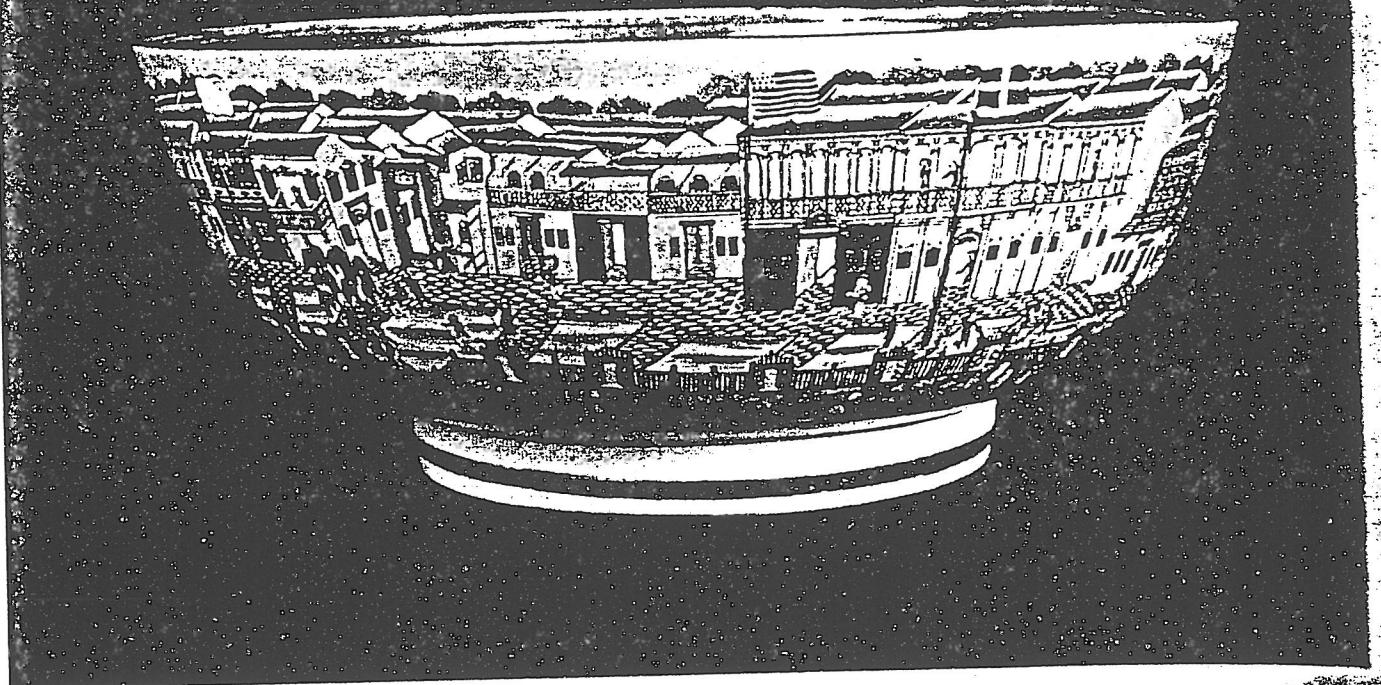
Summer of 1978

\$2.95

Southern Accents

The magazine of fine Southern interiors and gardens





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Chinese Export Porcelain

East/West Accents – Part I

By Callie Huger Efird

Long before America was settled, the Western World was intrigued by the treasures of Cathay. From the days of Marco Polo onward, trade routes were established to the Far East in search of silk, tea, lacquer, ebony, ivory, spices and porcelain. This porcelain, made in China expressly for western markets, is known today as *Chinese Export* or *China Trade* porcelain. Those porcelain products produced for the Chinese domestic market are not classified as such.

China Trade porcelain is a classic example of trade as an exchange of ideas that evolved over several centuries. Historically, the Portuguese were the first to venture beyond the Indian Ocean to the East, establishing an embassy in Peking as early as 1517. By the late 16th century, the Dutch and English both were in eastern waters. By the 17th century, the Dutch were the dominant traders. Chinese ports were, however, closed to westerners by internal rebellion during the third quarter of the cen-

tury, after which the English East India Company established itself as merchant leader. By mid-18th century, at the zenith of the trade, twelve countries were active in the porcelain market – and the Americans were yet to enter due to England's restrictive measures on the colonies. After independence and on into the 19th century, the Americans dominated the market. European business declined because of widespread domestic porcelain manufacture.

It is hard to comprehend that at that time, porcelain was not considered a major trade item; silk and tea far outranked it. Despite this, it is estimated that some 60 million pieces reached European markets in the 18th century.

Chinese Export porcelain's existence today is due first to its immense popularity as part of the European craze for the "exotic oriental," and, second and even more important, to its extreme durability. Its body paste is hard; the formula was derived from a combination of natural elements, kaolin

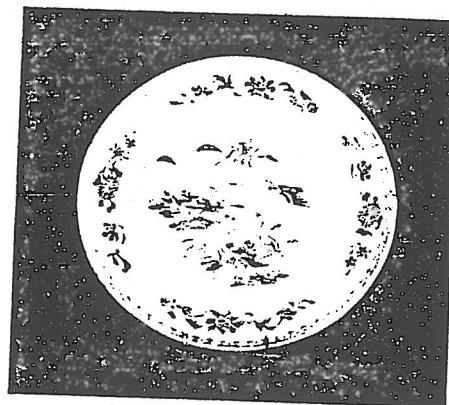
(a clay) and pentuntse (a flux element which, when fired at a very high temperature, fused to form a true, very hard porcelain. Lustrous, vitreous glazes and jewel-like enamels added to its brilliance and its strength allowed very thin, fast potting. The fact that no product of this quality could be produced anywhere in Europe gave great impetus to the trade. Only in 1709 did the German chemist Böttger develop a formula for hard porcelain at Meissen, and many years were necessary for its commercial development.

Although trade centers for western countries were established in several eastern ports (e.g., Dutch at Batavia, Portuguese at Macao), the headquarters for porcelain trade was at Canton on a spit of land in the

Figure 1 – Punch bowl, possibly American made, 1785-1800. A magnificent example of a so-called "hong" bowl; the painting details the waterfront at Canton where the trading establishments of various countries are identified by their flags. *Reeves Collection, Washington and Lee University.*

Figure 2 - Plate, unknown market, 1740-1750. Central design in "encre de chine" (black ink) and shows several geese before distant mountains. Careful, yet free brush strokes accomplish the drawing with a minimum of line leaving generous spaces. Collection of Walter Willis.

Figure 3 - Barber's or shaving bowl, European market, circa 1765. Designs are heavily enameled in *alle Rose* colors. The central pattern shows several oriental containers with flowers. If this had been designed for the Chinese domestic market, probably a single container would have appeared. Collection, Washington and Lee University.



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Yangtze River. The rapidly expanding trade warranted the establishment of "factories" or trade centers, which were under regulation by the Chinese emperor's decree. The "foreign devils" were not allowed beyond the boundaries of this small town. Each country's trading establishment consisted of living areas upstairs and business offices downstairs (Figure 1). Clever Chinese hong merchants were responsible for orders and delivery of the wares. The wares were actually made at hundred miles inland at Ching-te, the finished pieces being transported by train and water to Canton for delivery to westerners. The hong merchants piled ready-for-export patterns such as scenes, landscapes and stylized designs; but

special-order, personalized patterns took many months for delivery. Only the durability of the porcelain allowed its arrival in Europe after so much varied and difficult travel.

As the importance of Canton increased, it was quickly recognized as an international marketplace. Here the exchange and mixture of ideas from both East and West took place. So intent were both sides on buying and selling, that one of the greatest cultural exchanges of all time evolved. It was first a result of the Chinese porcelain merchant's determination to cater to the tastes of the western customer. The Chinese were excellent businessmen, ready to redesign their products according to western preferences. Whatever porcelain

designs these seafarers wanted, the clever Orientals endeavored to produce. They became master copyists, imitating European forms and decoration.

Yet, throughout the trade eras, the thread of exotic oriental designs persisted as a tantalizing reminder to the West that ancient Chinese art offered ever fresh, unexplored sources of design.

Interestingly, the Chinese did not accept western designs for their own porcelain; what the kilns produced for their domestic markets remained thoroughly Chinese in concept. They were simply smart enough to adapt their designs to the western taste. In general, the oriental artist valued space – an abundant, clear background balanced a sparsely drawn design. Style was produced by simplicity (Figure 2). For the westerners, the Chinese artist produced fuller, more crowded patterns filling nearly all space. These still contain basic oriental patterns and design elements, but are arranged in western fashion (Figure 3).

In order to simplify the vast assortment of designs, it's easiest to divide them into two groups: first, those designs derived from Chinese decorative elements; and second, those designs derived from western sources, such as Chinese copies of illustrations, insignias, special order personalized items and patriotic themes. This discussion covers those designs in the first group, with the second to follow in a later issue.

Chinese designs underwent changes practically from the beginning of the trade. Both Chinese and Dutch elements are found on the bulb pot, a purely Dutch form

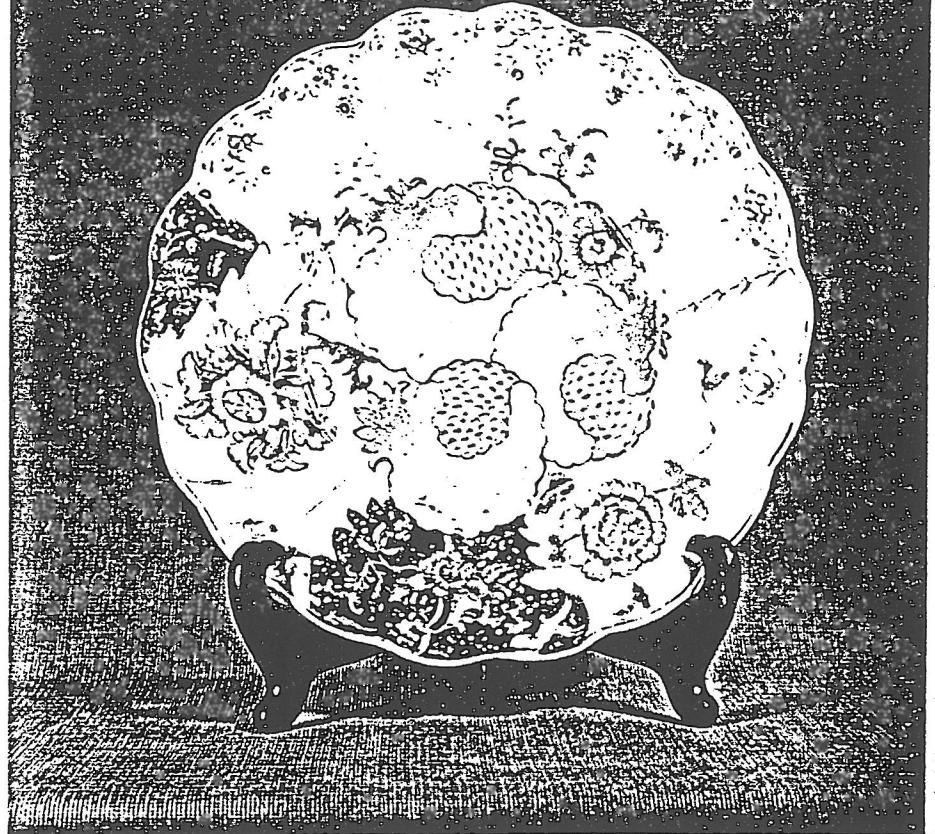


Figure 4 - Crocus or bulb pot. Dutch market, possibly late 17th century. This underglaze blue design features a Chinese dragon and flowers together with a Dutch scroll design on the base. Here a western shape is surmounted by a lotus blossom.

Figure 6 – Large scalloped plate, European market, circa 1760. The *Tobacco Leaf* design appears in pinks, turquoise and green with underglaze blue and features pomegranate-like central pattern. Several other *Tobacco Leaf* variations appear in predominantly orange with browns and greens, and a variety of roses and blues. Interesting copies of the patterns are being made today. *Anonymous Collection.*

Figure 7 – Punch pot and tea pot, European market, 1770-1785. Both pots feature scenes of mandarin figures in everyday life. Backgrounds are brocaded, scaled, crosshatched in small patterns of intricacy. These chinoiserie patterns can be found on almost any form produced by the Chinese potter. Because they were very decorative and depicted lifelike scenes, they were immensely popular in Europe. *Anonymous Collection.*

Figure 8 – Plate, European market, 1785-1800. This pattern is called *Palace Ware* probably because of its rich gilding. Decoration covers the entire plate; both outer and inner borders are of tight patterns in brown and gold, and their cartouches contain European scenes and Chinese flowers; an indoor Chinese genre scene covers the center. *Ex Collection of T. Gordon Little, Atlanta.*



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(Figure 4). It is known that the Dutch provided wooden models and drawings of designs early in the trade; silver and other metal shapes were often translated into porcelain.

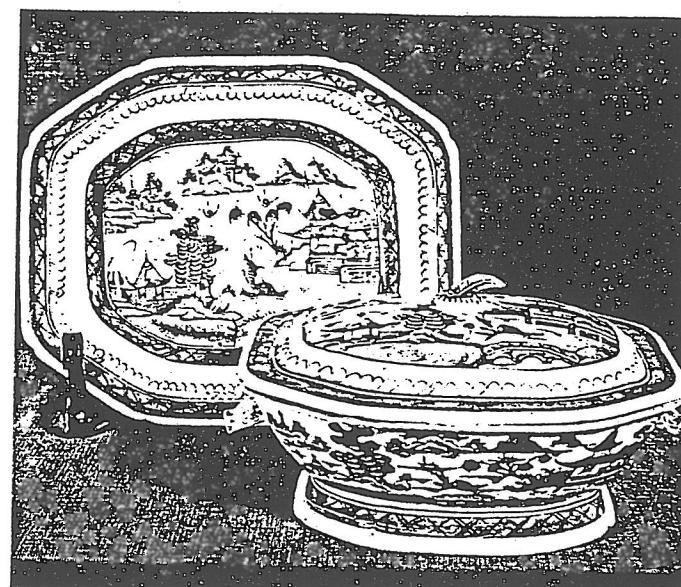
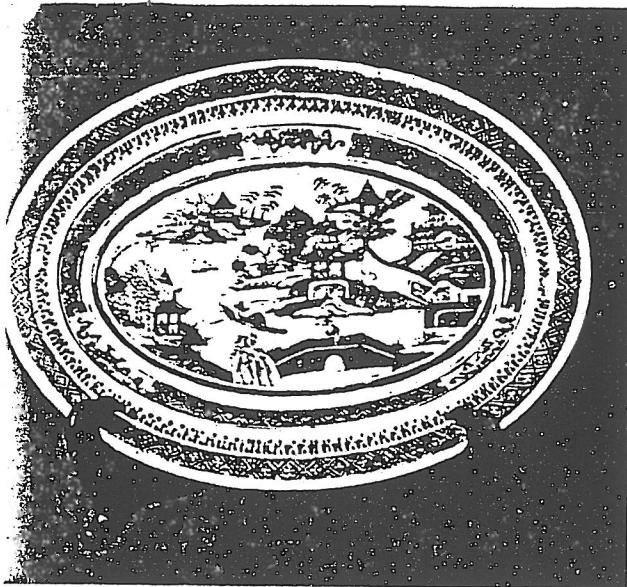
Other designs featuring flora and fauna include the highly popular and collectible *Tobacco Leaf* patterns, of which there are more than a dozen variations in color combinations. Many of these include exotic birds or squirrels amongst twisted and contorted leaves that resemble dried tobacco. In our illustration (Figure 6), the major floral pattern could stand alone; but the

Chinese painter, always anxious to please, has scattered blossoms very reminiscent of English field flowers along one edge! Again the East and West appear harmoniously together on this magnificent charger.

By mid-18th century a definite palette of colors had emerged. *Famille Rose*, or rose family, features a collection of lavender pinks varying in tone from deep rose to light purple, the intensity of which changed according to the length of time in the kiln. Considered very desirable, these pinks were another example of East-West exchange. The rose-colored enamels were produced

from an oxide of gold process that was first discovered in Europe and brought to China early in the century.

Chinese figures in scenes or chinoiserie designs were popular subjects for the porcelain painters. Views of family life in or around a house, tea drinking, children's games, acrobats, work animals – all were part of the Oriental's daily life, and all were most appealing to the Europeans. These scenes were presented in a wide variety of ways – configurations on a plain white background, before a fully detailed background, inside a cartouche, or in a panel



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nded by a very elaborate, diapered reticulated background (Figure 7). Of fancy borders accompanied these designs. A particular taste for this chinoiserie developed in the 1770's. Perhaps the most elaborate of these patterns is known as *Palace Ware* (Figure 8). This is a definite misnomer, as no Chinese ever would have approved of this bold, fancy pattern with its completely spaces. Today, however, this beautifully executed, finely detailed, often heavily decorated ware is very collectible.

Another intriguing example is found in the studio-chinoiserie designs of Cornelius Pronck, a Dutch artist, who was commissioned in 1734 by the Dutch East India Company to design whole porcelain services in an oriental manner. Pronck's designs were taken to China for translation into paste. Pieces of the several Pronck

services are rare and extremely costly today (Figure 9).

The third category of Chinese designs is the *River Scene*. Probably the most popular of all subjects, it generally consists of a landscape including water, mountains, a pagoda-roofed structure, trees, bridges and boats. Beautifully detailed polychrome examples are found; but more often it is the simple monochromatic underglaze blue which is quite prevalent in export wares. Even today, blue is still thought of as the Chinese porcelain design color. The variety of underglaze blue patterns is endless, as the Chinese painter would mix and match designs, combining borders and central patterns with abandon.

In the monochromatic blue wares, the most popular design is the River Scene. When this is used as the central motif surrounded by a "post and spear" border

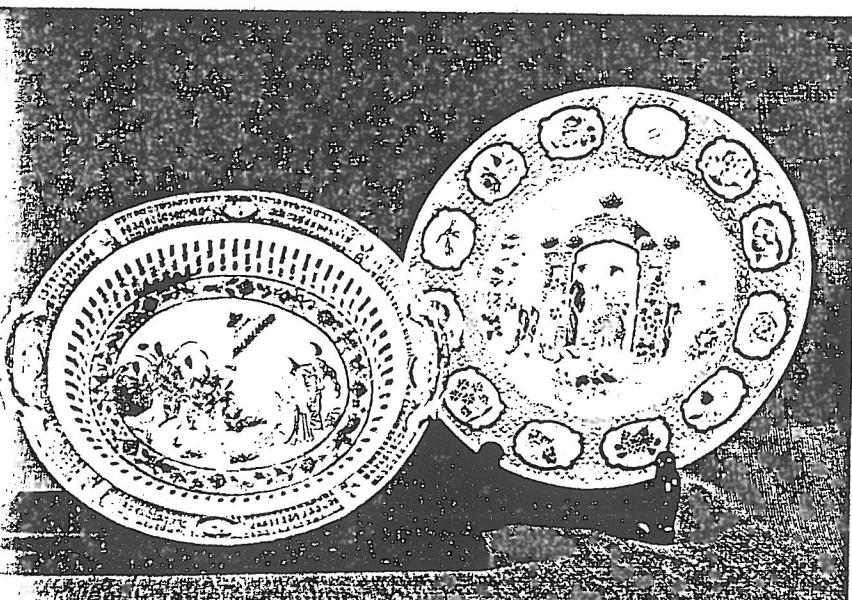
(Figure 10), it is known as *Nanking* — probably after the port city on a northern porcelain route. Generally, Nanking is well potted and crisply executed. River Scenes are found with the Fitzhugh butterfly border (to be discussed later), as well.

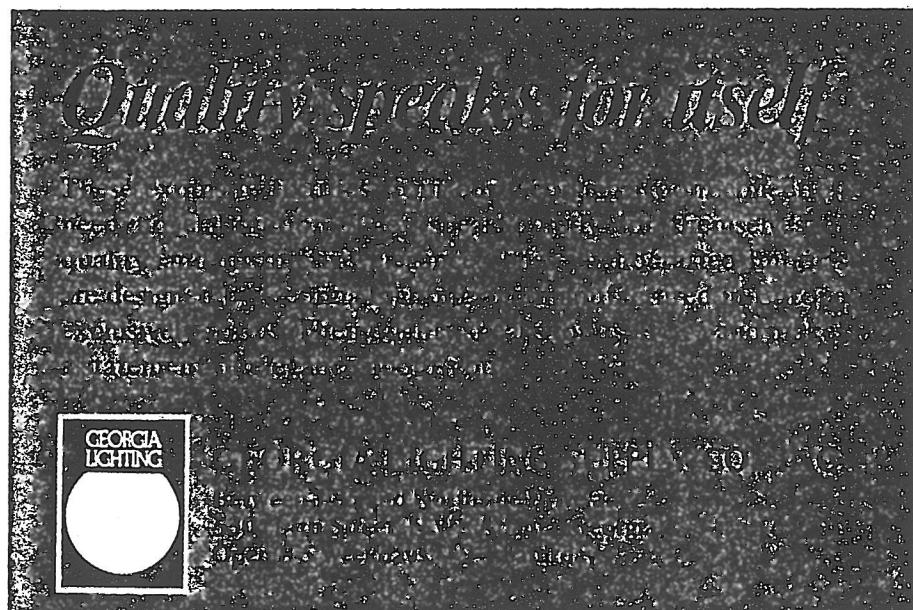
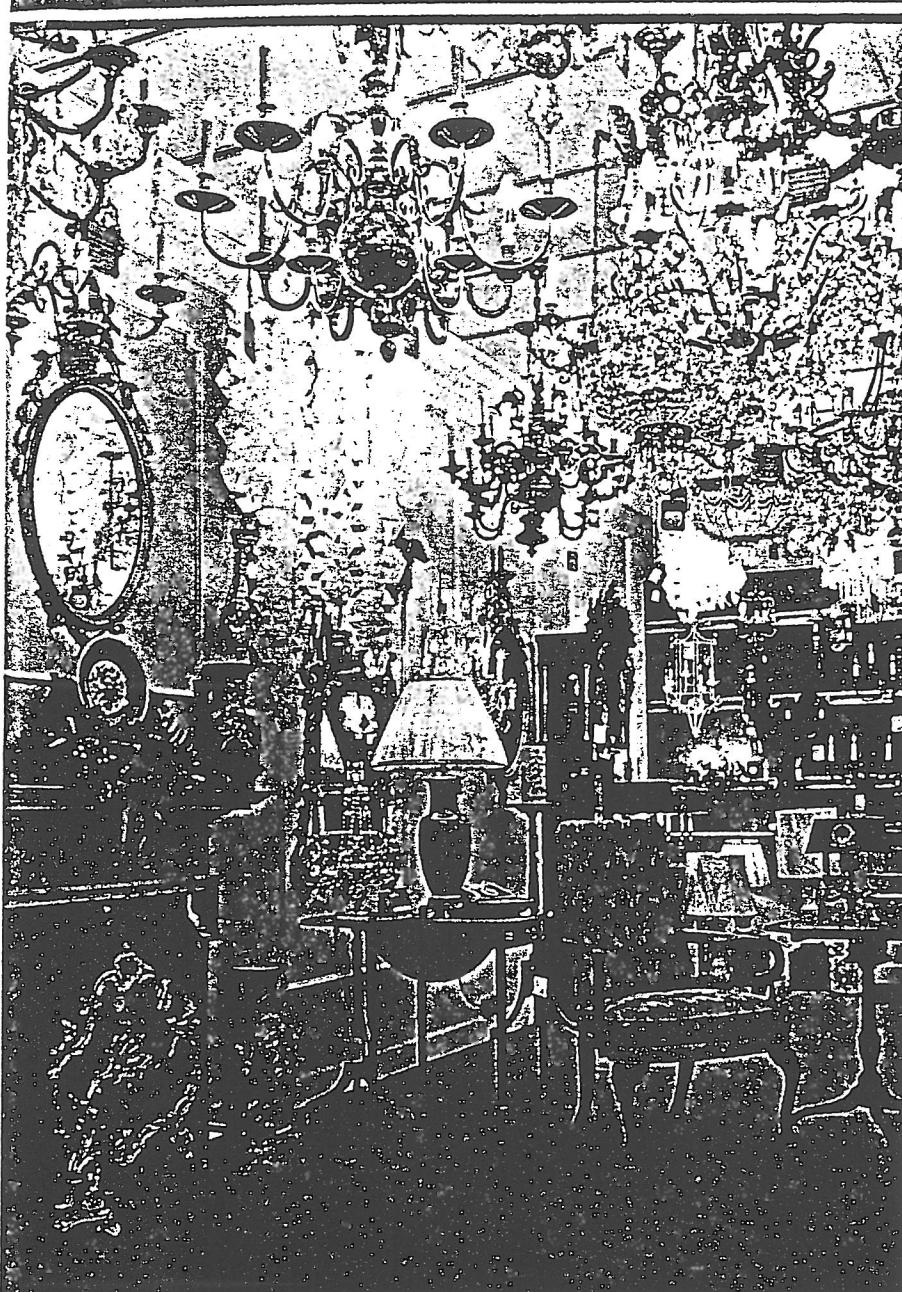
As the trade came to demand more and cheaper wares, a similar underglaze blue river scene with a distinctive scalloped inner border appeared (Figure 11). This design, most often used on a heavier, coarser ware, is known as *Canton*. It is basically a 19th century item produced in huge quantities to be sold inexpensively for everyday use. Its endless variety of shapes and hues of blue have made it very attractive to today's collectors. Scarcely a form imaginable was omitted from the Canton repertoire. It is

Figure 9 - Two Pronck pieces, Dutch market, 1735-1750. The reticulated chestnut basket is in the *Dame au Parasol* pattern with an iron red and gold honeycomb border design. The plate design is known as *In the Arbor* and shows a figure seated beneath a shaped hedge; green is dominant in the border as well as the central shrubs. Ex Collection of T. Gordon Little, Atlanta.

Figure 10 - *Nanking* platter, unknown market, 1800-1830. Oval platter with underglaze blue river scene surrounded by post-and-spear border. Anonymous Collection.

Figure 11 - *Canton* tureen and stand, unknown market, 1800-1820. Well potted and well painted in clearly defined underglaze blue in somewhat lighter shades. The scalloped inner border is easy to identify. Anonymous Collection.



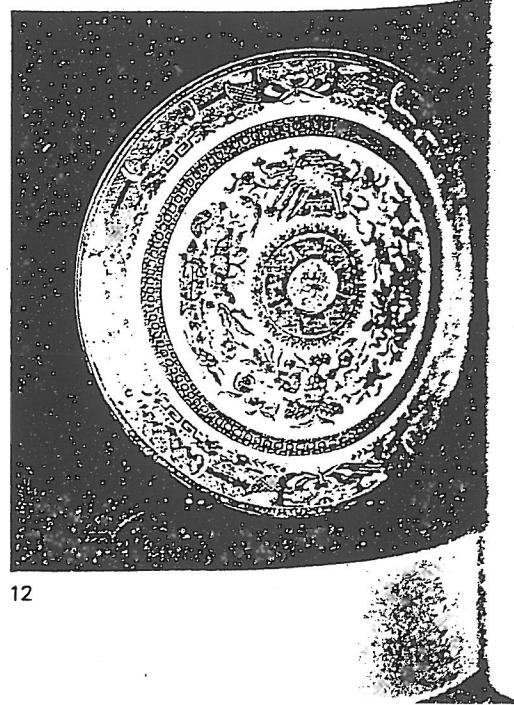


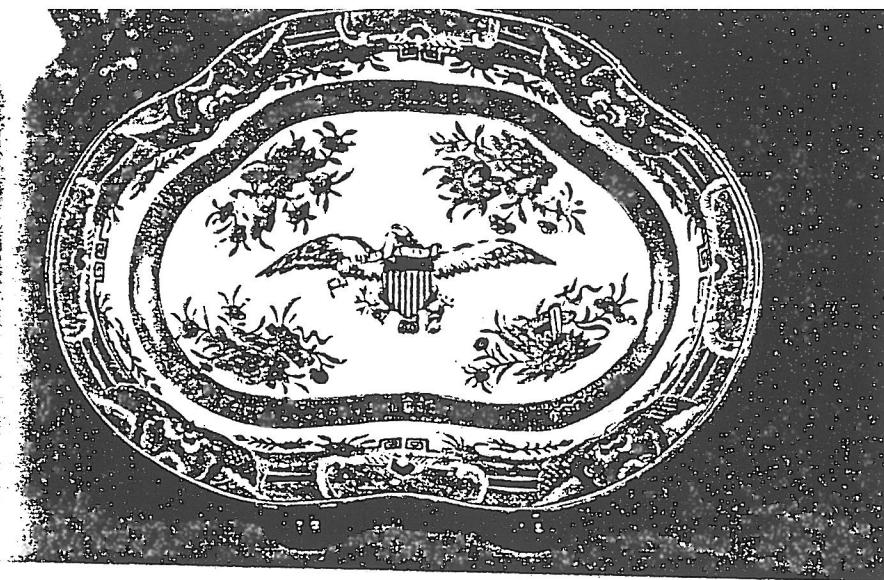
judged on its clarity of line and wash and on the quality of potting. The Canton porcelains that our grandmothers used for everyday dishes are now our prized possessions. The purchaser must remember that this rough ware was produced well into the 20th century and even now is being copied, so beware of the too-recent product.

Probably the pattern best exemplifying the East-West exchange is a stylized composite of Chinese elements arranged on a piece in very western fashion. Today it is known as *Fitzhugh*. There are many old wives' tales surrounding its title, but the most likely is that it was selected by a man named Fitzhugh who was active in the China trade in the late 18th century.

The pattern itself consists of a central medallion with a post and spear border surrounded by four panels of stylized flowers and trophies representing the Chinese arts (Figure 12). The pattern is called "Fitzhugh" as long as there are the panels and medallion, regardless of which border accompanies them. The question of the border design has long been a subject for debate. Sometimes the Nanking post and spear is used; even more frequently, a heavily decorated and diapered, closely brocaded border featuring a spread-wing butterfly appears. This is known as the *Fitzhugh butterfly border*. It sometimes appears with other central patterns, as with the river scenes mentioned previously.

Figure 12 – *Fitzhugh* saucer, American made, 1785. This piece represents the total *Fitzhugh* pattern with the fully developed butterfly border. *Reeves Collection, Washington and Lee University.*





Fitzhugh appears in many colors. Blue is most common, but orange, green and brown often were used; puce, yellow and black are rare. Sometimes initials, crests, arms of arms or eagles are substituted for the central medallion (Figure 13).

In the early 19th century, there was aitable flood of heavily decorated patterns, most of which were obviously stern in concept, but Chinese in detail. The orange Mandarin plate (Figure 14) has placement similar to the Fitzhugh central medallion and panels. Compare also Rose Medallion pattern (Figure 15). It probably the most familiar of all 19th

e 13 - Fitzhugh-shaped serving dish, American et, circa 1800. Orange Fitzhugh pattern with n American eagle substituted for the central llion; polychrome shield of stars and stripes; carries motto, "E Pluribus Unum." This ed border illustrates the finest quality porcelain ng. Collectors value American insignias on ugh very highly. Reeves Collection, ington and Lee University.

14 - Large service plate, Orange Mandarin, h American market, circa 1815. Mandarin alternate with foliate panels and trophies in around center medallion on white ground. A with the motto, "Deeds Not Words," sur medallion containing a griffin. The wide border on the concave rim (a 19th century shows an Empire pattern of stylized rams' and a scallop device alternating with gold ions. Rich decoration with stylized restraint is of the period. Reeves Collection, Washington e University.

15 - Rose Medallion platter, probably in market, circa 1810. One of the most popular styles, this pattern is still made today. The 19th century pieces are softer in coloring and in execution. Reeves Collection, Washington e University.

century designs and, like Canton, has been made continuously up to the present. Again the basic Fitzhugh arrangement is repeated, only here there are complete panels arranged as spokes radiating from the central medallion. The panels, alternating figure scenes and floral paintings, are superimposed on a gold background that is covered with vine-like tendrils and pink peonies. The earlier 19th century pieces are well executed in soft, luminous colors; the later ones are overdone, both in brash colors and too generous amounts of enamels.

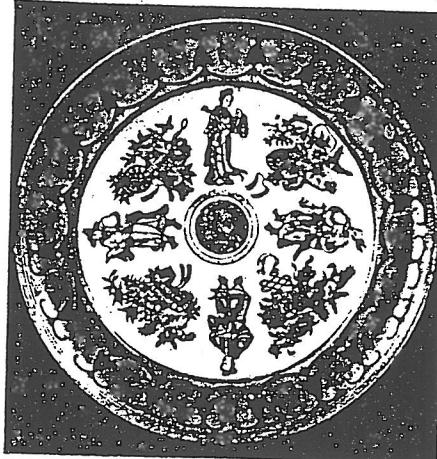
Rose Canton, another 19th century pattern, uses the floral designs of Rose Medallion without the panels, figures or medallion. *Sacred Bird and Lotus* scatters single birds and flowers reminiscent of those found in groups in earlier designs across the whole piece. Most often these are in monochromatic orange or green. A polychrome facsimile of this spread on a pale green or white ground is known to collectors as Celadon.

The market for more abundant, cheaper wares led to a poorer quality product; more heavily potted and less distinctively painted pieces began to appear frequently in the 19th century.

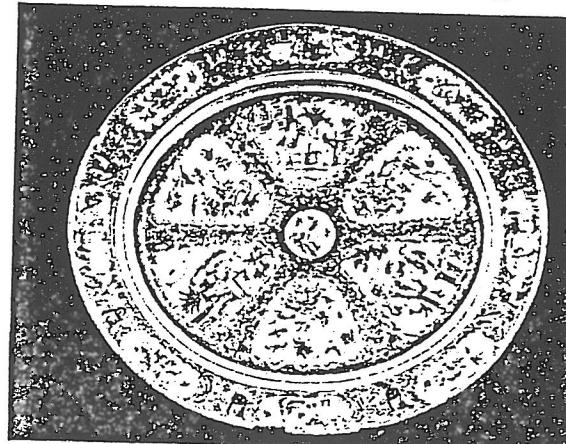
Thus the lure of the Orient influenced the porcelain tastes of the Western World, the exotic East supplying design elements for the wares so widely acclaimed by a most receptive West. In a subsequent issue, specially ordered western designs, meticulously copied by Chinese porcelain painters, will be examined. ◇

Several color illustrations through the courtesy of Washington and Lee University.

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