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Chinese Export Porcelain: Similarities and Differences Between Independent Nations, Australia and the United States of America

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Introduction

Trade and its ensuing exchange of both ideas and material goods has impacted cultures and nations throughout the world. From the exchanges of beads and pottery between nomadic societies and the Kula Ring, to the famous Silk Road and the trade routes set firmly into place by European colonial powers; this early trade has influenced national and local economies, international relationships between governments, and has spread knowledge, ideas, and tastes. Perhaps one of the most known trade goods, resulting from the demand for it in the European markets, is Chinese export porcelain; more commonly known as China. European countries such as France, Portugal, and Britain, recognized the quality and beauty present in traditional Chinese porcelain and by introducing it to their own economies they made it an item of value and a marker of status. This consumption of Chinese goods, moreover, the demand for this commodity seeped into the societal norms of their subsequent colonies as well. This was not, however, a one-sided influence. As the term trade suggests, even the simple act of purchasing this porcelain was an exchange of commodities as well as ideas. European elites were influenced by the delicate art form produced by the Chinese merchants, but they in turn changed its production by commissioning specific pieces (that had never before had a place in the Chinese household, and therefore had not been produced as porcelain) or specific designs that spoke of national and familial identity, rather than the traditional Chinese nature scenes. In addition, as the European colonies came into their own, they too had influence over the market of Chinese export porcelain. This included their own household needs, identity markers, and relationships with Chinese traders, merchants, and sailors. Two of the largest of countries to rise from colonial powers (specifically the British) are Australia and the United States of America. As they began to come together as their own distinguished community, they needed to simultaneously establish themselves in the world economy and create their own identity. This dual need is reflected in the types Chinese porcelain imported into their economies and the role it played in their individual societies.

Commercial trade between the Chinese and the West was first made possible “by the Portuguese opening of the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, and the first porcelains decorated specifically for the Western market resulted from Portugal’s direct contact with Beijing between 1517 and 1521” (Corbeiller and Frelinghuysen 2003:7). Once the Europeans and even the traders of the Islamic expansion encountered the fine style of Chinese pottery that traveled “outward to be avidly consumed by any nation or culture which encounters it … [becoming a product which can] supplant local wares in vulnerable countries without strong
indigenous pottery traditions, often at the same time spreading Chinese designs with irreversible consequences” (Pierson, 2012:10). And in the beginning of this trade relationship the imported goods were chiefly traditional styled bowls, cups, and dishes. But by the seventeenth century, “records indicate a growing desire for specifically Western forms” or ceramic wares. And the range of sought after forms began to include items such as “standing salts, jugs, tankards, mustard pots, and plates” (Corbeiller and Frelinghuysen 2003:8). As mentioned above, Europeans were able to not only influenced the porcelain’s form, but their cultural tastes also began to influence the design and patterns of the glaze, as well as the color schemes. “Until the end of the seventeenth century blue and white was the near exclusive palette of Chinese export wares, although in 1699 the English East India Company ship Nassau carried porcelains carefully distinguished by such colors as brown, whey, olive, and codlin (the last being an apple tone)” (Corbeiller and Frelinghuysen 2003:15). Europe’s influence on this production of colored Chinese pieces is fairly substantial, as they preferred to purchase the classic style of blue and white porcelain (unless specific scenes, crests, or flags called for an addition of color) which allowed primarily Japanese workers to monopolize the field of colored porcelain. In fact, the cargo bound for European markets in the vessel discussed by Corbeiller and Frelinghuysen, the Nassau, consisted entirely of blue and white pieces. To further establish their classicism, European elites began to commission the replication of their own familial crests on these imported goods. When Britain still held sway over towns and port cities of colonial America these crests could still be found on the porcelain goods within elite homes.

It is somewhat more difficult to see the changes in Chinese export porcelain caused by newly established Australia and the United States, because they themselves were still influenced by their British forefathers. However, by comparing and contrasting the Chinese porcelain imported by both nations some changes do come to light. For example, after the American Revolutionary War (1763-1787) and after the Americans established direct contact with the Chinese (the Empress of China being the first American trading ship to directly establish trade between the Americans and the Chinese) the familial crests that had previously been visible in elite homes were replaced with newly established symbols of the free land as they tried to establish their own separate identity. There has not been much discussion that puts the Chinese porcelain for America and that for Australia into conversation with one another. Excavations of homes and port cities in each country have been done and porcelain uncovered there. However, the amounts of porcelain found at each site needs to be put into its own historical and social context before direct comparisons between the nations can be made. Excavations like this are numerous, but very few specifically discuss the changes or differences seen in the imagery drawn in the porcelain’s glaze. If more analyzations and records of the imagery are gathered and published, they could add a new layer of narrative to the collection of quantitative chemical analysis and porcelain counts already in the public domain. Efforts for countries to distinguish themselves from their colonial founders can be found within historical documents and the excavation of prominent ports and cities.
Methods

This paper will be examining the differences between the Chinese porcelain imported to Australia and the United States of America after they gained independence from Britain and established their own trade links with China. Due to the limited access Morris students have to raw excavated material (i.e. none) the research took more of a literature based approach. Meaning, that because there is no access to actual excavated Chinese porcelain, various books, journals, articles, and grey matter was examined in order to obtain the proper data. To begin examining the differences in the imported porcelain (resulting from identity, cultural, and economic influences) it was imperative to gather texts that address the background of the porcelain trade in order to establish a solid foundation. For example, *Chinese Export Porcelain for the American Trade*, by Jean Mudge directly addresses the entirety of the porcelain trade, as well as the rise and fall of specific trends in style. Clare Le Corbeiller and Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen’s article, *Chinese Export Porcelain* specifically addresses the shifts in design and color that occur throughout the entirety of the Chinese exports. Both of these documents include images of the actual porcelain being discussed so that the colors and designs are visually represented. In addition to articles discussing the porcelain trade as a whole, articles and publications of site excavations were used to collect the raw data that make comparing Chinese porcelain in Australia and the United States possible. The excavations used for the purposes of this paper are the following:

**Aiken-Rhett Mansion**

This elite townhouse in Charleston, South Carolina was occupied by 1820. It served as the home for wealthy men, their family members and their slaves. In addition to having an outbuilding for slaves (which housed at least 14 by 1860) this site was walled off and separated from the rest of the community, making it unlikely that anything found at the site is a result of cross contamination or outside refuse. The excavation of this site, coupled with that of the William Gibbes House, was meant to “provide a starting point for the investigation of socioeconomic status as it is reflected in the urban” American archaeological record (Zierden and Calhoun 1990:79).

**William Gibbes House**

Another elite townhouse separated from the rest of the community, located in Charleston, South Carolina. Construction of the home was finished in 1772 and at one point it was owned by William Gibbes. Gibbes was a successful merchant who was interested in transatlantic and coastal shipping and owned a plantation on nearby Johns Island. In 1780 the British converted this townhouse into a hospital and banished Gibbes from Charleston. This home was chosen in tandem with the Aiken-Rhett Mansion, for research purposes because the “extensive documentary evidence available [about the two sites] provides a control seldom possible in a crowded urban site” (Zierden and Calhoun 1990:79).
Russell House
Archaeological research done on the Nathaniel Russell House is one of the most recent projects examining colonial Charleston, South Carolina. And the data gathered from the House was used, coupled with other research on urban sites, was used to gain information about refinement, landscape development, and the ethnic relations in the urban setting of Charleston. The mansion was built 1808 by Nathaniel Russell, a businessman originally from Rhode Island, and his wife Sarah Hopton, who came from a well off family. There they raised two daughters, and after the death of her parents and her husband, Sarah Russell Dehon remained in the house with a daughter, son-in-law, and eventually twelve grandchildren. Archaeological excavation, architectural and documentary study of the Nathaniel Russell House was commissioned by the owner (the historic Charleston Foundation) in order to aid in long term restoration work.

First Trident
Cited by Martha A. Zierden and Jeanne A. Calhoun as “previously excavated” from Charleston, South Carolina. This site and its assemblages belonged to an upper middle class community, and was used by Zierden and Calhoun as an archaeological control to compare and contrast with the deposits found at the Aiken-Rhett Mansion and the William Gibbes House. More information about the landowners or dates were not available in their presentation of the material.

Drayton Hall
A lowcountry plantation about twelve miles northwest of Charleston, South Carolina. It was owned by the Drayton family and used as their winter residence.

Elizabeth Hemings Site
Starting at around 1980 archaeological studies of Monticello, Virginia, home to Thomas Jefferson and his family, have been done to call attention to revealing the truth of the enslaved and free workers who worked there; in order to “raise the real historical Monticello above the threshold of historical visibility” (Neiman, McFaden, and Wheeler 2000:1). The Elizabeth Hemings site is a small portion of the 5000 acre plantation owned by the Jefferson family in Virginia. The central matriarch of this home was Elizabeth Hemings whose descendants made up at least ⅓ of the 130 of the African Americans recorded living in the Albemarle County. Six of Elizabeth’s grandchildren were born to her daughter Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson.

Wellington Street Site
Port Albert, in the Victoria Province of Australia, was first influenced by Europeans in 1841. The Wellington Street site discussed by Prossor et al. was among the earliest sections of the Port to become permanently occupied. Eventually, in 1856, plots on Wellington Street were sold to private individuals and had many owners and families. In
the 19th century this area of the Port was strongly associated with government employed maritime workers; the owners of the homes on Wellington Street included boatmen, pilots, and light keepers.

**Bean’s Parsonage**
Reverend Willoughby Bean came from an established English family that had military connections. He and his family occupied this parsonage in South Gippsland, in the Victoria Province of Australia, from 1849-1859. The archaeological site was worked on by Lawrence, Brooks, Lennon, and their team (from La Trobe University) in order to compare it to work previously done by Graham Connah. Their hope was to provide a more complete view of the various classes present throughout the history of Australian society.

**Lake Innes**
This site in New South Wales, Australia, is really a collection of several other well preserved sites from the former estate of Major Archibald Clunes Innes, occupied in the 1830s and the 1840s. It was originally researched by Graham Connah to study estate life and social status in Australia. He was specifically looking at the hierarchy of servitude, reaching from the aristocrats to the poorest of labourers. Lawrence, Brooks, and Lennon, compare these excavations to that of the Bean Parsonage in order to cover a gap in the hierarchy that has been little researched in Australia. The buildings at Lake Innes included the homes of servants, labourers, coachmen, blacksmiths, and the home farm.

**Excavation of the Sydney Cove Shipwreck**
In 1797 the Australian merchant vessel *Sydney Cove* was wrecked on its journey delivering trade goods from Calcutta to Port Jackson (Sydney) Australia. The cargo included alcohol, foodstuffs, livestock, textiles, luxury goods, and ceramics (including an impressive array of Chinese Porcelain).
Analysis of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Number of artifact fragments</th>
<th>Number of whole Artifacts</th>
<th>% of Ceramics that are Porcelain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bean Parsonage</td>
<td>14000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Street</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiken-Rhett</td>
<td>4078</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbes House</td>
<td>2407</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Trident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drayton Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell House 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell House 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell House 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Heming's House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.

(possible) how the size of the assemblage can affect the percentage of porcelain at a site. For example, if one item out of a total of four excavated (at a fictional site) is porcelain that site’s recorded percentage of porcelain is equal to another (fictional) site which had 25/100. This could present skewed data, because just examining the porcelain percentages would not reveal how much porcelain was actually at the site, and might give a wealthier appearance than what otherwise might be assumed.

As stated in the Introduction and illustrated by the Methods section of this paper, the data that was gathered for comparison come from both Australia and America after they gained their independence from Great Britain. The graphs created by this data show a large difference in the amount of porcelain at each site. However, these differences do not simply come down to the wealth of the families or individuals whose homes have been excavated, but are
actually a result of several different factors: regional taste, differing cultural displays of wealth, overall national trade relationships with China and other trade links, etc. Image 1 displays the general area of Australia being examined with this research. Both Port Albert and South Gippsland are part of the Victorian Province of Australia, and Port Jackson is where the Sydney Cove was headed before it wrecked in 1797. It is in this area, the Victorian province, where the Bean Parsonage, Lake Innes, and Wellington Street sites noted in Image 2 are located. With this direct comparison it clearly shows the large differences between the American and the Australian sites. Image 3 takes a closer look at the Australian half of Image 2, clearly showing the diversity even between the sites that are comparatively close together. The Wellington Street site is located within Port Albert, and the homes located there traded hands several times between boatmen, fishermen, and merchants and their

![Amount of Porcelain in Ceramic Assemblages at American and Australian Sites](image1)

**Image 2. Comparison of Australian and American Porcelain Sites**

![Amount of Porcelain in Ceramic Assemblage of Site](image3)

**Image 3. Percentage of Chinese Export Porcelain Found in Australian Excavation Sites**
families. It was in fact, “among the earliest parts of the Port to be permanently occupied” (Prossor et al. 2012: 812). When the Wellington Street site was examined with the John Thomas’s family was occupying the area, researchers were expecting to see evidence of an ordinary, small town household. But instead there was evidence to suggest (as illustrated in image 3 with the high percentage of Chinese export porcelain) that “John Thomas’s employment in the Harbor Services gave him and his family a privileged position in a small coastal town where the regional economy depended on the harbor facilities he helped to operate” (Prossor et al. 2012:817). And this conclusion serves to show that the differences in regional economies and societies cannot be assumed based on the overarching tendencies in the nation’s economy. In contrast, the Bean Site (as shown in Image 3) had a much lower porcelain percentage than any of the others, including the Lake Innes sites which were the locations of various labourers. And the spread of porcelain between the Lake Innes sites shows differentiation even between the labourers. As mentioned in the Methods portion of this paper, the Bean Site was host to the Bean Parsonage, which holds another type of status in and of itself. In summation, “a minister of the Anglican Church, whatever the circumstances of his personal finances, would have been perceived to have had a respectable status wholly removed” from the status of his or any other state owner’s servants (Lawrence et al. 2009:74). The Beans were an influential household in their society, but their status as a parsonage lead to displays of wealth being showcased in ways not reflected in physical goods, specifically Chinese porcelain.

As shown in Image 2, the number of Australian sites actually excavated and made available for examination are fewer than those in America. This lack of research and the lack of materials available for cross-examination can cause biased interpretations of national economy, which is why it is important to look at the context of each site - as depicted by the discussion of the Bean Parsonage above. Another difference between the American and Australian sites made obvious by Image 2, is that the American sites, as a whole, have a higher percentage than the ones from Australia. Image 5 shows that lowest percentage of Chinese export porcelain found in America is 4.9% at the Aiken-Rhett Mansion (Charleston, South Carolina). This is over 6 times as much porcelain found at the Bean Parsonage - the site with Australia’s lowest porcelain.
percentage. The Aiken-Rhett Mansion, the Gibbes House, and the Russell House all belonged to upper class individuals. For example, during his time, William Aiken, Jr. “was one of the richest men in antebellum Charleston”. His estate from 1850 alone was worth $1990,000 and supported his wife, his daughter, a French - woman, himself, and “a small staff of seven slaves” (Zierden and Calhoun 1990:81). By 1859 the property was worth $290,600 and he housed twelve slaves, some of whom were talented craftsmen. This extravagant home played host to many parties and social gatherings (William Aiken served on the South Carolina Legislature and played a role in supporting the Confederate cause despite his Unionist tendencies). This was a home that needed to impress, so it might appear strange that this mansion has the lowest percentage of porcelain present on American sites. This unexpected distribution could be caused by a differing amount of ceramics present at the site. A higher number of ceramics recorded -which is also an indicator of wealth- can lead to a lower percentage of porcelain being present on site. From various records (such as letters, merchant records, and records of the dinners served at parties) it is obvious that the people who lived at the Aiken-Rhett Mansion were not only wealthy, but important influential figures in their community. In order to understand why their percentage of Chinese export porcelain is so low in comparison to the other American sites the historical context of the home and its residents needs further examination. What were the American-Chinese trade relationships like while William Aiken was living in South Carolina? Was his ability to purchase porcelain affected by the American Civil War and his obligations to support the Confederate Army? These questions, and more, need to be considered while cross-examining this site with other American sites, let alone the recorded porcelain excavations in Australia.
The American site with the highest porcelain percentage, as shown by Image 5, is the Elizabeth Hemings Site. It is located in Monticello, Virginia, and is part of the large estate that once belonged to Thomas Jefferson. Monticello was a 5000-acre plantation that housed Jefferson and his family, as well as both many free workmen and hundreds of enslaved African Americans. Elizabeth “Betty” Hemings arrived there in 1775, at around 40 years of age, after she was inherited by Jefferson. Betty and her family -she had twelve recorded children- became prominent and trusted slaves who worked more of the skilled labour and held many responsibilities. She was given her own place of residence, hence the name the Heming’s house, near Mulberry Row, which is where most of the slaves and workers were housed, and where her adult children later lived with their families.

At first glance, it might seem a bit strange that the home of a slave was the site with the highest percentage of Chinese export porcelain, but there are several factors that should be considered. It is true that Betty was a slave, but even amongst that community there is a hierarchy, especially on well established and wealth plantations such as the Jeffersons’. As stated previously, Betty became a prominent and trusted figure. She, and her family, did not work in the fields but became essential to the more skilled household and construction tasks around the estate. Betty’s account, and the percentage of porcelain found in her home, can also be used to reflect upon the conditions of the Jeffersons themselves. To own such a large estate and provide for the many people that were needed to run it, in addition to showing individuals like Betty favor through housing and expensive goods such as porcelain, Thomas Jefferson and his family must have been quite wealthy and powerful within their own social circle. Smaller sites like the Hemings house can come together to provide insight to various levels of social status as well as the overarching concepts and cultural practices of the time.

On their own, sites such as the ones discussed in detail throughout this section (the Bean Site, Wellington Street, the Aiken-Rhett Mansion, and the Elizabeth Hemings Site) cannot reflect
the national wealth and social norms. Besides the nation’s economy, there are many smaller factors that shift how wealth is displayed even amongst a community with known economic or social standing. For example, if the findings at the Elizabeth Hemings site and the Bean Parsonage were compared to each other without the examination of social contexts or individual backgrounds it would be easy to assume that the Hemings were more wealthy and held a higher social status than the Beans. However, by including the background narrative it is obvious that this is not the case. As a Reverend it was most likely expected that Bean did not hoard or display large amounts of wealth, but this would not have diminished his social power within the community. On the other hand, because her home reflected the wealth of the Jefferson family and how much they valued her, it can be seen that Elizabeth was well respected within the Monticello community. Yet her status as a slave would have made her poor and powerless elsewhere. Another example would be Charleston, South Carolina. Knowing its history can provide much insight to the individuals who lived there. Zierden states that “from its founding in 1670, Charleston, South Carolina, functioned as a vital urban community. It was a century later the fourth largest city, and the wealthiest per capita, in the British colonies”. She also claims, as illustrated in the discussion of Imagery below, that the elites of this society have been “defined in economic terms … however, other agencies were at work in definition and self-definition” (Zierden 1999:73-75). The elite though strongly recognized by their individual wealth had to distinguish themselves in other fields as well. Such as arranged marriages with other established families, business partnerships (which were sometimes tied to the marriages) and political appointments. In other words, they had to play various parts of the social field to establish their own identities. It is these differences of social influence and economy that make it important to look at a household, or a sit, as a whole, rather than relying primarily on the amounts of porcelain and other indicators of wealth.

**Visual Differences in Porcelain Decoration**

In her book, *Chinese Export Porcelain for the American Trade: 1785-1835*, Jean McClure Mudge documents the establishment of trade between the infant country America and the ancient and well established China, what wares the Chinese were exporting, and the ways in which the Americans established their own identity through their decorative choices of imported porcelain. It is this emphasis on and the analysis of porcelain decoration that distinguishes her collection from the quantitative research done at archaeological sites. The images and colors within the glaze of Chinese export porcelain, if properly analyzed, can illuminate differences in status and identity within the United States as well as Australia. Mudge states that “the real basis for identification of Chinese export wares made particularly for America lies in their decoration. Forms are helpful to indicate European or Oriental influences and to date objects; but American symbols on export porcelain alone signify pieces intended for the American market” (Mudge 1981: 161). To visually represent this she includes images of the “more common and the particularly significant” pieces which were intended for American households. Two images in
particular were used to showcase American identity (and in fact could not be mistaken for anything else) the American flag, and the seal of the United States, officially adopted in 1782. This image of the eagle with its olive branches was made readily available on American currency (silver and gold coins) as well as used to seal and decorate official documents. Given that this seal was used on trade documents as well, it was relatively easy for the Chinese craftsmen to

![Image 7](image7.jpg)

Image 7. (Mudge 1981: 190)

incorporate it into their glazed images. For example, Image 7 displays two versions of the United States’ official seal. The image on the left of the figure is the detail of the eagle on two mugs and a flagon (dated about 1795-1812) found at the Winterthur Museum; while the image on the right is the design on the certificate dictating the ownership of the Elizabeth (a ship) from 1804, taken from the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library. “Many variants of the eagle appear. Sometimes the wings are spread high, and sometimes they are lowered; the shields are striped and colored, or filled with a monogram, or painted with a floral motif” (Mudge 1981: 168). These are not the only variations to be found in this particular image, others occur in such things as coloring and even the personal ability of the craftsmen in charge of glazing the individual pieces. As shown by Image 8, George Washington, the first President of the United States, also became an iconic symbol found on various Chinese export porcelain pieces bound for America. His portrait was indeed so popular a marker of

![Image 8](image8.jpg)

Image 8. (Mudge 1981: 201)
American identity, that after his death, even the image of his tombstone was used to decorate various wares.

Personal commission and decoration also played a large role in the society of the American elite. “Special orders of export porcelain were often individualized by the crest of cipher of the purchaser, and more rarely by his portrait … [these objects] indicate the importance attached to personalized wares, perhaps as a result of the renewed spirit of individualism after the Revolution” (Mudge 1981: 177). As previously mentioned, many elite families living in the American colonies possessed a family crest or coat of arms. And although these elites still held stalk in their heritage these crests seemed to fall out of fashion. “Those which are preserved, however, fascinate for their individuality, especially in the changes which made them American … The revised crest, literally the crowning achievement of a coat of arms, allowed Americans to top anything they had inherited” (Mudge 1981: 178-179).

An example of this is the platter shown in Image 9. This platter, dated about 1820, bears the arms of Charles Izard Manigault (1795-1874) from Charleston, South Carolina. The platter can currently be found at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. According to Mudge, “Manigault devised the most unusual crest of all: the bust of a feather-crowned, arrow-bearing native (of the South Pacific of America) draped with animal skin” (Mudge 1981: 179). Image 10 also displays this shift. Elias and John Morgan, from Hartford Connecticut, took their Welsh crest and switched their ancestor’s reindeer with the head of a griffin. This plate can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Similarly (though not depicted here) the Sargents of Gloucester, Massachusetts, replaced the dolphin from their traditional crest with the figure of the eagle discussed previously. These American elites adapting their coat of arms to reflect their new
American identities is of course a general statement, and can not account for all the choices made by elite families and individuals. Indeed, some Americans rejected this change to familial crests and preserved their coat of arms the way they had always been presented.

Although Mudge doesn’t provide any images of Australian porcelain to compare with the pieces imported into America, Mark Staniforth and Mike Nash provide plenty of images in their documentation of the Sydney Cove shipwreck of 1797. According to Staniforth and Nash “the merchant vessel Sydney Cove was wrecked while on a voyage from Calcutta to the newly established British penal colony at Port Jackson [now known as Sydney] while carrying a speculative cargo which included alcohol, foodstuffs, livestock, textiles, ceramics and luxury goods” (Staniforth and Nash 1998: 1). As previously stated at the time the ship was sailing Port Jackson was still under British control, which some might argue is something that makes this Chinese export porcelain incomparable to those mentioned in the discussion of the porcelain imported into free America above. However, Australia already had control of their porcelain trade networks, as they were importing the porcelain through India, rather than through Great Britain. Therefore, the porcelain in the Sydney Cove shipwreck can be directly compared to the Chinese porcelain found in early America to show distinct differences in taste and identity. This excavation cannot however, be included in the graphs above which directly compare the amounts of porcelain found at various sites and within various regions. Porcelain from this ship, and the other goods as well, were meant to be distributed throughout several communities, meaning that there would be an unrealistic representation of wealth and prestige within the Port Jackson community, as well as a representation of design that was no longer regionalized.

During their analysis of the Sydney Cove shipwreck, Staniforth and Nash reviewed the porcelain that was able to be recovered, and took note of both their shape, or function, and the designs present in the glaze. The four types of ware they recorded were toiletry sets (including chamber pots, washing bottles, chamber pot lids, and a washbowl or basin) dinner wares (including
soup plates, dinner plates, and chafing dishes) tea wares (consisting of traditional Chinese styled tea bowls and saucers) and nested bowls. In addition to recording the various types of Chinese porcelain found on the Sydney Cove (i.e. the various uses these differently shaped vessels had) Staniforth and Nash also pay particular attention to the glaze work, which is not something that has been recorded at many archaeological dig sites involving Chinese export porcelain in Australia as well as America (in this context ‘glaze work’ refers to the colors used and the patterns or scenes painted on the porcelain’s surface). As previously discussed, on Chinese porcelain bound for America, it was common to see markers of American identity, such as the National Seal, the American flag, and busts of George Washington. These untraditional designs also incorporated several colors not seen in (nor wanted) in classical forms of Chinese glaze work. (Image 11 shows some of these color variations available at the time.) But in the assemblages intended for Australian consumption, classic scenery and color schemes are prevalent. In the whole recording of the Sydney Cove’s cargo put forth by Staniforth and Nash, they do not once record an example of colors deviating from the traditional blue and white glaze, nor do they record familial crests or symbols of national identity as seen in the American collection. Image 12 is a prime example of this. It is a hot water plate which illustrates the effects Western practices had on porcelain production in the East, yet the design depicts a Chinese landscape with native flora, people, and architecture. (There were at least 48 of these hot water plates amongst the assemblage) The edges of the plate are also decorated with an intricate pattern which is typical of Chinese porcelain (although it does vary by production year and location). Another example of these Western inspired vessels are the chamber pot and washing water bottle. In their examination of the wreck Staniforth and Nash reference Mudge that the “chamber pot was unknown in China prior to contact with the West and it can be considered as a ‘western’ form
design for foreign taste and made for export” (Staniforth and Nash 1998: 21). And in the
wreckage they found that bottles and chamber pots, like the ones depicted in Image 13, along
with chamber pot lids and deep set washbowls composed at least twelve toiletry sets as part of
the Sydney Cove’s cargo. They also “noted that all of the Sydney Cove examples have a similar
landscape design with elements of lakes, mountains, islands, trees and buildings contained
in the exterior body decoration” (Staniforth and Nash 1998: 21).

Though it should also be stated that these “elements” were also found on the other wares
throughout the cargo; making detailed analysis necessary to distinguish such things as sets or
pairs.

Traditional Chinese depictions of scenery were not the only thing that the Australian market preserved. The tea wares that were being imported were also styled in the shape found within Chinese homes. (In this case ‘tea wares’ refers to the cups and saucers used for drinking tea. It does not include tea ports because none were found in this assemblage.) These cups have no handles so that they resemble small bowls - hence the name ‘tea bowl’ - while British tea cups have dainty handles added both for decoration and function. The saucers that came with the tea bowls differed from the British’s preferred style in that they had no indentation to indicate where the bowl should rest on it. This style of cup and saucer is also what can be found in American collections. There is not much to indicate why the Australian market favored tea bowls and un-indented saucers rather than the style preferred by the British and the Americans, but it is known that the style consumed by the Australians was cheaper than the style being produced specifically for the rest of the Western market. This could indicate, generally, that America had a wealthier economy than Australia at that time.

In addition to these differences Staniforth and Nash also note that there were ten different
types of tea bowls and ten different types of saucers. But rather than being subdivided according
to variations in shape, these various categories come from the differences in glaze work. As
briefly stated while looking at the hot water dishes from this shipwreck, the designs on every
piece of porcelain found contain at least some elements of landscape characteristics: mountains,
rivers, hills, flora, boats, architecture, and common people. Patterning around the edge of the hot water plate was also used to indicate both makers and styles; and the tea wares are no exception.

Here, Image 14 shows what Staniforth and Nash categorized as a type One tea bowl and saucer set. Again it has been decorated with blue and white glaze, and depicts traditional Chinese architecture and flora. Though perhaps more prominent when viewing the actual pieces, a matching border can also be seen on the interior of these two tea wares. A strong indicator that they belonged to a set. Image 15 depicts a sketch of a type 8 tea bowl (left) and a type 9 saucer (right) and although both contain flora and other natural influences in their patterning, this side
by side comparison highlights the fact that they do not match with one another, which indicates that they are not part of the same set.

Overall, the Chinese export porcelain sent to America and the porcelain meant for Australia have strong differences between them. Where the American market seems to be geared towards identity and individuality right from the get go, the goods meant for Australia appear to have mass consumption and traditions in mind. It is hard to make claims about the export porcelain found on the Sydney Cove because it never reached its destination. On the other hand, the pieces found in American collections seem more individualist; many sets of porcelain were ordered (like that found in the cargo of Sydney Cove) but based on these two analyses alone it appears that elite American families and individuals had a more direct influence over what was being imported (many more stand alone pieces were commissioned that had glaze work indicating ancestry, occupations, and allegiances).

Conclusions

There are several influences over how much Chinese export porcelain was imported into both America and Australia, let alone their individual households. And so, to fully understand what the excavation of porcelain at an individual site is truly reflecting, these overarching concepts and the historical context of the site needs to be understood by those studying reflections of wealth, influence, and status within American and Australian societies. (such overarching influences include, though are not limited to: international trade and government relationships, national and international economy, localized economy, individual wealth of site, person, or family being studied, social status, etc.) Though this research examined multiple sites from America and Australia, importance of these influences can be seen most strongly in the comparison between the Australian excavation of the Bean Parsonage and the Elizabeth Hemings Site in the United States. When these two sites are compared without any background knowledge of the residents who lived there (especially their economic and social standings) it would appear that the residents of the Elizabeth Hemings site were wealthier than those of the Bean Parsonage, and from there it can be assumed that they must have also held a stronger or higher position in their societies as well. However, as discussed above, this is not the case. In reality, those who lived at the Bean Parsonage had a higher social standing, as it was the minister’s family and the parsonage’s servants who resided there. And they would have been much more influential in their community than the Hemings who were the slaves of Thomas Jefferson and his family (though this excavation does reveal that they were prominent and influential in the slave community of Monticello, which is another discussion entirely).

As previously discussed, the way in which Chinese export porcelain within individual homes and communities were not the only pressures affecting what was being imported into the markets of America and Australia. Cultural and personal taste played a large role as well. For example, the most striking difference between the American collection of Chinese export porcelain (discussed in Jean Mudge’s Chinese Export Porcelain for the American Trade:
1735-1835) and the Australian collection of Chinese porcelain (described in Mark Staniforth and Mike Nash’s Chinese Export Porcelain from the Wreck of the Sydney Cove (1797)) is the American desire for individuality. There are many pieces that deviate from traditional Chinese decoration, which instead incorporate things like the official seal of the United States, the national flag, the first president George Washington, and household crests (which were further individualized as many commissioners redesigned their familial crests to distinguish themselves from their relatives in Europe). However, in Australia -or at least in what was found aboard the Sydney Cove- traditional designs tended to prevail. Perhaps it is due to later British influences, though it could be the prevailing taste of that society. However, it is hard to be certain about what the Sydney Cove cargo could say about Australian society because it never made it to port, let alone the homes it was intended for. But as a general statement, based solely off of these two collections, it appears that the elite American families (or individuals) had a more direct influence over what was being imported; most of the Australian pieces were part of much larger sets, and the American pieces were much more often commissioned as single pieces.

The history of Chinese porcelain, from first construction to being a firmly established part of various markets, is vast, both within and without the Chinese nation. As a major trade good, the porcelain and its makers heavily influenced what was considered to be fine and elite within European society and Europe’s subsequent colonial states. And in turn, Europeans introduced new demands for pieces that fit western needs (such as chamber pots and hot water dishes). And as these European colonies began to form their own countries with their own social customs and their own identities, Chinese craftsmen were again influenced by these new markets and the styles and designs they needed to keep the trade of export porcelain both prominent and desirable. Much research has gone into examining the amount of porcelain found at various sites and the chemical makeup of the pieces (in order to date and identify the region of production). And this has revealed many things about individual homes as well as societies on a larger scale (neighborhood, town, state, etc.) However, hardly any of these archaeologists have published, let alone recorded, an analysis of the designs found on the pieces of Chinese export porcelain that they uncovered in their sites of interest. If more of this data was gathered and published, other researchers would be able to examine how these designs fit the social context that they were found in, rather than having to rely on museum collections and shipwrecks. If the designs of the porcelain glaze from various locations can be compared and contrasted with one another (in addition to their distribution) a clearer picture of how Chinese porcelain differed between various nations and individuals - not just those belonging to America or Australia - can be obtained.
References