From the Chinese Guan to the Mexican Chocolatero: A Tactile History of the Transpacific Trade, 1571-1815

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2014
ABSTRACT

From the Chinese *Guan* to the Mexican *Chocolatero*: A Tactile History of the Transpacific Trade, 1571-1815

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The dissertation follows the trajectory of one of the commodities of the transpacific trade, Chinese porcelain, from the city of Jingdezhen where it was produced, to Manila where it was sold to Spanish merchants, on to Mexico, where it was adopted by the colonial society. The study ends in the city of Puebla where potters drew inspiration from Chinese porcelain for the invention of a new ceramic style known as *loza poblana*. The methodology of following the trajectory of Chinese porcelains through various sites reveals a new kind of history, one where the tactile aspects of the circulation of goods become salient. The places, contexts, and transactions that the commodities passed through are more prominent--the trade is no longer an abstract exchange between different parties or an endeavor driven purely by imperial greed. Instead it emerges as a process that developed from an interaction between global material forces and local histories and contingencies. Such a tactile history also provides details about the movement and transfer of aesthetics in the early modern period, as seen in the case of the design of the Chinese *guan*, a jar form, that was adapted to make the Mexican *chocolatero*.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first trip to Mexico was momentous. I discovered a wonderfully colorful place and also found a research topic for my PhD. Xochitl Lara Becerra and her family hosted me on that visit and I owe them the greatest thanks for introducing me to their country. I took a while to arrive at a research topic, and could not have asked for a more supportive dissertation committee. Adam McKeown has been an unfailing advisor, whose attentiveness and encouragement were key to completing the project. Dorothy Ko introduced me to visual and material culture studies in her class and has continued to inspire me throughout the process. Pamela Smith provided opportunities and encouraged me by sharing her own work and experience so I would be confident to pursue my research. Caterina Pizzigoni was gracious and allowed me to study with her when I realized, rather late, that I wanted to work on colonial Mexican history.

Margaret McQuade was equally generous with her expertise and contacts. She has been influential to this project from the very first time I met her at the Hispanic Society of America in New York. Through Margaret I met Maria Antònia Casanovas on a fleeting visit to the Museum of Ceramics in Barcelona, and she sent me home with valuable catalogues to pore over. Margaret also introduced me to Fernanda Gamboa in Cholula, Mexico, where I observed artisans at work in Fernanda’s Santa Catarina Workshop.

In England John Moffett at the Needham Research Institute guided me through the NRI library and advised me on local opportunities. Stacey Pierson and Jessica Harrison-Hall were both kind enough to let me join their projects so I could learn more about Chinese porcelain. Professors at the University of Warwick, Anne Gerritsen, Giorgio Riello, Luca Mola, and Maxine Berg, all took an interest in the project and have continued to advise me.
Anne Gerritsen introduced me to May Huang, who shared her knowledge of Chinese ceramics and was my support system while I was doing research in Jingdezhen. Patrick Coughlin and Dryden Wells were also extremely helpful during that trip and have continued to answer my questions about the craft of pottery over the years. I am also especially grateful for having met Maja Lund-Lokkegard and Cynthia White in Fremantle, Australia where I took my first pottery class. These two expert throwers not only extended their friendship, but were curious enough to build their own kiln and mix their own glazes and allow me to experiment with them.

José Hernández Palomo helped me settle into Seville on both of my research trips to the city and on numerous occasions extended his privileges to me at the EEHA library. In Mexico I was fortuitously introduced to Hector Rivero Borrell, director of the Museum of Franz Mayer, who allowed me to access their collection and then connected me to scholars and private collectors in Mexico. In Puebla the staff at Museo Bello were incredibly accommodating and welcoming, making research there a thoroughly pleasant experience.

Over the years many friends and colleagues have helped me by providing a couch, a shoulder, or encouraging words over skype. I want to thank Danielle Williams, Wolasi Konu, Samip Mallick, Olga Rodriguéz Ulloa, Sheetal Chhabria, Liza Lawrence, Arunabh Ghosh, Julia Palacio del Langer, Andrew McDonald, Desha Osborne, Jared Roussouw, Luis Pablo Osorio, David Sada, Shakti and Ambika Shekhawat, Cristina Calzadilla, and Jonathan Torn. I am also fortunate to have a brother, Kartikeya Singh, who is also my closest friend and whose confidence and humor have carried me through the process. My parents, Raina Shekhawat and Karni Pal Bhati, have supported me in innumerable ways over the years, but this project especially would not have been possible without them because it was their footsteps that I was following on that first trip to Mexico.
CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

The Material Worlds of an Early Modern Trade Network: Production, Trade, Consumption and Invention

In the central district of Mexico City stands a blue-and-white tiled two-storied building known as Casa de los Azulejos (House of Tiles, Figure 1.1). From afar the tiles adorning the edifice are reminiscent of Chinese porcelain. At one point it was claimed that the tiles and some of the ironwork used to decorate the house had been brought especially from China.1 However upon closer inspection, one notices that beyond the flashes of influence from Chinese porcelain, the aesthetic of the tiles bears the marks of a local ceramic tradition. The Countess of Orizaba, María Graciana Suárez de Peredo, who renovated the house in the eighteenth century, introduced this manner of decorating facades of buildings from Puebla de los Angeles (Puebla), where she grew up.2 The house is a unique colonial landmark that demonstrates the skill of the Puebla potters, but also proves that Asia was a part of the colony’s mixed heritage, as seen in the myth about the origin of the tiles, in the influence of Asian aesthetics on the tiles, and in Chinese porcelains that were used as architectural elements inside the house (Figure 1.2).3

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1 Escobosa de Rangel, Magdalena, *La Casa de los Azulejos: reseña del palacio de los condes del Valle de Orizaba*


3 Chinese porcelain jars are attached to marble columns on a staircase inside the house. For more detail see Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 37.
This project is an examination of the trade network, often referred to as the Manila Galleon Trade, that made it possible for Chinese ceramics to become an integral part of a colonial Mexican monument. Beginning in the late sixteenth century silver from the mines of Zacatecas in the Viceroyalty of New Spain and Potosí in the Viceroyalty of Peru was sent to Manila on a yearly basis to support the colony in the Philippines and to purchase Asian commodities. The textiles, furniture, spices and various other goods that were bought in Manila with the silver were shipped to Acapulco from where they were distributed across colonial Latin America (Figure 1.3).

The dissertation follows the trajectory of one of the commodities of the transpacific trade, Chinese porcelain, from the city of Jingdezhen where it was produced, to Manila where it was sold to Spanish merchants, on to Mexico, where it was adopted by the colonial society. The commodities of the transpacific trade, Chinese porcelain, from the city of Jingdezhen where it was produced, to Manila where it was sold to Spanish merchants, on to Mexico, where it was adopted by the colonial society. The

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4 In the Spanish Empire, the colonies of the Americas were divided into viceroyalties, which were governed by a viceroy appointed by the Crown. In the sixteenth century there were two such viceroyalties, New Spain and Peru. Once the Philippine islands were colonized they were placed under the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. For more on the Spanish imperial system see John Elliot, Imperial Spain, 1469-1716 (London: Penguin, 2002) and Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Also D.A. Brading, The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
study ends in the city of Puebla where potters drew inspiration from Chinese porcelain for the invention of a new ceramic style known as *loza poblana*, as seen in the tiles of *Casa de los Azulejos*. Most studies on trade focus on the production or consumption nodes of networks, but in this narrative, the points of exchange are also included and shown to be significant to the overall functioning of the trade.

![Map of Spanish and Portuguese Trade Routes](image)

Figure 1.3. The map shows both Spanish and Portuguese shipping routes. Goods were collected in Manila and from there shipped to Acapulco. Earlier in the history of the trade, ships were allowed to travel between Peru and Manila, but in an effort to stem the flow of silver to Asia the Spanish Crown banned this direct trade.

The journey of Chinese porcelains through various sites along the transpacific trade route reveals a new kind of history, one where the tactile aspects of the circulation of goods become salient. The places, contexts, and transactions that the commodities passed through are more prominent—the trade is no longer an abstract exchange between different parties or an endeavor driven by imperial greed. Instead it emerges as a process that develops from an interaction

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5 *Loza* is a generic term for ceramics that was used in Spanish records to refer to ceramics from Spain, Asia or Mexico. The use of the term *poblana* indicates the origin of the ceramics. The term *loza poblana* is used here instead of the term commonly used today, *talavera poblana*, so as to avoid confusing the ceramics made in Puebla with those made in the city of Talavera de la Reina in Spain. See Margaret McQuade, “*Loza poblana: The emergence of a Mexican ceramic tradition*” (PhD, City University of New York, 2005), 14.
between global material forces and local histories and contingencies. Such a tactile history also provides details about the movement and transfer of aesthetics in the early modern period, as seen in the case of the design of the Chinese guan, a jar form, that was adapted to make the Mexican chocolatero (Figures 1.4 and 1.5).

The guan pictured in Figure 1.4 was produced in Jingdezhen and sent to Manila, from where it was shipped to Acapulco. This particular jar never reached Mexico because the ship it was on, the San Diego, was attacked by the Dutch and wrecked. However, other jars like it did get to Mexico and were reinterpreted into local forms such as the chocolatero, which was used to store the cacao beans that were made into chocolate. This particular one has lost its iron lid and lock, which would have been essential to its purpose since cacao beans were very valuable. Chocolateros were made in the shape of the Chinese guan and were also often decorated with designs inspired from porcelain.

Figure 1.4. Porcelain with underglaze blue. Wanli period (1563-1620) before 1600. The jar has four lobed panels each showing a seated sage.

Figure 1.5. Tin-glazed earthenware with iron lid. Puebla, ca. 1700. The shape of this jar is derived from the Chinese guan and the surface is divided in a similar manner to designs seen on Chinese examples.
The dissertation begins in Jingdezhen and follows the porcelains to Puebla because in addition to the various local factors that dictated ceramic production in Puebla, the incorporation of Asian aesthetics also depended, inter alia, on the ability of Chinese artisans to make ceramics worth emulating, on the ability of merchants in Manila to make these ceramics available in Mexico, and on the generally positive reception of Chinese and Asian goods in the colony. The choices, decisions and activities at each site were important for the functioning of the trade and had an impact on the eventual appropriation of Asian goods into colonial Mexico.

The chapter set in Jingdezhen is an investigation of how Chinese artisans made objects with fine qualities, such as the blue painted designs, in great quantities. It pays special attention to the bodily skills required in the production of ceramics. The following chapter set in Manila asks how the commodities exchanged hands from Chinese merchants and shopkeepers to merchants who would take them to Mexico. The fate of the San Diego guan is proof that conditions in Manila were vital to the accessibility of Asian goods in the Spanish American colonies. The chapters set in Mexico examine questions of reception and status of Asian commodities in the colonial society as well as investigate the ways in which these goods were adopted and adapted by different members of the society.

Each stop on the journey of the ceramic objects represents a node of the trade network—the sites of production, exchange, consumption and invention. The history and context of each site played a role in the development of the trade and each one was impacted by the trade differently. For example, the quality of Chinese ceramics was such that there was a global demand for these objects, including in Mexico, and trade networks were created to make these commodities available in distant locales. Conversely, the transpacific trade also had a bearing on the growth and evolution of these sites. Manila was transformed into a global hub, the kilns in
Jingdezhen profited from the capital brought by foreign trade and the potters in Puebla benefited from having access to a variety of aesthetic influences in order to develop a unique style of their own.

The dissertation is organized in a manner that each node of the trade is analyzed on its own as well as part of the system. In such a conceptualization the network emerges as an entity that developed from negotiations and interactions with local contingencies rather than a structure that was externally imposed upon the places it connected. Although the exploration of a route to Asia via the Pacific was driven by the Spanish Crown’s desire to have access to Asia, the making and development of the transpacific trade network was not just based upon Spanish imperial desires, but also depended on the quality of Asian goods, the motivations of Chinese and Spanish merchants in Manila, and the demands of consumers in the colony of Mexico.

In addition to offering a new perspective on the making of trade networks, the multi-sited approach offers a means to compare the places that were participating in global trade in the early modern era. Jingdezhen and Puebla were both known as ceramic production centers, but the manner and the extent to which their ceramics circulated was significantly different as was the resulting impact on the producers of these ceramics. Manila and Acapulco were both ports, but in the case of Manila the success of the transpacific trade was subject to the fact that the site was already a place of exchange where Chinese and Japanese merchants brought their goods. Acapulco, on the other hand, was created as a port expressly for the functioning of the transpacific trade, but it did not become an entrepôt like Manila. The differences in the manner that these sites evolved signify the multiple ways in which a place was incorporated into a network and the importance of local histories to the development of trade.
When the history of a place is contextualized in a broader framework, the local events take on a global significance. Such is the case with Puebla when it is studied as an important node in the transpacific and transatlantic trade networks. It emerges as a city comparable to other early modern cultural capitals of the world that had access to a wide variety of goods and where new tastes and fashions originated. The *Casa de los azulejos* and the *chocolatero* are examples of novelties created in Puebla that were then adopted and used in the Spanish colonies.

By focusing on the transpacific trade the dissertation forces us to consider an important commercial and cultural exchange of the early modern period that has thus far been ignored. Studies of the early modern period are dominated by scholarship on European demand for Asian goods, especially Chinese goods, and the resulting explosion of consumerism and industry seen in Europe. In such narratives colonial Latin America figures as a place that provided the silver that lubricated global trade, but not as a place that had its own demands and needs for Asian commodities. In the chapters of the dissertation set in Mexico we see that colonial Mexico’s trade with Asia was important in the formation of new colonial aesthetics and identities, a phenomenon that is overlooked in the emphasis on increased East-West interaction in the early modern era.

Temporally the dissertation focuses on the early modern period, defined roughly as the period from 1500 to 1800. At times it was necessary to discuss earlier periods because the historical context prior to the inception of the trade was important for understanding how the trade made an impact. The Manila Galleon Trade began in 1571 and ended in 1815, two dates

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that are significant for different reasons. The earlier one is telling of the fact that people in the Spanish American colonies had access to Asian commodities in great quantities earlier than most of Europe. Thus the perceived idea that metropoles influence their colonies is turned on its head when we realize that often the society in Spain was getting its Asian goods via Mexico and in some instances adopting customs of using Asian objects from the colony. The later date, 1815, is important because it signifies the duration of the direct trade between Mexico and Asia. Although this historical connection is often overlooked, the nearly 250 years of trade meant that the journeys of ships across the Pacific were not without consequence for the places that were engaged in the trade.

**Structure and Methodologies**

Scholars who write histories of the movement of goods and people across regional boundaries are often plagued with the question of reconciling the local context with the global flows that they write about. To avoid this dilemma the study focuses on one class of objects, ceramics, and investigates how their production, exchange and appropriation was contingent upon both global trade and local conditions. Following goods through the nodes of a trade network allows us to see them both as global commodities that were mass-produced for multiple markets and as specific, singular objects that were significant in different ways to individuals who made, traded and bought them.

The dissertation is structured so that each chapter focuses on a particular stage of the objects’ journey. Each chapter begins with a historical overview of the site being discussed to understand the context in which the trade took hold. The middle sections of the chapters focus on the particular processes under discussion, such as production of ceramics, activities related to
trade, or various forms of consumption. The chapters end with object studies of ceramics that further elucidate the processes discussed. Some of the objects appear more than once because the same vessel, a porcelain cup for example, can be used to describe the skill of the Chinese artisan and to serve as an sample of the variety of goods that were brought to Manila. It might appear again in a painting in a depiction of its use and value to the colonial society, and in the city of Puebla its form is reinterpreted and integrated into the local tradition.

This is the general structure and methodology for the entire dissertation, but internally each chapter has its own methodology based on the kinds of sources available for an individual site and what was happening in each place. For the chapter on Jingdezhen, “Crafting a Global Brand: Jingdezhen and its Porcelain,” the sources consisted of historical documents, field research in Jingdezhen and personal training in ceramic production. The chapter provides an analysis of how the material properties of Chinese porcelain were created that made them into a global commodity. The skillful artisans in Jingdezhen were able to transform the clay into fine-bodied ceramics that fired to a white color and were painted with intricate, bright blue motifs. These qualities of the objects were prized worldwide, and inspired imitations, making Jingdezhen porcelains what art historian Craig Clunas has called the world’s first “global brand.”

The research methodology for the chapter was to investigate what specifically the skills of the Jingdezhen potters consisted of, to know what was required to craft a porcelain object from raw materials dug out of the earth. This was done in part through learning the basics of the craft and gaining experience working with clay. The goal was to put the craftsman and his

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knowledge on the global trade map.\textsuperscript{8} The importance of the objects produced by the potters of Jingdezhen has long been known, but the people who made them have not been part of narratives that discuss the movement and influence of these objects.

Beginning the journey in Jingdezhen and focusing on the very hands that shaped the objects was essential for keeping the materiality of the object present throughout the dissertation. The question of how these objects were handled in each place and the kinds of spaces they occupied remained at the forefront as the narrative traced their journey out of the kilns in Jingdezhen to markets in Manila and Mexico, and eventually ending in potters’ workshops in Puebla.

In the chapter on Manila, “From Junk to Galleon: Commercial Activity in Manila,” the porcelain objects are followed through various spaces and transactions before they become part of the cargo of a ship headed to Acapulco. The aim is to investigate the role of the port city in connecting production centers in China to consumers in colonial Latin America. One of the arguments of the chapter is that Manila’s success as a hub was partly due to its precolonial history as a place of exchange. In that era porcelain was a valued commodity in the islands and Chinese merchants were aware of this. The existence of those fine objects on the islands encouraged Spanish colonizers to use Manila as the base for their operations in Asia because they could capitalize on the preexisting commercial ties.

Once Manila was colonized the Spanish introduced some of their methods of conducting trade, such as the loading and construction of the galleons, and these techniques were then modified to suit the needs of the transpacific trade. The chapter discusses the work of both the

\textsuperscript{8} The body of literature, predominantly anthropological, on the knowledge of making has been helpful for this project, but the chapter on Jingdezhen does not speak to that literature directly, especially as anthropologists are moving towards interdisciplinary methods of combining ethnographic work with neuroscience to study “knowing.” See for example Trevor Marchand “Making knowledge: explorations of the indissoluble relation between minds, bodies, and environment” in \textit{Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute} 16 (2010): 1–21. For the aims of this dissertation I did not delve into how potters knew what they knew but focused on what it was that they knew.
Spanish and Chinese in making Manila into a global hub. Inspired by the chapter on Jingdezhen, the preparation of the cargo hold of a galleon is seen as a production process, where there is a division of labor and the objects are handled by different groups of people. The commercial activity in Manila was not just an exchange between merchants, but a series of tasks required for the trade to function properly and the chapter follows the objects through these tasks.

The cargo that was prepared in Manila is unpacked in the following chapter, “A Parián in the Plaza Mayor: Making Space for Asia in Colonial Mexico.” Unlike the chapters on Jingdezhen and Manila where we investigate a production process, the consumption of Asian objects did not follow a pattern. Each object had a trajectory of its own and the uses and meanings of these objects were numerous and diverse. The aim was to gain a broad perspective on the status of Asian goods in colonial Mexico as well as to learn specifically how porcelain objects were perceived and used by members of the society. The chapter is an investigation of the larger spaces that Asian objects moved through, such as the port of Acapulco and the central marketplace in Mexico City, known as the Parián, as well as more intimate spaces such as churches, sitting rooms and kitchens. Studying the objects in the different kinds of spaces made it possible to analyze both how Asian commodities were construed broadly and publicly and the meanings they were ascribed in individual and specific contexts.

The methodology for the following chapter, “Blue-and-White Chocolateros: Crafting a Local Aesthetic in Puebla” differs yet again. Unlike the other places in this narrative Puebla is presented both as a site of consumption and production, or rather invention since loza poblana was a new style of ceramic created in the sixteenth century. For the chapter on Jingdezhen the driving question concerned the skills of the artisans who were able to mass produce objects that had global appeal. The foremost question for the chapter on Puebla was not just how the potters
made their ceramics but why it was that their creations, which were influenced by Chinese ceramics, had such great local appeal and enjoyed high status alongside Chinese ceramics. The social milieu in which both Chinese and Mexican ceramics were being consumed was especially important.

Ceramic industries in Asia and Europe started imitating Chinese porcelain when the demand for blue-and-white porcelain could not be met by Chinese kilns.\(^9\) The same explanation cannot be applied to the development of the ceramic industry in Puebla or to the Mexican artisans’ use of Asian designs. Puebla was established as a religious and cultural center for the colony, and commentators writing about the city who mentioned the ceramics produced there likened them to those produced in China and argued that they were better than those in Spain. Such comments suggest that there was a social importance to the locally produced ceramics beyond merely replacing Chinese imports.

The city of Puebla and the craft of the potters were both maturing at the same time, which meant that the loza poblana objects were helping form a creole identity while at the same time being shaped by this new identity. The chapter considers both the sociopolitical context in which the ceramics were produced, and the technical process by which they were made. Seen in this manner, the Puebla potters’ reinterpretations and modifications of Chinese designs become deliberate choices that made foreign designs locally coherent. They were not always imitations that were intended to replace Chinese porcelains.

Puebla is the only place in the dissertation that is studied both as a site of consumption and production. The demarcation of the different sites either as places of production, trade or

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\(^9\) In the second half of the seventeenth century the kilns of Jingdezhen were disrupted due to political unrest and during that time ceramic production centers in Japan and Vietnam made blue-and-white stoneware ceramics that were exported to colonial Latin America and Europe. The Delftware industry in the Netherlands also began to develop in this period when fewer imports were coming in from Jingdezhen.
consumption is in order to focus on the specifics of the processes of making goods, exchanging them and adopting them into daily life. It is true that a city like Manila was not just a place of trade but also a site of production where ivories and furniture items were crafted and sent to the Spanish American colonies. However, the goal was not to write a history of Manila, but rather to investigate its place in the transpacific trade. Since the narrative is anchored to porcelain objects, the activities that come to light when studying Manila are those that pertain to the transportation, exchange, annotation and packing of those objects.

**Literature Review**

The ceramic objects that are the focus of this dissertation have been studied in various ways by scholars of different disciplines. As trade commodities they are homogenized by economic and global historians and as art objects they are often singularized by anthropologists and art historians. By following their trajectory from production, to trade, to consumption, this project transcends this dichotomy between global commodity and individual object. It does so by building on several bodies of literature.

The emphasis on the tactility of the ceramic objects as we follow them through different spaces is inspired by material culture studies. It is a vast body of literature, but one essay in particular was significant to the use of ceramic objects for historical investigation in this project. History of science scholar Shigehisa Kuriyama in his essay “The Resonance of Strings,” has argued that the study of strings in Western culture offers a window into the development of Western science and medicine. He begins his analysis of this artifact with its crafting from the intestines of sheep.\(^10\) He proceeds to follow the significance of the objects in various different

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aspects of life in Europe. For Kuriyama the resonances of the vibrating string are wide-ranging because it was an artifact that crossed the boundaries of craft, science, medicine, religion and art. According to him one cannot comprehend European cultural history without paying attention to the importance of strings.\textsuperscript{11}

Blue-and-white ceramics are similarly resonant artifacts. They are far-reaching objects that crossed geographical, cultural and social boundaries, occupying a variety of different spaces and coming into contact with a great many people. Strings were interesting to Kuriyama because they were essential to several bodies of knowledge in Europe and therefore could illuminate how these bodies of knowledge were connected to each other and the ways in which they contributed to Western science. Similarly blue-and-white ceramics were significant to the various nodes of a network. By tracing the trajectories of these objects through these places we learn how they were connected to each other and the role they played in the making of the transpacific trade network.

The multi-sited methodology of the dissertation follows the work of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins who in his essay “Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of the World System” compared three historical cases of societies responding differently to commodities introduced by market forces. Sahlins argued:

\begin{quote}
…the World System is not a physics of proportionate relationships between economic ‘impacts’ and cultural ‘reactions’. The specific effects of the global-material forces depend on the various ways they are mediated in local cultural schemes.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} Other interesting ways in which scholars have used material sources to investigate historical events and phenomena include Dorothy Ko, \textit{Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding} (Berkeley: UC Press, 2005), Pamela Smith, \textit{The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and Laurel Ulrich Thatcher, \textit{Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth} (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2001).

In a critique of world-systems analysis, Sahlins was making the case that the local context dictated the manner in which global material forces were incorporated into a particular place.

This dissertation too proposes the importance of the local context, but unlike Sahlins instead of comparing different cultural reactions to global commodities, the sites that are compared are places that were involved in global trade in different capacities. Sahlins’ work registers the cultural differences in the consumption of goods whereas this study makes the argument that the local context of the different nodes mattered in the development of a trade network. By using one particular commodity and comparing the way it was treated in different sites we can investigate how each of those places participated in global trade.

The utility of following the trajectories of objects was most famously proposed by Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff in *The Social Lives of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.*\(^\text{13}\) The idea to follow the journey of Chinese porcelains is inspired by their work, but the study has also departed from those essays in significant ways. Appadurai and Kopytoff were particularly interested in objects as they moved in and out of the commodity phase. The chapters presented here are not investigations of the politics of the values assigned to objects in different contexts. Instead the focus was on the factors that facilitated the movement of objects from one place to another and the impact this movement had on the various sites connected by trade. I agree with them that tracing an object’s trajectory through different contexts can be illuminating, but the contexts that I chose to focus on are different.

Stacey Pierson’s most recent book *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* hews closer to a cultural biography of an object than this

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dissertation. She too follows the trajectory of Chinese porcelain through different cultural contexts to investigate its physical and conceptual transformation. Like Sahlins, Appadurai and Kopytoff, she is most concerned with the reception, appropriation and interpretation of these objects across cultures. She convincingly shows that the identities of Chinese porcelains changed in different contexts. The meanings ascribed to these objects by connoisseurs in Ming China were not the same as the ones ascribed to them by collectors in Europe, and often there was no recognizable connection between the two.

However, since in this study we follow Chinese porcelain through the nodes of a particular trade network instead of different sites of consumption, the research shows that what happened to the object at one site could have an impact on its eventual appropriation. For example, the bright blue motifs made by artisans in Jingdezhen played a role in the kinds of visual effects the potters of Puebla created for their ceramics. Indeed the potters’ ordinances in Puebla stipulated that in the making of fine ware the potters should recreate the kind of blue seen in Chinese porcelain.

Tracing the trajectories of Chinese porcelain for historical investigation is not a novel methodology. Chinese porcelain has been a fruitful source of study because of its ubiquity and wide popularity. Robert Finlay used the Asian commodity for such a purpose expertly in his 1998 article the “Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History” (1998). Finlay proposed that the circulation of blue-and-white porcelain created a cultural ecumene in Eurasia. By following certain motifs and objects through different cultural contexts he argued that this ecumene shared a collective visual language derived from the ceramics.

14 Stacey Pierson, From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

More recently porcelain has again been of interest to scholars interested in its utility to world history. A 2012 volume of the *Journal of World History* was dedicated to Jingdezhen porcelain. Unlike Finlay who saw connections and a common language created by the porcelain, the editors Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowall argue that though porcelain is proof of an interconnected world, the differences in its appropriation into new cultural contexts also show that the emerging connected world was characterized by differentiation.¹⁶

This project also emerges from a conviction that the manner in which Chinese forms and motifs were appropriated by consumers and artisans in Mexico was distinctive as compared to other parts of the world. The *guan* form was also imitated in Europe along with other Chinese designs, however its adaptation into the *chocolatero* was unique to Mexico and the tastes of the colonial society there. There is merit to Finlay’s argument that the movement of Chinese porcelain provided a common visual and aesthetic language to artisans around the world who were inspired by it. However, Pierson, Gerritsen and McDowall are right to point out that the ways in which this language was adopted was locally and culturally specific. They make their argument by following Chinese porcelain on journeys to the west of China, eventually ending up in Europe. This dissertation, on the other hand, registers the specific ways in which Mexican society appropriated Chinese porcelain, and in doing so brings that region of the world into discussions of the ecumene created by the movement of porcelain.

The works of Pierson, Finlay, Gerritsen and McDowall stand at the intersection of the fields of global history, art history and material culture studies, which is where this study is also situated, but since it follows a different trajectory, the narrative is necessarily different. The project begins and ends with an investigation of the production of ceramics. In the chapters on

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Jingdezhen and Puebla the emphasis is on the artisans’ work because they were significant to both the production and appropriation of goods that were circulating in the early modern world. This is not to say that the authors mentioned above are not knowledgeable about the ceramic production process in Jingdezhen. They have published on the topic, but when writing about Chinese porcelains as artifacts of global history, they have chosen to focus on the consumption of these goods and have not included the processes of production and exchange in their narratives.  

In recent years there has been a surge in scholars learning the craft or artistic practices of the past as a means to understand the knowledge of artisans. Historians Pamela Smith and Tonny Beentjes reconstructed casting techniques from early modern Europe to investigate the artisans’ purpose in life casting. Smith in particular has written extensively on artisanal knowledge using technical manuscripts or writings by practitioners themselves, such as The Admirable Discourses by Huguenot potter Bernard Palissy. Smith and others scholars, such as Tim Ingold or Trevor Marchand, who have thought seriously about craft knowledge do so in an effort to understand how people produce(d) and transmit(ed) knowledge that involves working with the body. This literature compels questions about how the commodities of the trade were physically produced.

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In the present study the work of the aforementioned authors is pushed in a new direction. They have argued for the significance of artisanal knowledge in the cultural context where it was produced. Here we see that the investigation of the bodily knowledge of artisans can be important to the study of commercial networks as well. If Chinese porcelain was a commodity that was sought after, then the manner in which it was produced has to be included in a history of a network that traded it.

There are few monographs on the exchange of goods between Asia and colonial Latin America. William Schurz wrote *The Manila Galleon* and it remains a widely cited work for details of the trade.²⁰ Pierre Chaunu’s *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques* is also cited for the statistical information on the flow of silver from Latin America.²¹ Building on his work economic historians Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez have argued that the field of economic history has failed to see the economic events of the early modern period in global terms by ignoring the vast drain of silver to Asia across the Pacific. In light of arguments about a European trade deficit with Asia in the seventeenth century, Flynn and Giráldez ask, “…why does no one maintain that this Pacific drain of silver was caused by dynamic Mexican demand for Asian products….”²² They find the omission of colonial Latin American demand particularly disconcerting because according to some estimates, in the seventeenth century the amount of silver sent across the Pacific per year equaled the combined amount sent to Asia by the Portuguese, Dutch and the English.²³

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²³ Ibid.
This project takes their call for paying attention to the colonial Latin American market seriously since it investigates the status of Asian commodities in colonial Mexican society. The essays by Flynn and Giráldez prove that there was a vibrant demand for Asian goods in colonial Latin America, and this work shows how the demand manifested itself in Mexican society. The chapters set in Mexico focus on the ways in which Asian commodities were appropriated according to the social, cultural and political needs of the society.

The question of the tastes and preferences of colonial Latin American consumers has only recently garnered the interest of historians. In her article “Made in China, Made in Mexico,” Dana Leibsohn uses inventories as one means of understanding how Mexican consumers of Asian and Chinese goods might have valued them. Based on her investigation she argues that certain imports from China were seen as “parallel” to imports from Castile. For Leibsohn this suggests a new kind of hybridity particular to Spanish America that is not seen elsewhere.24

It is true that colonial Mexican perceptions of Asian commodities were unique, but the research presented here suggests that there were times when a conscious decision was made to use an Asian name, person or commodity when European counterparts were available. In these instances the Asian goods were not seen as parallel to European goods, but as superior to them. The myth about the tiles of Casa de los azulejos coming from China instead of Europe is one such example. This is not to say that the consumption of Asian goods led to a sense of Mexican nationalism, but the unique position of Mexico being situated in the middle of Spain and Asia did afford the colonial society opportunities to distance itself from the metropole. Evidence of this can be seen in the preference for Asian goods and in the manner in which they were incorporated into the society.

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The way in which craftsmen in colonial Mexico reinterpreted Asian designs was also unique as compared to European reproductions of Asian goods, a topic that art historian Gustavo Curiel has dealt with. He refers to the phenomenon of adopting Chinese aesthetics in Mexico as “Chinese mimicry” to distinguish it from the term *chinoiserie* used to describe European interpretations of East Asian aesthetics. He defines this mimicry as “…varied interpretations of what the country’s inhabitants imagined East Asia to be like, but with recourse to images of local architecture [and flora, fauna, etc]. Thus the [Mexican] artist availed himself of the reality that surrounded him.”

The chapter set in Puebla explores the reality of the potters of Puebla who reinterpreted Chinese designs for their ceramics. It is not limited only to their visual world, but also considers the sociopolitical reality of the city and region they lived in. Such an investigation reveals that the potters’ rendering of foreign motifs into locally recognizable forms was not always because they could not replicate them or because they were interpreting them based on what they knew. They were often indigenizing Asian motifs because they wanted to make ceramics that appealed to consumers as a locally significant product and not just as replacements for Chinese porcelain.

**Sources**

Ceramic objects are the major historical source for this project. These include both Chinese porcelain and Mexican earthenware and within these larger categories the focus is especially on blue-and-white ceramics. Catalogues compiled by George Kuwayama, Maria Bonta de la Pezuela and Rocío Díaz are excellent resources for locating examples of Chinese

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porcelains that were brought to Mexico. However the provenance for some of the objects that these authors write about is not known; we do not know when exactly they came to Mexico.\textsuperscript{26} Shipwreck findings are the most accurate source for locating objects that were sent from Manila to Acapulco, and the findings from the discoveries of the San Diego shipwreck (1600) and the Nuestra Señora de la Concepción shipwreck (1638) are the most well known.

Amongst the earthenware ceramics made in Mexico, the focus is on the finer ware, which was painted in blue. Many of the objects in this category incorporate Asian designs. For these ceramics the problems of provenance are different. The potters in Puebla were supposed to sign their fine pieces according to guild ordinances, but few of the surviving objects bear signatures. Although it is not possible to match potters with their objects, the ordinances and other documents pertaining to the potters’ guild, such as the potters’ examinations were useful for understanding how the potters were expected to practice their craft.\textsuperscript{27} Only after learning about the official rules can one see when and how they were broken and determine whether these transgressions were significant to the making of the loza poblana style.

Textual sources on porcelain production in Jingdezhen are significantly different from the records of the potters in Puebla. Artisans in Jingdezhen were at times organized into guilds according to their particular vocation or based on clan relationships, but we have little information on these groups.\textsuperscript{28} The sources that do exist on the production process describe the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Many of these records were compiled in the early twentieth century by Mexican scholar Enrique Cervantes. See \textit{Nómina de loceros poblanos durante el periodo virreinal} (Mexico: 1933) and \textit{Loza blanca y azulejo de Puebla} (Mexico: 1939).
\end{itemize}
many steps and some discuss the skill of the potters. For the most part these works were not written by artisans themselves and therefore do not offer insight into what aesthetic decisions were the artisans’ own.

The difference in the kinds of sources available for each site and the information that can be culled from them is telling of the perceptions and concerns of the two ceramic industries. The superiority of Jingdezhen ceramics was known both in China and abroad and thus there was an eagerness to record the manner in which they were made. The Chinese sources that describe the production process of porcelain were written by officials and scholars for an audience that was of a similar station. They serve as a testament to the diligence of the artisans and the efficient division of labor found in Jingdezhen, but do not include instructions, formulas, or recipes that could provide technical information on making porcelain, which were known only to the artisans themselves.

By contrast, the records we have for the ceramic industry in Puebla were written by practitioners of the craft themselves and they served as guidelines for members of their community. The technical instructions and biographical information that is included in these records represent the concerns of the guild leaders to maintain control over the development of the craft by setting rules for who could practice the craft and how.

The textual record pertaining to the ceramics is used in combination with other visual and material sources. The meanings ascribed to both the Chinese and Mexican ceramics can be studied in paintings that depicted them, including still-life paintings, miniatures, casta paintings, and images on folding screens. These paintings offer glimpses into aspects of life in colonial Mexico that are not often included in textual sources. In addition to depictions of ceramics,
paintings of ports, cities, and marketplaces provided visual clues about the places where goods were exchanged and traded.

For information on the way the trade was conducted Spanish archival sources are helpful to a certain degree, these include ship manifests, cargo lists of passengers and crew and official correspondence. The official sources, including the records of what was being carried on the ships, was not always accurate and repeated decrees are proof that the rules were often broken. For unofficial accounts of what was happening lay histories, memoirs and letters are excellent sources. The writers of such documents had their own prejudices, but they provide descriptions of the atmosphere of a place and their biases reveal what kinds of observations were important to writers and readers of the time.

The authors of these types of sources are introduced in the chapters as they are cited, but one individual, Italian traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, commonly referred to as Gemelli Careri, appears in all four of the main chapters so deserves an extended introduction here. Careri was born to a noble family in Radicena in 1651. He studied law and worked in Naples until some misfortunes forced him to travel. On this first significant tour of his life he restricted himself to Europe, but having tasted the joys of travel, the next time he chose to go on a journey in 1693 he went on a tour of the world. He began his voyage to the east with Sicily and Malta and on to Alexandria. From there he continued further east through Palestine, Persia,

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29 Many of these documents can be found in Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson’s 55-volume *The Philippine Islands*, which consists of primary documents on colonial Philippine history translated into English by the two authors. Emma Blair and James Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493 – 1898: Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and Their Peoples, Their History and Records of the Catholic missions, as Related in Contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, Showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of Those Islands from Their Earliest Relations with European Nations to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century, 55 Volumes* (Cleveland, Ohio: The A.H. Clark Company, 1903 – 1909).

30 Surendranath Sen, ed., *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri: being the third part of the travels of M. de Thevenot into the Levant and the third part of a voyage round the world by Dr. John Francis Gemelli Careri*, (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1949), xx-xxi.
India, China, the Philippines and across the Pacific to Mexico, from where he returned to Europe. The entire journey took him more than five years and throughout that time he kept a meticulous journal with observations that have proved useful to historians over the years. The journals were published in six volumes in Italian in 1699-1700 and subsequent translations in other languages were made available shortly after, the English one as early as 1704.\(^{31}\)

Although not every event or observation that Careri included in his work can be verified or taken to be the truth, his account adds more detail to what we know of the places discussed in this study. Careri did not go to Jingdezhen himself, but while he was in China he was informed of the place where the porcelain was produced, which he correctly identified in his work as belonging to Jiangxi province. He also described the production of porcelain as he understood it, which is telling of what foreigners knew of the material in the late seventeenth century.

From China Careri went on to travel to Manila, Acapulco, Mexico City, Puebla and other destinations before returning to Europe. His writings can tell us what Manila was like or how Puebla differed from Mexico City, but by following his journey we cannot learn how exactly the trade networks were created that facilitated his travel. Careri’s memoir also has the benefit of providing the perspective of someone who was not part of the Spanish empire, but he only noted those details about the trade that pertained to his travels and experience.

Other textual sources, such as histories written by the colonizers of the Philippines, tell us the motivations of the Spanish Crown and recount the military feats that led to the conquest of Manila, but they provide an overarching narrative of how the trade was established and emphasize the role of the Spanish.

The advantage of writing a history of the trade from the perspective of one particular commodity is that it ruptures the meta narratives created by histories written from the perspective

\(^{31}\) Ibid., xxiv.
of a colonizing force. These ruptures can be seen in the sites that we follow the objects through. In these various places we are forced to reckon with the tangibility of objects and recognize the tactility of commerce. We have to consider the hands of the people who made the commodities of trade, those who packed and shipped them, and those who treasured and studied them.
CHAPTER TWO
Crafting a Global Brand: Jingdezhen and its Porcelain

Introduction

In the nineteenth century Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem titled “Kéramos” dedicated to the many ceramic traditions of the world. In this work the poet goes on a journey through different regions that were known for their ceramic art. He moves from places as diverse as Delft in the Netherlands, to Cairo in Egypt and eventually to Jingdezhen in China. The stanzas on Jingdezhen describe it as an industrious city that produced ceramics, which were distributed worldwide:

O'er desert sands, o'er gulf and bay,
O'er Ganges and o'er Himalay,
Bird-like I fly, and flying sing,
To flowery kingdoms of Cathay,
And bird-like poise on balanced wing
Above the town of King-te-tching [sic],
A burning town, or seeming so,--
Three thousand furnaces that glow
Incessantly, and fill the air
With smoke uprising, gyre on gyre
And painted by the lurid glare,
Of jets and flashes of red fire....
To all the markets of the world,
These porcelain leaves are wafted on

In the next stanza Longfellow goes on to write about the Chinese porcelain from his childhood, describing a pattern he remembered: “with its bridge of blue/Leading to unknown thoroughfares;
The solitary man who stares/ At the white river flowing through.” Motifs with arched bridges or pagodas with Chinese figures were commonly seen on export ware that went on to inspire imitations in Europe (Figure 2.1).

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In the eulogistic poem Longfellow praises all the ceramic traditions that he chooses to include, but he only writes about the ceramics of Jingdezhen as having wide global appeal. His ode is telling of what people in the Western world knew or imagined Jingdezhen to be and it speaks to the resonance of the ceramics produced in Jingdezhen; they were so far-reaching that they appeared even in the poet’s dreams. The aim of this chapter is to understand how a southeastern city in China was able to produce high quality ceramics in great quantities. As the production process unfolds through the narrative, the bodily skills of the artisans and the efficient division of labor emerge as two significant factors that were key to the quality and long lasting impact of Jingdezhen porcelain.

Figure 2.1 Butter dish and three octagonal dishes, porcelain with underglaze blue, Jingdezhen, eighteenth century. Discovered in the Geldermalsen shipwreck (1751). These objects bear the pattern mentioned by Longfellow in his poem with a bridge over the river. In this rendering there are two figures instead of one. Patterns such as these were produced for the export market and later imitated and spawned new designs, such as the popular “Willow Pattern” renowned in England.

The characteristic blue-and-white jars, plates, cups, ewers, etc. made in Jingdezhen can be considered an early modern global brand because to consumers these objects evoked a sense of luxury and were seen as representative of their country of origin, China. The association is obvious in the English language where fine porcelain objects are literally referred to as “china.”
Art historian Craig Clunas first used the term “global brand” to describe Chinese porcelain. He argued that blue-and-white porcelain can be considered the world’s first brand due to its distinctive features and wide availability:

Silver, both in the form of ingots and latterly in the form of actual European coins that have been recovered by archaeologists, moved to China to pay for...silks and for the ceramics that are arguably the world’s first global ‘brand,’ with shards and whole pieces of the distinctive blue-and-white porcelain now so firmly associated with the Ming (it came into widespread use in the fourteenth century); the evidence is distributed across the globe, appearing in the excavated site of a Prague hospital and the treasure chambers of Ottoman sultans, in contexts ranging from the mosques of East Africa to the sacristies of Peruvian cathedrals, and to shipwreck sites in California, South America, South Africa and even Australia.²

Much of the silver that Clunas mentions came from New World mines in Mexico and Peru, where Asian goods were in great demand. He also points out that some of the silver paid for silk, which was certainly more valuable than porcelain, but since it was of different varieties and sometimes traded in its raw form it could not become a recognizable brand in the way that blue-and-white ceramics could.

The brand value of Chinese blue-and-white porcelains is evident in paintings from around the world that depicted the prized objects. One such example is a fifteenth century painting from Samarkand or Tabriz depicting a procession (Figure 2.2). In this painting several different figures are shown in possession of blue-and-white ceramics that resemble ceramics from the Yuan and early Ming dynasties. The various guan form jars are not the main feature of the painting, but due to their coloring, they stand out in the desert landscape and are depicted in a manner that clearly shows that they were valuable to the people they belonged to.

In another painting by Dutch artist Willem Kalf, a porcelain *guan* is the highlight of the painting, which is titled *Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar* (Figure 2.3). As access to Asian commodities increased during the early modern period, paintings depicting Chinese porcelain became more common. The material qualities of porcelain, such as its translucence and shine, as well as the blue surface decoration, made the objects ideal for still life paintings. By including these ceramics in his paintings and depicting their properties properly, an artist could show off his skill.

Figure 2.2. 15th century album painting from Samarkand or Tabriz possibly depicting a bridal procession through the desert with carts carrying amongst other things, blue-and-white porcelain. Two other figures are shown conspicuously holding blue-and-white objects as if literally showing them off. The motifs on these various containers resemble Yuan and early Ming Dynasty ceramics (See Figure 2.12).
Figure 2.3. Willem Kalf (1619 – 1693), *Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Jar*, 1669. Oil on canvas. The glass like qualities that were treasured about the porcelain are highlighted in this painting where we can see the reflection of the leaves in the jar. Depictions of blue-and-white porcelain are found in still life paintings from other European countries, as well as in Mughal court paintings and religious and *casta* paintings from colonial Mexico.

In addition to paintings, Chinese ceramics also spurred imitations, or knock-offs so to speak, around the world. Many ceramic production centers around the world developed blue-and-white ceramics of their own, inspired by the Chinese porcelain introduced to them. Some of these places included Korea, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico, the Netherlands, France and England. Even though these places did not necessarily have access to the right materials or the knowledge to produce porcelain, they worked with what was available locally to create objects that were modeled after Chinese ceramics (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).
Jingdezhen porcelains were prized commodities around the world in part due to the skill of the craftsmen who made them. These artisans worked in a highly efficient system where they could mass-produce objects. In this chapter we see what daily production in this system would have looked like. Porcelain, or any ceramic, is made from raw materials dug out of the earth, which go through a series of transformations. The process is long and arduous and requires the aid of many different types of tools and technology. In order to meet the demands of “all the markets of the world,” the system of production in Jingdezhen was segmented into discrete tasks so that the artisans could produce high quality objects of near perfect uniformity in great quantities (Figure 2.6).

In the chapter the focus is more on the skills of artisans within this system rather than the management of the system, for which he have documents written by administrators and officials. The emphasis on the artisans is due to the fact that they are often not included in histories that discuss the commodities that spurred global trade. They are also neglected in narratives that
point to the significance of novel objects in the creation of new aesthetics and technologies. This omission is partly due to the fact that the particular skills of artisans are difficult to communicate since they are bodily practices.

When the production of porcelain is explained scholars often write about the ways in which the chemical properties of the clay change at the different stages, but the question of how artisans worked the materials to elicit those changes is a subject that remains elusive. Although we know that it was through artisans’ physical effort that porcelain was made it into a global commodity, describing that effort is not a simple task. The goal of the chapter then is to institute the artisans’ skill into a study of global trade, a topic which is usually investigated from the perspective of merchant or imperial interests.

Figure 2.6. Blue-and-white porcelain objects recovered from the wreck of the San Diego (1600), which was headed to Acapulco from Manila. The image shows a set of onion-shaped bottles and bowls decorated with the same design. The uniformity of the objects was possible due to the factory production process of Jingdezhen.

**Research Methodology**

Research for this chapter consisted of learning the basics of pottery, fieldwork in Jingdezhen, and consulting historical records that described the production process. I learned the basic elements of throwing, glazing and firing ceramics and observed artisans at work at several
sites in Jingdezhen. To an unknowledgeable eye, the work of an individual artisan who was in charge of particular step of the process, such as pouring glaze on vessels, might seem menial, but what is not obvious is the knowledge the artisan had of the proper viscosity of the glaze, the manner in which he knew how to hold the object or the tools to ensure a smooth motion, and the speed and rhythm with which he worked so that the glaze would flow unimpeded for an even coating.

French scholar François Sigaut wrote an essay titled “Technology” in which he considered the utility of studying technics. Some of the points in that essay have proven useful for the investigation of artisans’ skill in this chapter. Sigaut argued that skill and knowledge are two different steps, and that converting knowledge into skill required learning. For example, I could have the knowledge of how something was made, as I did from reading about the ceramic production process in Jingdezhen, but not the skill of actually making ceramics. Therefore I decided to learn how to make ceramics and it was in the process of learning the skills myself that I understood what specifically a potter’s knowledge consisted of. Historical sources describe the importance of training the body in specific ways to accomplish the different tasks, and these texts were useful as supplements, but were inadequate for understanding how the body had to be used or controlled to become competent at a particular task. By practicing the craft myself I could communicate what the potters’ skills were as a bodily practice.

Sigaut also writes that an artisan’s skill was not merely a matter of technical deftness, but rather consisted of an intimate familiarity with materials, tools, measurement systems, visual

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imagery, etc.⁴ Thus watching an artisan repeatedly pour glaze might give the impression that his work is merely about being agile or swift when in fact his skill is also contingent upon mastery of the properties of the glaze and the tools used to apply it. Through discussions of my own training I write about the elements of a particular skill that I lacked as a novice, and in so doing bring attention to the capabilities of a master craftsman.

The bowl shown in Figure 2.7 is hand-thrown on an electric wheel. Its form is not uniform because while lifting the wall my hand pulled too much or too fast, making a portion of the body thinner and uneven compared to the rest of the object. The error is noticeable in the final product, but while shaping it I was not aware of when exactly I applied more pressure than was necessary thus marring the circular shape.

It is possible that after months of practice I would have become comfortable with working on the wheel, but it was not a skill that could be acquired in a six-week class. Building with clay on the wheel allowed me to understand that in certain parts of the process the speed of the rotation of the wheel mattered, that the slightest change in pressure or speed with which the hands were working could alter the shape of the object, and that one’s posture and state of mind could also affect one’s ability to shape an object. Thus to master this step of the process I not only had to be familiar with the specific properties of the clay I was working with, but also had to understand my own body and recognize the slightest or unconscious movements I might be making.

⁴ Sigaut, 439.
Along with some of my classmates I also experimented with glazing and firing this bowl in a homemade kiln. We followed a basic recipe for a *raku* glaze and measured the chemicals and applied it ourselves. The bowl was fired in a trash-bin kiln in a reduction atmosphere (where the oxygen is removed from the kiln), which is what gave it the splashes of copper on the inside. The instructions for building a kiln with a trashcan are widely available, as are instructions for doing a *raku* firing. We could have used the glazes provided in our pottery class and have our objects fired for us, but we wanted to try to do it ourselves in order to understand the physical and chemical transformations of the clay. Yet, attempting to prepare the glaze and do the firing on our own showed us how little we actually understood the properties of the materials we were working with. We were able to follow instructions, but did not know ourselves why certain elements produced the effects they did. Such knowledge would require long periods of trial and error to understand the chemicals and their effects when used in different quantities. An experienced potter also knows how the effects change based on the firing temperature or atmosphere in the kiln.

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5 The word *raku* comes from Japanese and refers to a teaware that was produced there. In contemporary practice *raku* refers to a process of making ceramics in which low-temperature glazes are applied to a ceramic body. Towards the end of the firing process it is smoked or placed in a reduction atmosphere. See Susan Peterson, *The Craft and Art of Clay* (Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 211. The process is simple enough to be tried without specialized equipment which is why it was suitable for our experiment.
This training was necessary for research on the production process in Jingdezhen for several reasons. First, I understood what the bodily practice of working with and shaping clay consisted of. Second, in attempting many different steps of the process I understood how detailed each task was and the diverse sets of skills one had to acquire to master each one. The potential for destroying or marring the delicate objects lurked at every step. It made sense then that the production of ceramics in Jingdezhen was divided as minutely as it was in order to make great quantities of ceramics, minimize the margin of error and ensure the objects were standardized.

Yet despite the division of labor, there also had to be a synchronicity in the system. The way one task was performed could affect the next, for example if a particular type of glaze was
applied, the firing had to be done accordingly. When one person is in charge of the production from beginning to end, she knows how each step relates to the other one and what modifications need to be made. In a system where the labor was divided, the work was also coordinated remarkably well to ensure a successful firing.

In addition to learning how to make ceramics, I also observed artisans at work at several different sites in Jingdezhen. At the Folk Kiln Museum in Jingdezhen the artisans do not use any motor powered tools and many parts of the process are performed much in the same way as described in first-hand accounts and other texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the museum’s aims is to recreate the workshop model that was in operation in Jingdezhen. As a visitor one experiences an idyllic and beautiful setting that does not resemble the atmosphere of workshops in a town where thousands of kilns were burning in the premodern era.6

I was aware of the affective nature of presenting the work of the artisans in such a manner, but the goal for research at the museum was not to imagine the work environment of the artisans. Rather I was interested in observing their bodily movements, their postures, their techniques for holding and working with their tools, their speed, and the way they coordinated their efforts, all details pertaining to how specifically the objects were made (Figure 2.10). Prior experience in throwing and glazing helped with this part of the research because I was already familiar with the process and the challenges of each different step. The contrast between the artisans’ abilities and my own revealed the depth of their skill and knowledge of the materials they worked with.

6 Historian Vanessa Agnew has written on the problems with historical reenactments. See “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present,” Rethinking History 11, no. 3 (September 2007): 299–312.
Today there are several workshops in Jingdezhen where parts of the production process are still done by hand in the traditional manner. These workshops are open to the public and the artisans are often willing to speak with visitors. One such workshop was the Jingdezhen Jiayang Taoci Youxian Gongsi (景德镇佳洋陶瓷有限公司). There were also workshops that specialized in a certain type of ware, such as tiles or oversized jars and vases. One workshop was known to make such delicate pieces that they had to be fired twice, once after they were shaped so that they would be dry and sturdy enough to decorate and a second time after they had been painted and glazed. At this particular workshop I was invited to paint an object, and it is referred to as the “Twice-firing Workshop” in the chapter.

![Painter at a workshop in Jingdezhen. Note her posture and the way she uses the wheel and the paintbrush. One hand is on the wheel so that she may turn it without having to interrupt her painting. She is holding the brush in such a way as to be able to paint a certain part of the object properly depending on its curvature. Different brushes are used for different purposes and the artisan also has to have knowledge of those. There is a small piece of sponge between the heel of her palm and the vase so that she does not smudge the parts that have already been decorated.](image)

The artisans I spoke to in these workshops were young men and women, most of whom had gotten their training at the local Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute. They spoke to me in Mandarin about their jobs and asked about my own interest in Chinese ceramics. For the most part they were trained in a specific part of the process. The young man who threw pots at the Jiayang
workshop did not trim the objects he gave shape to. He had a repertoire of thirty to forty different shapes that he could make, suggesting that their training was focused on specific types of objects as well as being focused on a particular part of the production process. In the contemporary workshops the work was often divided according to gender, where men did the shaping of the objects and women did the painting.

Sources

The potters that produced the porcelain did not write their own treatises, and the Chinese sources that do exist were written by scholars and officials on the production process and the administration of the kilns of Jingdezhen. Sources by foreigners include the writings of Jesuits who were interested in how exactly porcelain was made in order to impart the knowledge to artisans in Europe. Given the limitations of these various documents, the fieldwork was integral to the research so that together with the textual and material sources I could analyze the physical production of porcelain.

The earliest Chinese source that specifically discusses ceramic production in detail is *Tiangong Kaiwu* (Heaven’s Craft and the Creation of Things 天工開物), a manual on various productive industries of China published in 1637.⁷ It was written by a scholar by the name of Song Yingxing (b. 1587) who was not an artisan himself and wrote the encyclopedic work for laymen. Historian Dagmar Schaeffer has shown that Song’s approach to writing about the different crafts was to be comprehensive and factual because as a scholar he believed that he

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⁷ Ellen Huang, “From the Imperial Court to the International Art Market: Jingdezhen Porcelain Production as Global Visual Culture,” *Journal of World History* 23, 1 (2012), 125.
could record in writing the things that one could observe from “seeing and hearing.”

For Song the world was divided into two groups: scholars and commoners. In his conceptualization the scholars were the only ones who possessed intelligence and talents and therefore had the ability to communicate what the craftsmen did. He did not consider the craftsman himself to be knowledgeable.

Song’s account is useful for its descriptions but his writing about craft stands in contrast to this study in fundamental ways. He believed that he could write about the craft just by observing it and without having any physical knowledge of it himself. The methodology presented here shows that as a scholar, learning the basics of the craft can be a means to access what it was that the craftsmen knew. It follows then that in this study craftsmen are seen to possess an intelligence that was integral to the production of commodities and therefore to the creation of global trade.

Another account of the manufacturing process in Jingdezhen was written by Tang Ying (1672 – 1756), who was the imperial officer in charge of the kilns in Jingdezhen from 1728 – 1756. One of his works can be seen as the captions to illustrations that were commissioned by the emperor on the production process in Jingdezhen. Tang’s work summarizes the entire process in twenty steps, which in some regards is quite brief, but still useful for providing an overview and presenting some of the different kinds of labor and skill that were necessary.

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9 Ibid., 235.

10 Huang, 127. I have used Stephen Bushell’s translations of Tang Ying’s writings titled “The Twenty Illustrations of the Manufacture of Porcelain” published in Robert Tichane’s *Ching-te Chen: Views of a Porcelain City*. The original in Chinese is in the official annals of Jiangxi province in book xciii, folio 19-23.

11 The twenty steps in Tang’s illustrations are the following: “Mining for the Stone and Preparation of the Paste”; “Washing and Purification of the Paste”; “Burning the Ashes and Preparing the Glaze”; “Manufacture of the Cases or Saggars”; “Preparation of the Molds for Round Wares”; “Fashioning the Round Wares on the Wheel”;
His descriptions were used by another scholar, Lan Pu, who also wrote about the production process in his *Jingdezhen Taolu* (Records of the Jingdezhen Kilns 景德鎮陶錄) published in the nineteenth century. In both Tang and Lan’s work the importance of the division of labor is prominent, and within this division they mention the expertise of the artisans who were involved in each step of the process. As someone who was living amongst the artisans, Tang’s attitude towards the work of the potters was different from that of Song because he recognizes that the talents and knowledge of the artisans were essential to a successful firing. Yet despite this recognition, Tang was writing as an official for other officials or scholars who were interested in an overarching description of the production process in Jingdezhen and in this context there was not much room for the specifics of the Jingdezhen artisans’ knowledge.

Historian Anne Gerritsen has studied administrative records pertaining to the operation of kilns in Jingdezhen and she writes that such records served the purpose of providing a new official with the knowledge he needed to oversee the operation of workshops. In the case of the development of kiln technology, these records do not tell us about the contribution of master potters who had the expertise for building kilns and firing wares, which was combined with the work of kiln overseers and the skills of the kiln builders and the labor workforce. Such innovations depended on the work of a great many people that are not credited in accounts

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written by the supervisors who were prone to attribute the successful developments to their own
efforts.\textsuperscript{14} This was true of other innovations in the production process as well, such as the
discovery of a proper glaze and the use of cobalt.

We might never be able to know who was responsible for which improvement or advancement in the production process, but there are sources that in the interest of discovering the secret to making porcelain described the work of the artisans in a different manner than that of the scholars and officials. The letters of François Xavier d’Entrecolles (1664-1741), a French priest who was proselytizing in the area in the early eighteenth century, provide details that would not be included in official accounts. His account is not exhaustive, but does provide a comprehensive view of the production process in Jingdezhen.\textsuperscript{15} D’Entrecolles was general superior of the French mission in China between 1706 and 1719 and superior of the French residence in Beijing for ten years between 1722 and 1732. He published works in both Chinese and French. In Chinese he wrote in defense of the Christian faith. For the French audience he wrote about the many aspects of Chinese society that he observed, particularly in the realm of manufacture. He wrote about the making of silk, artificial flowers, synthetic pearls as well as smallpox inoculation.\textsuperscript{16}

D’Entrecolles wrote two letters about Jingdezhen and the porcelain production process. The first one was dated September 1, 1712 and the second, almost ten years later, was dated January 25, 1722. Both letters were written before a formula for porcelain was discovered in

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 175.

\textsuperscript{15} Robert Tichane has included translations of d’Entrecolles’ letters in his edited volume \textit{Ching-te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City}, which is what was used for this study. Robert Tichane, \textit{Ching-te-Chen: Views of a Porcelain City} (Painted Post: New York State Institute for Glaze Research, 1983), 49.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Europe. In his first letter he wrote that he hoped that his “detailed description of all that is concerned with this sort of work should be of some use in Europe.” Presumably he wanted to help Europeans make porcelain on their own. D’Entrecalles’ investigation consisted of observing the process first-hand, speaking with potters who had supposedly converted to Christianity and consulting Chinese books that discussed Jingdezhen, of which he only mentions the Annals of Fuliang, the county where Jingdezhen was located. D’Entrecalles’ amended his first letter to further explain the things he did not fully understand or know when he wrote the initial letter.

While at times d’Entrecalles was impressed with the artisans’ capabilities, he could also be disparaging when he observed a task that he believed was better done in Europe. In those instances his bias is apparent, as is his lack of understanding about what exactly the knowledge of the artisans consisted of. His writings were useful for his observations on how the artisans worked as well as his descriptions of some of the seemingly minor tasks in the production process that were nonetheless quite important for a successful firing.

Through these various sources, the artisans’ own voices are not audible. The porcelain objects are the most obvious link to the artisans themselves, but they cannot tell us about the production process the way the textual sources can. By learning about the process myself I could understand to a limited degree how the artisans’ knowledge was important. This is not to say that by practicing the craft I can speak for the artisan, but rather that my own account can fill some of the gaps in our understanding of the artisans’ role in the making of porcelain.

Anthropologist Fang Lili has done similar work in her exhaustive analysis of the folk kilns of Jingdezhen by combining historical resources with fieldwork in contemporary

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Jingdezhen.\textsuperscript{18} Fang was able to see parts of the process that I could not and I cite from her work when necessary. Her interest in writing about the folk kilns was to detail the development of the craft in Jingdezhen so that the history of the artisans’ work was not lost, which is why she systematically described all the parts of the production process.\textsuperscript{19} She does not speak about it through her own experience as done in this chapter, but through her detailed observations.

While we are both interested in foregrounding the bodily practice of producing ceramics, the goal for this chapter was not to create a catalogue of the artisans’ skills and tasks in the manner in which Fang did. When reading Fang’s descriptions of the artisans’ work, I did not grasp the extent of their knowledge until I had practiced making ceramics myself, which is why I chose to speak through my own experience. Through this methodology I could bring attention to the physical practice of making ceramics instead of just describing the changes seen in the clay at the end of each step.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. The first gives a historical overview of Jingdezhen and describes its geographical and geological fortune. In this section we see that the city was poised to become the porcelain capital of the world due to historical and environmental reasons. The second section of the chapter is a description of the production process of blue-and-white porcelain objects. Discussion of the skills of the potters follows the basic steps of the production process beginning with the quarrying of the clay and ending with the packing of the finished objects. The second section highlights the other significant reason for the success of Jingdezhen’s porcelain: the skill of its artisans. The third and final section of the chapter focuses on a few choice objects made in Jingdezhen that display the skill discussed in the

\textsuperscript{18} Fang Lili, 景德镇民窑 (Jingdezhen Folk Kilns. Jingdezhen Minyao Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshi, 2002).

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 272.
second section. Through these objects we see specific examples of the ingenuity of the potters as well as the diverse markets that they produced ceramics for.

Jingdezhen emerges as one example of the kind of space that developed and expanded due to global trade. Unlike some of the other nodes of the transpacific trade network that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Jingdezhen was not a cultural, political or commercial center of the early modern period that attracted people from around the world. The city’s singular focus on producing porcelain for the world made it almost parochial in some regards. Yet, paradoxically the city also had world historical impact as home to the world’s first global brand.

**The Making of Jingdezhen: History, Geography and Geology**

**History**

The blue-and-white aesthetic that had such a wide reach and appeal has a global history of its own. In China blue-and-white ceramics were first made in the north of the country during the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907). However, these objects were not produced in great quantities and the trend did not last.20 During the time when these first blue-and-white ceramics were made, Jingdezhen, as a designated town, did not exist. Historians have surmised that before the Tang Dynasty the kilns that operated in the area that is today Jingdezhen only operated when the local populace was not involved in agricultural activity.21 It was during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) that the kilns became privately owned and began to focus solely on ceramic production. During this period the craftsmen evolved from farmers to highly skilled potters, specializing in different aspects of the production process.22


It was given the designation of a *zhen* (真), or the market town administration seat, during the Jingde reign (1004 – 1008), hence it is known as Jingdezhen. Kilns in the area flourished during the commercial expansion of the Song because they were producing porcelain for official use and for trade with the Jin or Jurched peoples in the North.\(^{23}\) At this time Jingdezhen was known for producing a white ware known as *qingbai* (青白), which is translated as “bluish-white” because that was the tone produced by the glaze and the firing.\(^{24}\) This porcelain was the precursor to the blue-and-white porcelain that was developed in Jingdezhen during the Yuan dynasty.

Porcelain production in Jingdezhen area also received a boost from the increased consumption of tea in China during the Song period when the beverage became popular beyond the world of the monks who used it as a stimulant for meditation.\(^{25}\) The manner of preparing tea changed over time and required the use of additional utensils, such as a teapot.\(^{26}\) In addition, green tea became more popular which made the white porcelain of Jingdezhen more appropriate for enjoying the color of the tea.\(^{27}\) Since porcelain was particularly well suited for drinking hot beverages, the artisans in Jingdezhen could meet the demands for making vessels for drinking tea just as later on during the Yuan they would meet the demands of consumers in Southwest Asia. Tea was also responsible for increasing the demand for Chinese porcelain abroad. In the late sixteenth century the tea ceremony became increasingly popular in Japan and consumers there

\(^{22}\) Ibid.


\(^{27}\) Finlay, 125.
began to custom order Chinese porcelains. In the seventeenth century tea was introduced to Europe, where demand for Chinese porcelain increased as the beverage gained popularity.

Patronage of ceramics produced in Jingdezhen continued to expand under the Mongols in the Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368) when the kilns developed into larger factory complexes. It was during this period that the blue-and-white aesthetic became prominent again. Two foreign groups were partially responsible for the resurgence and dissemination of blue-and-white ceramics: the Mongols from the north who were ruling at the time and the Islamic consumers in Southwest Asia. During the Yuan Dynasty Jingdezhen expanded as a ceramic production center because the Mongol rulers demanded new products, but more importantly they also encouraged trade, especially with Muslim merchants from Southwest Asia, who initially provided the cobalt that was used for the blue painting of the vessels.

Potters in Southwest Asia had been trying to make blue-and-white ceramics and they had the cobalt to produce a blue color but did not have the right materials to make a white ceramic body. The artisans in Jingdezhen were able combine the two elements to make a product that appealed to these two groups and that eventually became popular beyond the Muslim world (Figures 2.11 and 2.12).


29 Finlay, 128.


31 Ibid., 34.

32 Finlay, 158.

33 Ibid. See also Carswell, 17-8.

Jingdezheng ware, Yuan dynasty, 1320 – 1350. Underglaze blue decoration. During this time the artisans in Jingdezheng made new shapes and designs influenced by artefacts from the Muslim world. The large porcelain dish in Figure 2.11 is an example of such an object. The jar in Figure 2.12 is in the guan form, characterized by its short neck and globular body. It is decorated with a lotus motif and phoenixes on the shoulder and a chrysanthemum scroll on the body. The shape and decoration of this jar very closely resembles the blue-and-white ceramics shown in the album painting from Samarkand in Figure 2.5.

Even after the Mongol rulers were ousted Jingdezheng continued to flourish because the new Ming rulers established an official porcelain factory towards the end of the fourteenth century. At this point the kilns of Jingdezheng were divided into two categories, those that produced imperial porcelain (guanyao 官窯) and those that made the rest (minyao 民窯). Despite the distinction there was considerable collaboration between the two types of kilns. The Ming emperors were known to commission a great variety of objects from the kilns of Jingdezheng,

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36 Ibid., 33.
keeping them busy to the point that the official kilns had to rely on the private kilns to finish their orders.  

The *minyao* wares that were not made or sent to the imperial capital were sold in other parts of China through a network of producers, brokers and merchants. The brokers were based in Jingdezhen and were divided into groups known as *bang*, which were responsible for dealing with buyers from specific regions. Merchants would send in their orders to the particular middleman who was in charge of orders for their region and everything would be arranged beforehand so that very little of the porcelain that left Jingdezhen was not already sold. Beginning in the early seventeenth century Huizhou merchants (from today’s southern Anhui region), who traded porcelain in addition to various other commodities, strengthened and expanded their trade networks and were thus responsible for making Jingdezhen porcelain available in many parts of China and to markets abroad.

Towards the end of the Ming, imperial supervision slackened as the court was losing power and production for private sales to the foreign market increased. Support from foreign markets kept the Jingdezhen kilns active even as new rulers were coming into power, but by the 1670s the civil unrest reached southern China and many kilns in Jingdezhen were destroyed. However this was not the end of Jingdezhen’s prominence. In the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911),

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42 Ibid.
with the support of its emperors, the kilns of Jingdezhen were revived and by the year 1683 they were producing porcelain again.\textsuperscript{43}

As with the Ming emperors, the Qing leaders also took interest in the porcelain produced in Jingdezhen and commissioned porcelain for the palace. In this final period of Jingdezhen’s glory, the artisans continued to innovate and produce new kinds of shapes and glazes and developed their use of overglaze enamels.\textsuperscript{44} Jingdezhen’s prominence in the world of ceramics began to wane in the late eighteenth century due to internal problems of patronage and competition from European ceramic centers that had found formulas to make porcelain. By the end of its reign as porcelain capital of the world Jingdezhen had been producing ceramics for nearly 800 years.

The workshops of Jingdezhen are considered to have formed the biggest industrial complex of the early modern period in China and possibly even in the whole world.\textsuperscript{45} However, there was no central control of this complex. Imperial support of the kilns in Jingdezhen was necessary for Jingdezhen’s development, but at the same time the kilns either survived or were rebuilt following dynastic changes. The potters were somewhat under official control, especially the imperial kilns that produced porcelain specifically for the emperors but when imperial support waned they were mostly beholden to the merchant capital that ensured the continued production and dissemination of the goods produced by these artisans.\textsuperscript{46}

Jingdezhen was a place that was carved out both by local demand, especially from the emperors, as well as foreign consumers’ demand. The emperors who took an interest in


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{46} Fang, Hu and Jian, 314.
Jingdezhen and commissioned objects sometimes put undue stress on the industry but also spurred innovation as the artisans tried to make objects that suited their fancy. Jingdezhen remained a major producer of porcelain because the artisans could keep both local and foreign consumers interested in their products, as a good brand is wont to do.

**Geography and Geology**

Jingdezhen was able to become the porcelain capital of the early modern world partly due to its location. It was fortunate both geographically and geologically. It was close to several bodies of water, which was useful for making ceramics and for transporting them (Figure 2.13). It was connected to the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal so the objects could be taken to the capital when it was in Nanjing and later when it moved further north to Beijing. To transport materials to the south, merchants used the Gan River. On the nine hundred kilometer journey to Canton, the major port for trading with China, there was one day’s trek over the Meiling Mountain Pass, which was the only time land transportation was used. Water transportation was not only useful to take porcelain away but also to bring materials to Jingdezhen, such as the firewood that was needed to fire the kilns.

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47 Finlay, 45.

48 Ibid.
The artisans in Jingdezhen were also fortunate in that they had access to the right minerals to be able to make porcelain, which in the early modern period was a highly desirable material. It was in demand for its aesthetic value as well as its utility. In the sixteenth century its virtues were praised by a Portuguese friar who tried to convince the Pope to use porcelain for his table service instead of silver or glass:

—We have – in Portugal – a sort of service that, being of clay, is so much better than silver in beauty and cleanliness that I advise all princes (if a humble friar can give such advice) not to use any other service and to banish silver from their tables. In Portugal we call it porcelain, it comes from India and is made in China. And the clay is so fine and transparent that the white porcelain is clearer than crystal and alabaster, and those that are striped in blue enrapture the eyes, appearing like a composition in alabaster and sapphires. What it loses in breaking easily, it gains in cheapness. The greatest princes can esteem it for its delights and rarity and it is seen as such in Portugal.49

49 A. Varela Santos, Portugal na porcelana da China: 500 anos de comércio (Lisbon: Artemágica, 2007), 56.
The friar confirms that porcelain objects were identified with China even if they had been procured in other locales and that in the sixteenth century they were a luxury only yet accessible to the very wealthy (Figure 2.14). Porcelain could compete with silver because it was still rare, but the friar also points out that it was cleaner than the metal as well. This was due to the fact that porcelain’s impermeable surface helped decrease bacterial infections because particles of food could not get stuck in scratches and pores the way they did in vessels made of wood, earthenware, and precious metal.  

Figure 2.14. Porcelain ewer with blue-and-white underglaze decoration, circa 1520. The armillary sphere on the bulbous portion of the ewer is a Portuguese symbol. The shape of the ewer itself was developed in the fourteenth century during the Yuan period and is derived from Southwest Asian metalwork objects. It is an example of the kinds of objects the workshops in Jingdezhen developed over time, where they mixed motifs and designs received from different parts of the world.

When we speak of porcelain we refer to a particular type of ceramic body. In most basic terms this body is categorized as being white, translucent, and high firing and as a result it is also non-porous. Porcelain can be contrasted with earthenware, which fires to a brown or red color and is porous. Another common type of ceramic body is stoneware, which falls in between

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50 Finaly, 130.
earthenware and porcelain and can be fired at higher temperatures than earthenware but does not have a white body. In order to make blue-and-white earthenware and stoneware objects, they have to be glazed first to make them white, fired once, decorated and then fired a second time, whereas porcelain only needs to be fired once. The earthenware and stoneware imitations are also not translucent like porcelain.

![Earthenware body](image1.png)
![Stoneware body](image2.png)
![Porcelain body](image3.png)

The porcelain in Jingdezhen was made of two materials, *kaolin* or china clay, and *petuntse* or china stone. In the broadest terms, we can think of these materials as “clay minerals,” which when combined with water form clay. The surrounding areas of Jingdezhen had great

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quantities of both minerals. In fact, the word *kaolin* comes from *Gaoling* (高岭), which is the name of the mountain close to Jingdezhen where the mineral was mined. The word *petuntse* comes from *baidunzi* (白墩子), or white bricks, which was the form of the mineral once it had been processed for use.\(^{53}\)

Other parts of the world also have access to these minerals but they were discovered later. For a great deal of time there was mystery around this material that was known to come from China and there were fantastical theories about how it was produced, such as the following one by Portuguese traveler Duarte Barbosa:

They make here [China] great store of porcelain, which is good merchandize everywhere. This they make from the shells of fish ground fine, from eggshells and the white of eggs and other materials. From these they make a paste which they place under the ground “for a certain time.” This among them is held to be valuable property and treasure, for the nearer the time approaches for working it the greater is its value [and this paste they leave as a treasure to their sons, and they always have some left to them by their ancient predecessors with records of it, place by place]. And when the time is fulfilled they fashion it in many styles and manners, some coarse, some fine, and after it is shaped they glaze and paint it. [And in the same place where it was buried they place fresh paste, so they always have the old to work on and the new to bury.]

\(^{54}\) Already by the early sixteenth century, Barbosa was aware that porcelain was something that sold well in different parts of the world. Yet, he clearly did not know what the porcelain was made of or how the “paste” was prepared.

When Italian traveler Gemelli Careri traveled from Canton north into the country to the capital, he stopped in a town that he identified as Vien, which according to him was a point from which all the porcelain of the country was shipped. It is not clear what town he is referring to

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 13.

exactly, but he was aware that not far from that town was the place where all the porcelain for domestic and foreign consumption was made. He did not identify Jingdezhen by the right name, but knew the province:

The wind ceasing, we set out betimes on Saturday the first of October, and came to the town of Vien, which is on the left of the River, and most of the houses are built of timber and canes. Here all the purcellane [sic] is shipp’d off for the Kingdom, and for exportation, the finest of all China, being that of the city of Joacheu, in the province of Kiangsi, which is brought to be shipp’d here.\textsuperscript{55}

Careri went on to describe what he knew of how this porcelain was made. He was better informed than Barbosa:

But it must be observ’d, that the clay is brought from another place to Jaocheu, after it has been there bury’d almost an Age in subterraneous Wells, because of the air and water of that place; for where the clay is dug the work proves not so fine. The colouring we see in the purcellane is not superficial, but after being laid on is cover’d with the same transparent matter.\textsuperscript{56}

Careri knew that the clay in the region was special but that it had to be shaped in a different place than where it was dug. He was also aware that the glaze used to decorate the porcelain was composed of the same material as the clay, suggesting that by the late seventeenth century there was more knowledge about how porcelain was produced. Having access to the right materials was definitely part of the reason why Jingdezhen’s artisans were able to be so prolific, but the manner in which they made them was also significant.

\textsuperscript{55} John Francis Gemelli Careri, \textit{A Voyage Around the World} in \textit{A Collection of Voyages and Travels: Some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English...}, \textit{Volume IV} (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704), 305.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
The Making of Porcelain: Artisanal Skill and Division of Labor

The artisans in Jingdezhen made porcelain by mixing together kaolin and petuntse, both of which required extensive preparation before they could be combined to form a workable clay. The work for mining these materials was done by different groups of people, who knew what properties to look for to find the correct materials in nature and how to properly extract them. Kaolin had to be quarried and then levigated to remove any impurities. The remaining white sediment was then mixed with water and was ready to be used. Petuntse also had to be quarried and then crushed to reduce its particle size. It was also levigated, then dried slightly and made into bricks. After this whenever it was needed it was crushed again and mixed with water so that it could then be combined with kaolin.\(^{57}\) For both minerals the work of gathering the materials and then pounding them or washing them was divided and done by different groups of people, with different sets of skills.\(^{58}\)

Those who were in charge of pulverizing the petuntse had to know how to operate the waterwheel that operated drop hammers that crushed the mineral (Figures 2.18 - 20). This was an innovative way of grinding the material that is still used in some places in Jingdezhen since it is very energy efficient. A wheel is placed in a flowing body of water, which propels the wheel, which in turn operates the hammers.


\(^{58}\) Fang, 265.
Once the minerals had been prepared they had to be mixed together and made into a clay that could be shaped. However, once again, the ones who prepared the clay were a different group of artisans from the ones who prepared the raw materials to make the clay and one of the most important steps before making the clay was to test or sample the materials in order to know how the minerals should be combined based on the type of objects being made.\textsuperscript{59} This testing was done by putting a small quantity of the minerals in the kiln and testing for the amount of

\textsuperscript{59} Fang, 273.
water released, which would tell the artisans more precisely the chemical composition of the minerals. With this information they would know in what quantities the kaolin or petuntse needed to be mixed for that particular batch of clay.

We think of ceramics as the quintessentially handmade objects since the potter’s hand literally shapes the clay. However, in the process of making a porcelain object from beginning to end, different parts of the body were important for the different steps. For example, once the clay had been mixed and prepared it had to be trampled to make it more ductile and workable. In this process it was the feet that were used rather than hands, and as simple a task as pounding on clay with feet might seem, there was a technique even for trampling. The men and women responsible for this task move from the edge of the clay into the center, placing one foot close to the next (Figure 2.21). In Chinese the process is referred to as “trampling the lotus mound” (踩莲花) because the clay looks like a lotus mound.61

60 Ibid.
Once the clay was trampled it could be shaped. The clay was shaped using a potter’s wheel or in molds. Here we will focus mostly on the use of the wheel. In the *Tiangong Kaiwu* Song Yingxing described this part of the process as follows:

To make this type of porcelain body [round wares] first a potter’s wheel has to be set-up. In the wheel a vertical wooden axle is erected, buried in the ground three *chi* (unit of measurement) so that it is safe and steady. On top two *chi* is permitted and on the top and bottom are arranged round plates. The edges of the plates are turned with a short bamboo rod. A mandrel protrudes from the center of the plate. To make all the cups and dishes that do not have to be a specific shape, the clay is held with both hands on top of the mandrel, and the plate is turned. The thumbs with the nails clipped off press the clay at the base and they lightly turn the clay and move it upwards, thus the shape of a cup or bowl emerges.\(^\text{62}\)

After reading this description, an untrained person would not be able to throw an item on a wheel. Only by handling the material can one learn the skill. The artisan who threw the pot had to be in tune with the wheel and the clay. He had to monitor the speed of the wheel as well as know whether he had placed the clay properly in the center and whether it was shaping up proportionally on all sides. The object thrown on the wheel could be fairly thick because in the next step it would be trimmed, but if it was not centered properly then there was not much that could be done when trimming.

In contemporary classes students are told that the clay responds to the slightest of movements, however it is difficult to discern the relationship between the movements of one’s hands and the clay’s response to them. Students also are not always aware of the way they are moving or the kind of pressure they might be applying unintentionally. Song’s description alludes to this period of learning because he says that new apprentices would spoil many pieces and needed a great deal of experience before they could throw identical objects. What he does not specifically say is that the period of learning is a time to understand the material and one’s own body and being conscious of it at all times in ways that one might not be used to while not practicing a craft. Song’s description does include one detail about bodily practice about having the fingernail cut off. This comment alludes to the importance of training the body, disciplining it and keeping it under control.

The effects of throwing on the wheel for a long period of time could literally be seen on a person’s body. The person giving the initial shape to the object on a wheel often rotated the wheel himself with the help of a stick (Figure 2.22). In the time that the wheel was moving he had to give shape to the vessel. Throwing objects in this manner required the potter to sit with his legs crossed or splayed (in the manner shown below) and after years of sitting this way the
bodies of these potters changed. Their gait changed to resemble that of a crab, which was the nickname given to them.

![Figure 2.22](image)

After placing the clay on the wheel, the potter rotated it with the stick. In the time that the wheel was moving he finished making a bowl of the shape and size sitting on the wooden plank. According to a caption to a photograph at the Folk Kiln Museum in Jingdezhen this posture for working caused the potters’ bodies to change: “拉坯者因长期盘膝在坯车上劳动，致使两下肢关节变形，走路一跨一跨，故绰号为螃蟹.” (Because the potter works at the wheel for long periods of time with his legs bent, the joints of his lower limbs transform and he begins to walk one stride at a time, which is why he is nicknamed the ‘crab.’)

Today most studio potters sit on a stool and use an electric foot operated wheel to throw their objects. They might experience discomfort if throwing for an extended period of time but irreversible change to the shape of their bodies is unlikely. Due to the way the system of production was divided in Jingdezhen, artisans were involved in repetitive tasks. Depending on the demand a potter could be expected to work for hours throwing the same type of form. The crab-like gait of an artisan who had to work in this manner is an excellent example that proves the significance of the artisan’s body in the making of a global commodity, while at the same time showing the effects on his physique of his involvement in global trade.
Once an object had been given its shape, it had to be trimmed. The artisan in charge of this step worked with the clay in a different manner. He had to be able to judge how much of the clay he could trim while still leaving it strong enough to stand. He also had to be familiar with the various blades he used and their individual purpose (Figure 2.23).

Song’s description of the trimming process is as follows:

When the unbaked piece is completely dry, as seen by its white color, it is dipped once in water and while wet it is placed once more on the mandrel to be smoothened [pared] twice with a sharp knife (while the ware is being smoothened, the minutest shake of the hand can make speckles in the piece when it comes out of the fire).  

Song emphasizes the confidence with which the artisans had to work, any hesitation in their movements could affect the shape of the piece, and correcting the errors could be very difficult. As with the mastery of the wheel the confidence of using trimming tools came from experience.

Throwing the clay on the wheel was just one in many steps that were required for giving shape to the clay. D’Entrecolles wrote about the manner in which a cup would be shaped and from his description we see that at least four artisans were needed to properly shape an object:

A cup for example, when it comes off the wheel is only an imperfect cap-shape, a little like the top part of a hat which has not yet been applied to a form. This worker only gives it the height and the diameter that is desired, and it leaves his hands nearly as soon as it starts there…The cup, on leaving the wheel, is next received by a second worker who sets it on its base. A little after that it is delivered to a third who puts it on its mold and impresses the form on it. This mold is on a kind of wheel. A fourth worker polishes this cup with a chisel, especially toward the rim, and makes it as thin as is necessary to give it some transparency…It is surprising to see with what speed these vessels pass through so many hands.  

Working with great speed could only have been possible if each artisan had mastered his particular task. Each of these steps that is described by d’Entrecolles required knowing how the clay would react to different motions and tools.

From these various descriptions written by Song and d’Entrecolles we see that there were many demands made on the artisan’s body. He had to learn the task through observation and keep repeating it until he could do it properly. He also had to keep his body in shape, and then continue to practice until he had mastered his skill and could work swiftly and confidently without making errors. The finished objects are silent about the amount of work that was required to make them, but even observing the artisans at work can be misleading because they seem to be working with great ease.

Controlling and disciplining the body was not just required of the artisans who worked on the finer parts of the process of making porcelain. Even porters who were responsible for transporting finished pieces from one work station or workshop to the next had to move their bodies in very specific ways. These men had a special way of carrying the delicate vessels over

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64 D’Entrecolles, 71-2.
their shoulders with the help of wooden planks (Figure 2.27). They could be seen and heard on the streets of Jingdezhen as they tried to move between workshops. D’Entrecolles was impressed with their skill and ability to move through the crowds:

I was surprised to see that a man balances on his shoulders two long boards, on which the porcelain pieces are closely arranged, and that he goes like this through many streets full of people without breaking his merchandise. Truly, people carefully avoid striking him however, for one would be obliged to make good the damage one had caused. But it is astonishing that the carrier controls himself so well, and the movements of his body too, so that he never loses equilibrium.

This method of transporting pieces described by d’Entrecolles is still used today, as shown in Figure 2.24. This man was bringing in pieces to the Twice-firing Workshop so they could be painted. He had to balance his body perfectly because the pieces had no protection; they could easily slip off the planks and be destroyed. The weight on the two boards seems to have been

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65 Ibid., 56.
66 Ibid., 88.
evenly distributed based on the number of objects on each board and they did not slide on the boards as he moved around.

There were many tasks, such as the job of transporting vessels between workshops, in the process of making porcelain that might not be immediately obvious. Song wrote that a piece of clay passed through seventy-two different processes before it was finally made into a cup and he was not necessarily exaggerating.\textsuperscript{67} Each step of the process was divided into as many smaller tasks as possible. For example, the artisans who prepared the pigments for painting the porcelain were a different group from those who selected and separated the pigment based on quality. The following is d’Entrecolles’ description of their work:

The blue material after it has been roasted, must be specially selected, and there is a particular class of workmen whose duty it is to attend to this. The superior kind selected is that which is dark green in color, of rich translucent tint and brilliant aspect. This is used in the imitation of antiques, for the monochrome blue glaze, and for fine porcelain painted in blue. When of the same dark-green color, but wanting somewhat in richness and luster, it is used for the decoration of the coarser porcelain made for sale. The remainder, that has neither luster nor color, is picked out and thrown away.\textsuperscript{68}

It seems that the skill for selecting and separating the different “blue material” was distinct from roasting and preparing it. Tang Ying also confirmed the separation of these tasks in his twenty illustrations. The blue of blue-and-white porcelain is made from cobalt, a mineral which is mixed with a liquid substance, often tea to create an “aqueous medium” to create a pigment.\textsuperscript{69} Cobalt is an ideal mineral for underglaze painting because it survives the high temperatures required for


\textsuperscript{68} D’entrecolles, 149.

firing porcelain. During the Yuan Dynasty much of the cobalt used in Jingdezhen was probably from Southwest Asia, but by the fifteenth century domestic cobalt was being used.

The task of painting the motifs on the objects was also divided into two steps, one for outlining the image and the other for painting it in. Tang describes the separation of the labor for the task of decorating the surfaces:

> The different kinds of round ware painted in blue are each numbered by the hundred and thousand, and if the painted decoration upon every piece be not exactly alike, the set will be irregular and spoiled. For this reason the men who sketch the outlines learn sketching, but not painting; those who paint study only painting, not sketching; by this means their hands acquire skill in their own particular branch of work, and their minds are not distracted. In order to secure a certain uniformity in their work, the sketchers and painters, although kept distinct, occupy the same house.

According to Tang, the only way to ensure uniformity in the objects produced was to divide the process and have artisans focus solely on their particular task. He even says that the ones who sketch were not supposed to learn how to paint so that their hands would become accustomed to performing the one task perfectly. At the Jingdezhen Jiayang Workshop the work is still divided in this manner.

> It was perhaps because the painters were limited in their scope that when d’Entrecolles witnessed them at work in the eighteenth century, he was not very impressed by their skill. He wrote:

> These Hoa-pei, or painters of porcelain are little less destitute than the other workers. This is not astonishing, since the abilities of one of them would not pass for a beginning

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70 Ibid., 29.
71 Carswell, 22-3.
apprentice in Europe. All the skill of these painters and in general for all of the Chinese painters, is not founded on any principle, and only consists in a certain routine helped by a limited turn of imagination. They don’t know any of the beautiful rules of this art.\textsuperscript{73}

D’Entrecelles’ harsh words probably result from the fact that he saw the artisans making the same designs repeatedly and imagined that anyone who could hold a brush could paint these objects. My conclusions, after having observed the artisans and also attempting to paint a porcelain object, were quite the opposite.

In the Twice-firing Workshop I had the opportunity to paint a porcelain cup myself. The owner presented me with two porcelain cups on which he asked me to write my name. They were both meant to be mementos of my visit. I got to keep one of the cups and the other one stayed at the workshop. From the outset I did not know how to hold the brush or the cup or how much paint to collect on the brush. Once I was ready to paint, there was the question of proportions, deciding what size would look best. I wrote small characters first, but it was very difficult to control the brush. On my second attempt, I painted larger characters, which was slightly easier, but took over the cup, and spoiled the refined overall design (Figures 2.25 and 2.26).

\textsuperscript{73} D’entrecelles, 151.
To be able to paint characters properly on these vessels would not only have required training in calligraphy, but also knowledge of the curvature of the vessels because that too affected the manner of drawing the characters. The posture, the choice of paintbrush and the manner of holding the object could all change depending on the shape of the vessel being painted.

The extended experience of painting objects was especially useful when painters made motifs unfamiliar to them, such as the insignia of European monarchs, or wrote in languages unknown to them, such as Tibetan, Arabic or the European languages. The artisans would have been provided with the text that they had to paint onto unfired porcelain objects and to accomplish the task it was not necessary for them to understand the language that they were writing, but rather it was the knowledge of the materials they were working with that mattered. The painters had to be able to envision the foreign design or script as a composite of individual strokes and lines and thus reproduce the image one stroke at a time.\(^74\)

\(^74\) Art historian Lothar Ledderose writes about module production in Chinese art and has described the motifs on Chinese porcelain as composites of lines and strokes in *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 97.
If I return to my own experience of writing on the porcelain cups, I know that had I been asked to write in Arabic I would have been at a loss and my imagination or knowledge of the region where the language originated would not be helpful for the task. I might have succeeded in painting something that looked like Arabic because I would have tried to reproduce the overall image. The skill of the Chinese artisan was in being able to break the image into smaller pieces, each of which he reproduced perfectly so that the end result was a truer imitation. This serves as a way to understand the entire production process of porcelain in Jingdezhen since it was divided into very specific tasks, each of which was performed by a different artisan. These artisans perfected the specific tasks they were to perform and learnt those properties of the materials that were important for them.

After the objects were painted they had to be glazed. Glaze is the glassy substance poured on a ceramic body to make it nonporous, or in the case of porcelain to protect the color of the painting in the firing process. Just as the right combination of kaolin and petuntse had to be found to create the ceramic body, the right glaze also had to be created for the kind of porcelain body produced in Jingdezhen. The glaze used for the blue-and-white ceramics was less fluid than the glazes used for the qingbai porcelain so that the painting would not spread during the firing. The glaze used in Jingdezhen is based on petuntse and is liquid and colorless. Because the ceramic body and glaze are made from the same material the glaze fuses with the body, making it seem as if the clay came with the glaze. When there is not a good glaze fit with the body, during the firing process the expansion and contraction of the body and the glaze can occur at different rates and the glaze can crack or peel off the object. However, at times the glaze would be intentionally cracked to create a particular visual effect.

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75 Wood, 61.
D’Entrecolles might not have been impressed by the work of the painters, but he thought the artisans who applied the glaze were very skillful:

…there is a lot of art in the way in which porcelain is glazed, both for putting it on without any more defects than are necessary, and for spreading it equally on all sides. For porcelain that is very thin and delicate, one applies to thin coats of glaze…First one takes a cup in one hand by the outside and, holding it on a slant over the container of glaze, with the other hand one pours inside enough glaze so that it is nearly filled. This is done for a large number of cups. When the first of these is dry on the inside, one gives them a coat of glaze on the outside in the following manner: one holds one hand inside the cup, and supporting it with a little stick under the middle of its foot, one plunges it in the container of glaze, from which it is removed immediately. 77

The application of glaze did not require many sophisticated tools. A successful glazing of an object was contingent upon the speed and ease with which the artisan worked. The entire process had to be completed in one smooth motion so that the glaze was applied evenly and not allowed to collect in the recesses of an object.

Once an object such as a bowl or a cup was glazed and dried, it was then given a foot. 78 This required the object to be placed back on the wheel, after the bottom was sprinkled with water so that the clay was moist enough to be trimmed and carved out. The object was placed upside down on the wheel and it had to be centered again so that the foot that was being formed would keep the object balanced when finished. At this point a different set of blades were used and the person in charge of the procedure had to be careful not to carve too far so as to make the body too thin at the bottom. Fang writes that the potter used his left hand to keep the object in place and with the right he held the blade. As with earlier steps, the hands had to be steady, and


77 D’Entrecolles, 87-8.

78 Fang, 287.
the artisan had to know the right amount of pressure to apply on the bowl and on the blade.\textsuperscript{79}

Any movement that displaced the object, such as too much pressure while carving, could put the foot off-center and ruin the bowl. Once the foot was carved this part of the piece also had to be glazed. However, the glaze was wiped off the bottom, or those parts of the objects that would touch the saggar in order to prevent the object from fusing to the saggar (Figure 2.27). All these details were necessary, and any misstep could create a defect in the piece.

After the objects had been glazed completely and dried they were ready to be fired, but they could not be placed into the kilns directly. In order to make efficient use of the space in the kiln, objects were first placed in saggars, earthenware cases (Figure 2.30). Saggars protected porcelain objects from the kiln atmosphere and allowed objects to be stacked on top of each other without danger of getting stuck together. These containers were made by a different group of artisans that did not live in Jingdezhen.\textsuperscript{80} Both d’Entrecolles and Tang Ying discuss the making of saggars because they were important for the production of blue-and-white porcelain and d’Entrecolles even mentions the manner in which porcelain objects were placed in saggars:

\begin{quote}
It is necessary for me to describe the manner in which porcelain is placed in these saggars; the worker does not touch the pieces directly with his hands; he might break them, for nothing is more fragile, or distort them, or fill them full of defects. Instead he picks up each piece from the board by means of a little cord. This cord is held by a stick with two branches, or a fork of wood that he takes in one hand, while with the other he holds the two ends of string, crossed or open according to the size of the porcelain piece. It is in this manner that he grasps a piece, raises it gently, and then puts it in the saggar on the little saucer. All that is done with incredible swiftness.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} Fang, 288.

\textsuperscript{80} Tang Ying, 140.

\textsuperscript{81} D’entrecolles, 91-2.
The saggars themselves are incredibly useful objects, but d’Entrecolles saw ingenuity even in the manner in which they were filled. Since the porcelain objects could not be touched, the artisans had to devise a way to place them in the earthenware cases. The little saucer he mentions kept the porcelain object raised and away from the sides of the saggar itself.

![Figure 2.27. Earthenware saggar with porcelain shard. It was possible for pieces to get stuck in the saggars during the firing or if it was not placed in the saggar correctly.](image)

Saggars were meant to protect the objects, but there were many ways in which the objects could still be ruined and there was a great deal of waste in Jingdezhen. Whenever possible, the artisans found ways to reuse materials or use them more efficiently.\(^\text{82}\) For example, broken pieces of porcelain could be reused in the kilns to create a kind of shelving between different layers of objects that needed to be fired.\(^\text{83}\) Another area where conservation was important was in the use of wood for the kilns. Great quantities of wood were needed to keep the kilns running in Jingdezhen and this wood had to be stored properly. There was a particular manner in which the chopped wood was stacked and piled so that it would be protected from the elements.\(^\text{84}\)

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\(^{82}\) D’entrecolles, 94.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.

\(^{84}\) Bai Ming, 123.
By the end of the Ming Dynasty developments in kiln technology also helped reduce the use of wood. Archaeological evidence shows that many different types of kilns had been used in the Jingdezhen area, but by the Ming the egg-shaped kiln was most prevalent (Figure 2.29).\textsuperscript{85} This type of kiln was more fuel efficient than the dragon kiln because it heated up more rapidly and was better insulated.\textsuperscript{86} It was also superior to some of the other kiln models because it allowed for several different types of objects to be fired together since different parts of the kiln reached different temperatures.\textsuperscript{87} The kiln was loaded by a special group of people who knew where to place vessels based on the temperature required.\textsuperscript{88} The firing of the kiln was handled by yet another group of people, some of whom could do a fast firing while others a smooth and even firing. Finally, the work of unloading the kiln was the responsibility of a group of workers who used thick gloves and cloth to protect themselves from the intense heat produced in the kilns.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} Fang, Hu and Jian, 310. Finlay, 93.
\textsuperscript{86} Finlay, 93.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Fang, Hu and Jian, 316.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
Once the objects were made they had to be packed to be transported to their various destinations. There was yet another group of workers that was responsible for this task. By the time Tang was made supervisor, the people who packed the porcelain were known as “mat men.” According to him, the finer quality ware was packed in the following manner:

The round ware of ‘first-class color’ and the vases and sacrificial vessels of the ‘first and second class’ are all wrapped up in paper and packed in round cases, there being packers whose duty it is to attend only to this work. With regard to the round ware of ‘second-class color,’ the dishes and bowls are tied together in bundles, each composed of ten pieces, which are wrapped around with straw and packed in round cases, for convenience of carriage to distant parts.

This was how the porcelain was packed to be transported to the ports. In earlier times when ceramics were sent on the Silk Road the techniques for packing were different. For transportation across land the porcelain was first placed in a container, which was then filled with sand, earth,
soya and wheat and then sprinkled with water. This mixture hardened around the porcelain and protected it on the journey. When the container arrived at its destination, the mixture was again sprinkled with water so it would soften and the vessel could be removed. The packing of porcelain was adapted to the mode of transportation that was used to move it. From the port cities where it was sent on to further locales, such as Manila where yet other techniques were used based on local knowledge and methods of transporting such objects.

**Objects of Note**

A closer examination of a few of the objects made in Jingdezhen can elucidate the kind of ingenuity and skill that could be seen in the southern Chinese city. Not every artisan who worked in Jingdezhen would have been extremely talented. We also do not have many records on individual potters so for the most part we do not know who can be credited for some of the more notable designs and ultimately every object was completed through collaborative effort. The aim in this section is to showcase the variety of high quality ceramics the artisans in Jingdezhen were capable of producing. The objects discussed are impressive for various reasons and highlight the skills of artisans who worked with the clay at different stages of the process. Some are remarkable for their shape, others for the glaze and yet others for the painting. They also represent different styles of ceramics that were produced in Jingdezhen over time.

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92 Carswell, 76.
We begin with the *guan* jar since we are following its journey and it was a popular form in many different markets. This shape was produced in great quantities during the Yuan when the blue-and-white aesthetic was also taking hold. The *guan* is characterized as having an ovoid shape, a short wide neck and a wider mouth than the *meiping* vase, another popular form of the Yuan (see Figure 2.4). It was constructed in segments: two halves were thrown on the wheel and then luted together. The lid could also be thrown and the attached later. Once the form had dried, the object would go through the many steps of the process outlined above.

The material properties of the *guan* that were so prized in many places were indebted to earlier innovations in ceramic production in Jingdezhen. Take for example a pair of cup stands made in kilns in the Jingdezhen area in the Song Dynasty (Figure 2.31). These are known as *qingbai* porcelain and were the precursors to the blue-and-white ceramics that became popular during the Yuan. The bluish-white tone of the vessels is a result of reduction firing in a wood-fired kiln. The porcelain that these objects were made with could be potted thinly and the glaze

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93 Medley, 178-182.
94 Kerr, 95.
was made of the same ingredient as the body, giving the translucent body a shine that made it even more striking and made Europeans compare the material to glass.96

Yet unlike glass, porcelain was more suitable for drinking hot beverages, as d’Entrecolles mentioned in his letter. These vessels would have been used for drinking hot wine or tea. The white color would have been an excellent contrast to the green tea that was becoming popular during the Song. The color and the creamy texture of the cupstands proves why porcelain was such an appealing material both for its aesthetic and utilitarian value. We also see that by an early date Chinese potters were able to make very fine objects both with the wheel and the use of molds. They understood the properties of the clay, how it should be glazed and the kinds of atmospheres it could be fired in. In the subsequent era they built on this knowledge to make blue-and-white ceramics that would become one of the most influential commodities of the early modern world.

Figure 2.31. *Qingbai* Porcelain from the Northern Song Dynasty, 11th-12th century.

In addition to producing strong clay bodies that were white and translucent, the artisans in Jingdezhen were also talented in making a wide variety of forms, including reproductions of

92 Ibid., 96.

96 Ibid.
metal ware. Often these reproductions were bottles or lobed objects, such as the cupstand in Figure 2.31, which is why the porcelain reproduction of a large brass canteen was particularly novel. The brass canteen is from what is today Syria from the mid-thirteenth century and it is believed that the porcelain version was made for Chinese consumers who were interested in Islamic metalware forms in the early fifteenth century (Figure 2.32). 

Reproducing such a shape into porcelain is not an easy task since flat surfaces, such as the walls of the canteen can get warped and crack during firing. The porcelain canteen was fashioned by making different parts of the object separately and then joining or luting them. Given the shape and the size of the canteen, at least a couple pairs of hands would have been required to put it together. This type of collaborative shaping of objects can still be seen in Jingdezhen today. In a workshop that specialized in making oversized jars, as many as three potters worked together (Figure 2.33).

Figure 2.32. Brass canteen with silver inlay. Syria or northern Iraq, mid-13th century. Porcelain canteen with underglaze blue, Jingdezhen, Ming Dynasty.


98 Ibid.
Once the canteen was shaped, the painters chose to paint it with a combination of Chinese and Islamic motifs, thus maintaining a connection between the form and the surface decoration. A wave pattern is used to decorate the edge of the wall of the canteen. A floral scroll arranged in the form of Islamic arabesques takes up much of the surface and in the central roundel is an eight-pointed Islamic star. The artisans in Jingdezhen were masters at adapting foreign shapes and designs in a way that the finished product was of a cohesive design, not a random mixture of motifs. And even when they utilized foreign shapes or designs they did so in a way that highlighted the properties of the porcelain, such as its plasticity and the brilliance of the blue and white combination. By incorporating foreign designs into their repertoire the potters could retain their customers and attract new ones.

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99 Ibid.
The surface decoration on the inside of the bowl pictured in Figure 2.34 is its most remarkable feature. Made for the Japanese market in the early seventeenth century the bowl is made in the Japanese decorative style of *katami-gawari*, which entailed dividing the field into two parts and decorating it in two contrasting designs.\(^{100}\) The Chinese painters of this bowl chose to separate the fields by leaving the middle a blank white. The blue background for the crane and the waves shown close to the peony tree are the most intriguing aspect of the decoration of the bowl. Both of these decorative elements were created by blowing the paint on the bowl, a technique known as *fukuzumi*. Considering that the design is painted on the inside of the bowl makes the artisan’s use and control of the cobalt even more remarkable. The peonies on the tree have been painted with underglaze copper, which has fired to a pink color.\(^{101}\)

In the canteen discussed above the artisans exploited and worked with the plasticity of the clay to create the foreign shape for local consumers. With this bowl they exploited the different minerals used for decorating porcelain to create a design that satisfied Japanese consumers. The

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\(^{100}\) Curtis, 65.

\(^{101}\) Ibid.
innovations and combination of different techniques was another way for the artisans in Jingdezhen to maintain a freshness in their craft.

The bowl in Figure 2.35 displays a unique glazing technique that was used by artisans in Jingdezhen. The bowl was made for local Chinese clientele in the Kangxi reign (1662 – 1722) of the Qing Dynasty. It is decorated with traditional Chinese auspicious imagery, including the Goddess Xi Wang Mu on a phoenix, a bat, and the Eight Immortal Saints from Chinese mythology. The unusual aspect of this bowl is its crackled glaze, which adds another decorative element to the entire design. The faint cracks seen on the piece are intentional and are made by making the glaze crack during the firing process and thus create an intricate network of fissures, giving an additional texture to the glaze. This method of decorating with a crackled glaze was in use since the Tang Dynasty and is more often seen in monochrome vessels.

Figure 2.35. Porcelain with underglaze blue.

To successfully execute a crackled glaze required that both the glaze formula and the firing of the object be controlled very precisely. The bowl highlights the importance of the skill of artisans other than the ones who shaped and decorated the objects since kiln workers would have had to place the bowl in the right location in the kiln and remove or cool it at the appropriate time for the effect to be successful.
The final porcelain object is not one singular object but many identical ones recovered from the wreck of the Dutch ship Geldermalsen (1751). The dishes are similar to the one seen in the beginning of the chapter in Figure 2.1 with a version of the Willow Pattern mentioned by poet Longfellow. The number of identical pieces of porcelain shown in the picture is striking when we know they were not made with modern machinery (Figure 2.36). The fact that sets of objects with matching motifs could be made in Jingdezhen increased the demand for the porcelain produced there. Several sets could be created from the dishes and bowls sent for the Dutch market. The objects recovered from the Geldermalsen shipwreck are a testament to the success of the production process in Jingdezhen and its division of labor.

Figure 2.36. Porcelain with underglaze blue. Bowls and plates with pagoda riverscape pattern.
Conclusion

Despite the advanced kiln technology and the expertise of the various groups of artisans, the making of porcelain was a delicate and fragile process. It was possible for factors such as a change in temperature or weather to affect a firing and ruin a load. The precarious nature led people to seek divine protection of their labors. In his account d’Entrecolles mentioned seeing many temples on the streets of Jingdezhen and both he and Tang wrote about a local potter who was mythologized into a deity for his devotion to the craft and was akin to a patron saint for the potters of Jingdezhen. D’Entrecolles’ version of the myth is as follows:

As each profession has its own particular idol, and as divinity is produced as easily here as the title of Count or Marquis is given in certain countries of Europe, it is not surprising that there is a god of porcelain. The “Pou-sa” (for such is the name of the idol) owes its origin to the kind of designs that it is impossible to make. It is told that once an emperor wanted them to make him porcelain like a given model; they told him many times that it was impossible; but all these remonstrances only served to excite his desire more and more. During their life the emperors are considered a divinity to be feared by the Chinese and they believe that no one should oppose their desires. His officers therefore redoubled their efforts and used all kinds of pressure on the workers. These wretches would spend their money, go to all kinds of trouble, and only receive punishment for it. One of the workers, in a moment of despair, threw himself in a lighted furnace and was instantly consumed. The porcelain that was fired in this lot was perfectly beautiful, and to the liking of the Emperor, who then didn’t ask for anything better. Since that time this poor fellow has been a hero, and became as a result the idol who rules over the works of porcelain.

This account shows d’Entrecolles’ prejudice towards Chinese religion, but the story is still a powerful one. A craft that required such discipline of the body, in this particular instance ultimately required the sacrifice of a body in order to achieve a successful firing.

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102 D’Entrecolles, 96.

103 Ibid., 102.
These local heroes and deities were perhaps also necessary because the potter’s life was not always easy. D’Entrecolles wrote about the impoverishment of the artisans in Jingdezhen and while his account was biased it is true that the industry in Jingdezhen was controlled by merchant capital. They worked for workshops and kilns that supplied orders to the merchants and the competition and rivalry amongst the workshops kept wages low. As early as the Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368) foreign merchants were influential in supporting and promoting the industry in Jingdezhen, and this continued to be true until Jingdezhen lost its position as the leading porcelain producer in the nineteenth century. Despite perfecting their skills and achieving mastery over their craft most artisans did not become rich.

Tang wrote that although the kilns of Jingdezhen provided work to many thousands of workers, the nature of their work was very precarious:

Ching-te-chen, situated within the jurisdiction of Fou-liang Hsien, is only some ten or more li in circuit, environed by mountains and rivers, so as to form, as it were, an island, yet on account of its porcelain production merchants throng to it from all quarters. The private kilns, between two and three hundred in number, exhibit a constant succession of flames and smoke the whole year round, and give employment to not less than several hundreds of thousands of workmen and assistants. The porcelain industry gives subsistence to an immense number of people whose life hangs on the success or failure of the furnace fires, and they are all devout in worship and sacrifice.

104 During the Ming and Qing dynasties every major craft guild had its own patron saint or deity. This was especially true of crafts that involved transforming materials, such as metallurgy, ceramics and lacquerwork. See Anthony Barbieri-Low, Artisans in Early Imperial China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 102 -106.

105 In Jingdezhen even the different types of tasks within the overall production process had their own deities. See Fang Jingdeze Minyao, 145 – 149.

106 Fang, Hu and Jian, 322-3.

107 Finlay, 26.

108 Tang Ying, 170.
Tang describes Jingdezhen as an island, which is an apt symbol for the city. The town was a world unto itself, consumed with producing porcelain. Despite having an impact on ceramic industries around the world, the artisans in Jingdezhen did not come into contact with many foreigners. It is not even clear whether or how the introduction of foreign objects and motifs that were reproduced in Jingdezhen influenced the artisans of Jingdezhen because their tasks were divided so minutely.

The artisans of Jingdezhen created a product that was in demand and Chinese and foreign merchants created networks and organized themselves in a way so that they could make these objects available around the world. Increased demand meant that the artisans had to work more. This was what global trade looked like when seen from Jingdezhen; as the porcelains produced in the city were transported farther, the people who lived there did not become more connected to those distant locales. Jingdezhen stands in contrast to the next site we investigate on the journey of the porcelains, Manila, which became a global hub due to its involvement in long-distance trade.
CHAPTER THREE
From Junk to Galleon: Commercial Activity in Manila

Figure 3.1. Wood with iron fittings, oil paint, early sixteenth century. One of the first known images of the port of Manila painted inside a wooden chest. The latch that closes the trunk can be seen in the top center of the painting. The chest is now housed in the Museo Bello in Puebla in Mexico.

Introduction

The seventeenth century image of Manila shown above is painted inside a wooden chest that was made in the Philippines and sent to Mexico, possibly as a gift from a clergyman in Manila to a colleague in Puebla.¹ The wood used to make the chest was local to the Philippines, but the design of the chest was Spanish and the craftsman who made it was probably Chinese.² The object not only contains a visualization of the port of Manila, but as a whole it also serves as a symbol for colonial Manila, where local resources were used by Spanish and Chinese merchants for a trade that connected Chinese producers to colonial Mexican consumers.

¹ Private conversation with Ana Martha Hernández Castillo, Director of Museo Bello. The museum does not have a provenance for the object, but it is believed that it was sent as a gift from Manila.

² The wood used was perhaps a Philippine mahogany or sandalwood. The iron fittings of the chest and the interior compartments are telling of the object’s Spanish design. See Gustavo Curiel, “Los Muebles,” Elena Horz de Sotomayor and Ricardo Salas et. al. Museo Bello (Puebla: Secretaría de Cultura, 2009), 107.
Judging from this painting of the port, the most active space in the city is a cordoned off area shown in the bottom right. In this part of the city we see many different people congregated. Some are shown on horses with attendants holding parasols for them, other figures are merchants peddling their wares. This area was known as the Parián, the marketplace where much of the commerce conducted in the city took place. There are small boats, known as sampans, shown approaching the market. The goods on these boats would be unloaded and sold in the thatched roof shops shown in the painting.

Figure 3.2. An image made with engraving of the port of Bantam taken from the Dutch D’eeste boeck. Historie van Indien, waer inn ever. Published or produced in Amsterdam, 1598. This is one of the earliest known European images of a market in Asia.

The fact that the wooden chest was commissioned with an image of the port painted inside it suggests a curiosity about the place where these goods were coming from. Such inquisitiveness for the manner in which the things traveled is seen in other depictions of Asian markets as well, like in the engraving from the late sixteenth century of the port and market of Bantam (Figure 3.2). In Mexico City, the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the central marketplace began to be known as the Parián in the eighteenth century. The deliberate connection created between the Asian market and its Mexican counterpart and the visual
renditions of these spaces imply that consumers of Chinese and other goods were fascinated by the places that the commodities traveled through, as well as their origins. In this chapter we move from the site where Chinese porcelain was made to a place where it was exchanged or traded to investigate how this part of the journey mattered to the accessibility and appropriation of these objects in colonial Mexico.

Manila’s colonization by the Spanish Empire was determined in part by the relations between the Spanish and the Portuguese. Spain could not access Asia by going around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa as the Portuguese did due to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). The treaty divided the lands that were known by the Europeans at the time between the two Crowns along a meridian west of Africa. Once a route to Asia was discovered both via the Atlantic and the Pacific, conflicts arose as to who had rights to some of the lands in Asia and another treaty was signed in 1529, Treaty of Zaragoza, in which the Spanish gave up rights to the Moluccas. It was at that point that they began considering the islands that are today identified as the Philippines as their base. In 1542 an expedition was sent forth specifically to investigate the feasibility of occupying the Philippines and in 1564 armed forces conquered some of the islands. They were named the Philippines after King Philip II of Spain and placed under the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

Manila’s founding in 1571 was seen as the moment when global trade began because with the arrival of the galleons carrying silver from the New World, all the major continents of the world were connected in reciprocal relations of trade and exchange. For a few decades

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3 Dana Leibsohn also made this point a recent article in which she wrote: “The value of Chinese things drew sustenance from their site of origin, but no less from the ways in which they traveled and took up residence in American homes.” Dana Leibsohn, “Made in China, Made in Mexico,” in At the Crossroads: The Arts of Spanish America and Early Global Trade, eds. Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka, (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2012), 21.

beginning in the late sixteenth century, Manila was one of the busiest ports in the region, attracting merchants from around the world. It was connected to Jingdezhen, in the Chinese interior through trade but the port city evolved very differently from the porcelain capital of the world. Unlike Jingdezhen, which remained isolated even as its ceramics reached farther shores, Manila was transformed into an entrepôt with the arrival of ships laden with silver from across the Pacific.

Global commerce was significant for Manila’s growth, but the city’s local context and history were conversely influential in the development of the transpacific trade. It had longstanding trade relations with neighboring polities, including China. In addition, it had one of the best harbors in the region making it an advantageous location. Natural resources, such as wood, made it possible to build galleons cheaply and to construct a marketplace to conduct trade. Thus, there was a symbiotic relationship between the local context and outside forces in the making of Manila into an early modern hub.

If we return to the image in the wooden chest, we see that it not only reminds us of the importance of Manila in the trade between China and Mexico, but also points out that accessibility of Asian goods in colonial Latin America depended on the passage of these goods between different people, through shops, and markets. Thus in representing Manila but foregrounding the Parián, the image tells the viewer that what happened in that space was significant. This chapter explains the process by which goods from China were taken from junks and eventually put on to the Spanish galleons. On this journey from one sea-faring vessel to another, the objects were unloaded, unpacked, displayed, repacked, marked, recorded and loaded.

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5 For more on this see Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, “Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 13, 2 (2002); 391-427.

6 Schurz, 29.
again. These activities were significant to the overall functioning of the trade and by following objects through the different tasks we see that a successful commercial exchange required many different skills and a division of labor. Instead of considering the trade as an exchange between two groups of merchants or as aggregate flows of bullion and commodities, the focus in this chapter is on the tactile aspects of commerce.

The work of keeping the trade functioning was mostly divided between the Spanish and the Chinese who lived in Manila. Roughly ten to forty junks arrived from China to Manila every year carrying a great variety of commodities for the transpacific trade as well as supplies for the population living in Manila. These junks also brought Chinese merchants, artisans and laborers to Manila, some of whom stayed and contributed to the economic activity of the city. During the seventeenth century an average of thirty junks sailed to Manila carrying anywhere between 70 to 500 passengers. The population of Chinese residing in Manila fluctuated between a few thousand to tens of thousands in the two hundred and fifty year period.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) trade was officially banned at various times and even when it was allowed, merchants had to procure licenses to be able to engage in commercial activity legally. Despite these restrictions merchants from southern China continued to travel to the South China Sea region, which is why when the Spanish arrived in the region they noted the accessibility of Chinese goods in the islands of the Philippines. The ban on private trade in China

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9 Chia, 519.
was lifted in 1567, by which time the Spanish were establishing themselves on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.  

The region of southern China where most of the Chinese merchants and laborers came from as a whole did not necessarily flourish due to Chinese involvement in the Manila Galleon Trade, but individual families and lineages did. The merchants who participated in this trade did not invest their profits into the infrastructure of the ports where they traded from, but preferred to give back to their homelands due to the emotional attachment that traders or sojourners felt for their native places and lineages. These people chose to either support their relatives or invest in ship building and sustaining their business networks rather than contribute to the general economic development of the area. Traders from Fujian were able to survive and compete with other Asian and European merchants because they had networks that connected different locales in the region.

Similarly, the Spanish merchants were not always concerned with the Crown’s interests. Over time many of the merchants operating in Manila were not from Spain but had been born in Mexico. The demand from the colonies was such that the merchants continued the trade despite protests in Spain due to the loss of bullion and competition from Asian commodities. They often also bought more than what they were allowed to.

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10 For more details on the trade between southern Chinese merchants and Southeast Asian regions in during the Ming Dynasty see Roderich Ptak, “Ming Maritime Trade to Southeast Asia, 1368-1567: Visions of a ‘System’” in C. Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak, eds. From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz, 1998), 157-191.

11 Ibid., 529.

12 Ibid., 530.

13 Ibid.

This is not to say that the Spanish Crown had nothing to gain from the transpacific trade. The taxes on the galleons that went across the Pacific were a source of significant revenue.\(^{16}\) In China too the government issued licenses for merchants to be able to trade in the South China Sea region which brought in income for the government.\(^{17}\) In both cases, the governments profited to some degree from their merchants participating in the trade, but the merchants did not operate with the empire in mind, and often could not be controlled.

In addition to being the center of Spain’s commercial interests in Asia, Manila was also the hub of its religious activities in the region. The various Catholic orders and their clergy were responsible for proselytizing the natives and the Chinese. Their efforts in the community were important to the trade. It could be claimed that the foremost goal of the mission in Asia was the spreading of Christianity which justified continuing the hold on Manila and the trade when the Crown considered terminating it. The clergy patronized the trade by buying and commissioning many of the goods that were brought to or made in Manila. In a less tangible way, the clergy were also helpful because they were some of the first people to learn Chinese and native languages as well as publish dictionaries.

The chapter considers various factors that helped develop and facilitate the transpacific trade, these range from the history of Manila prior to Spanish arrival to the technology of marking bales and loading them onto the galleons. It is divided into three sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the trade between Chinese merchants and the natives of the islands of the Philippines. Trade in this area was vibrant prior to European arrival, to the point

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., 45.


\(^{17}\) T’ien Ju-K’ang, 381.
where Chinese merchants were aware of the specific tastes of the different groups in the region and had the knowledge and ability to procure and provide the goods in demand. When the Spanish arrived they saw that people on the island of Luzon and other places had access to Chinese goods and they chose it as the base for their activities in Asia. The Spanish benefited from the trade relationship between the islanders and the Chinese merchants because the shipping technology and trade routes to bring goods to the islands had already been in existence for a few hundred years, they merely had to insert themselves into an existing network and use their knowledge from conducting trade across the Atlantic to transport goods from Manila to Mexico.

Following the discussion of precolonial trade, the second section of the chapter moves to focus on specific aspects of the Manila Galleon Trade, such as the development of the marketplace, the packing, marking and recording of goods, and the construction and loading of the ships. In the last chapter we saw the level of detail and the extensive production process that was required for making porcelain. In a similar manner, in this second section of the chapter, we see the different steps that were necessary to make goods from Asia available in the New World colonies. Although many of the techniques for building or packing the ships developed out of the transatlantic shipping experience, they were modified in Manila to suit the demands of the transpacific trade. In Jingdezhen it was believed that a piece of clay passed through seventy-two hands before it was finished, and so in this chapter we see that the making of the hold of a ship also required the work of many different people before it was ready and the ship could sail off.

The third and final section of the chapter focuses on the various commodities that were sent from Manila to Mexico. The goods packed into the hold of the ship can be seen as a packaging of Asia, the contents of which became a source of information on Asia for those in the
Spanish colonies in America. The first two sections of the chapter explain how this package was created and the final section shows what it consisted of. Much of this section of the chapter is on the variety of Chinese ceramics traded to colonial Mexico. The diversity of ceramics serve as an indication of the wide assortment of other goods, such as textiles, furniture items, art objects, and perishables that were also loaded on to the galleons but have not survived over time the way the ceramics have.

There is a great deal that we still do not know about how exactly sales were conducted in Manila. The narrative presented here was pieced together from archival sources and extant writings. Antonio de Morga, a lawyer by training who became a high-ranking colonial official in Manila wrote the famous Sucesos de las Filipinas (Events of the Philippines), which was the first lay history of the Spanish conquest of the Philippines.\(^\text{18}\) This work includes valuable descriptions of Manila and the trade. In addition to his work, the eyewitness account of Italian traveler Gemelli Careri was also useful.\(^\text{19}\) Official information on the rules, regulation and development of the trade were available in Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson’s The Philippine Islands, which consists of primary documents on Philippine history.\(^\text{20}\)

Other primary sources that were useful for the chapter include archival documents regarding the contents of the ships’ cargoes in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City as well as the Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville, Spain. Both archives lack

\(^{18}\) It was first published in Spanish in 1609 in Mexico.

\(^{19}\) Careri’s work was first published in Italian in 1699. I have consulted the English translation published in 1704: John Francis Gemelli Careri, “A Voyage Around the World” in A Collection of Voyages and Travels: Some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English..., Volume IV (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704).

\(^{20}\) Emma Blair and James Robertson, eds. The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803; Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and Their Peoples, Their History and Records of the Catholic missions, as Related in Contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, Showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of Those Islands from Their Earliest Relations with European Nations to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century, (Cleveland: The A. H. Clark company, 1903-09).
ships manifests from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reasons for which are addressed later in the chapter. The Spanish records are different from those of the Dutch who had more precise accounts, which at times specified what kinds of porcelain objects were bought and include drawings of the objects specifically commissioned for Dutch consumers.²¹

For the colonial Mexican and Spanish markets more specific information about what kinds of objects were bought or commissioned can only be ascertained from surviving objects. We do not know the details of how commissioned objects were made or how orders were communicated between the Spanish and the Chinese, but material evidence tells us that it was possible and an apparatus was put into place to ensure that the goods bought and packed in Manila reached the right people in Acapulco.

The significance of the Asian commodities to the colonial society in Mexico will be discussed in the next chapter, for now we consider the process by which these commodities were introduced to Spanish America. The demand for Asian goods in colonial Latin America and the readiness of Chinese merchants to trade, work and live in Manila transformed the site into an important port for global trade. Even after the city lost its worldly prominence, it continued to be essential for the transpacific trade because a system was set up there to attract merchants to sell their wares in the Parián and from there for the goods to be prepared and sent to Acapulco. This system was established in part with the help of Chinese merchants who had been trading with the natives of the islands prior to the arrival of the Spanish.

Trade in the Nanyang

A thirteenth century Chinese source tells us that Chinese merchants had considerable knowledge of their various customers’ demands in the South China Sea region, which they referred to as Nanyang (南洋). In Zhu Fanzhi (Description of the Barbarian Peoples 諸番志), the author Zhao Rugua, Superintendent of Maritime Trade at the port of Quanzhou, provided detailed accounts of the kinds of ceramics that were preferred by the different communities in Southeast Asia. For example, qing ciqi (green porcelain 青瓷器) was preferred in Bo-ni, or Borneo and qingbai ware (bluish-white porcelain 青白) was the choice of the people in Yapo, or Java. In addition to listing preferences, Zhao also described how trade was carried out with the different peoples of the region. The following is from his description of what happened when a Chinese ship arrived at one of the islands that are today associated with the Philippines:

When trading ships enter the anchorage, they stop in front of the official’s place, for that is the place for bartering of the country. After a ship has been boarded, the natives mix freely with the ship’s folk. The chiefs are in the habit of using white umbrellas, for which reason the traders offer them as gifts. The custom of the trade is for the savage traders to assemble in crowds and carry the goods away with them in baskets; and, even if one cannot at first know them, and can but slowly distinguish the men who remove the goods, there will yet be no loss. The savage traders will after this carry these goods on to other islands for barter, and, as a rule, it takes them as much as eight or nine months till they return, when they repay the traders on shipboard with what they have obtained (for the goods). Some, however, do not return within the proper term, for which reason vessels trading with Ma-i are the latest in reaching home…The products of the country consist of yellow wax, cotton, pearls, tortoise-shell, medicinal betel nuts and yu ta cloth, and the (foreign) traders barter for these porcelain, trade-gold, iron censers, lead, coloured glass beads, and iron needles.  

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23 Zhao Rugua, Chau Ju-kua, His work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chi, translated from the Chinese and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911), 159-60.
Zhao’s description can be corroborated with archaeological and anthropological research done in the region. We know there was no centralized kingdom and the various communities were connected by an intricate system of gift-exchange that existed prior to the establishment of trade relations with Chinese merchants. Archaeologists have found Chinese porcelain in the hinterlands of the islands indicating that these goods were incorporated into an intra-regional system of trade between lowland peoples who had access to trade, the interior swidden-cultivating tribal groups and the upland hunter-gatherer peoples, who were responsible for procuring the goods that were in demand in China (Figures 3.3 – 3.5). The traders on these islands and the passenger merchants from China connected different parts of southern China to the hinterlands of the Philippines.

Figure 3.3. Burial site in Santa Ana, Manila, Philippines. Archaeologists uncovered seventy-nine pieces of ceramics made between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These included yingqing wares with brown spots, blue-and-white ware, greenwares and one piece with red underglaze decoration. See figures 3.6 and 3.7 for examples of what some of these ceramics might have been.


When the Spanish arrived in Asia in the sixteenth century these trade connections had already been in existence for a few hundred years and the early explorers remarked upon the availability of Chinese goods on the Philippine islands:

Upon capturing this island we found a quantity of porcelain, and some bells which are different from ours, and which they esteem highly in their festivities, besides perfumes of musk, amber, civet, officinal storax, and aromatic and resinous perfumes. With these they are well supplied, and are accustomed to their use; and they buy these perfumes from Chinese who come to Mindanao and the Philippinas [sic].

The ceramics that the Spanish found on their early expeditions to the Philippines were unlike the ceramics made locally in Spain or in the American colonies. The two objects pictured below are examples of the kinds of porcelain items that were traded in Nanyang prior to Spanish arrival. The material, the glaze and the artistry of these ceramics were incomparable in the world at that time and the brilliance of these objects must have caught the attention of the early colonizers.

Figure 3.4. Porcelain, 14th century. Ewer with a tinted glaze, and black spots made with iron. It takes its shape from a gourd and the serpent shaped handle is a characteristic of potters operating in the Yuan period (1271-1368).

Figure 3.5. Porcelain, 14th century. Jar with underglaze red decoration made with copper.

26 From the “Expedition of Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, 1541-46” in The Philippine Islands, vol. 2, eds. Emma Blair and James Robertson, 68.
For Chinese merchants Luzon and other islands of the Philippines were one of many destinations in the South China region where they sold their goods. Given the geographical proximity it is easy to imagine how China might have had long-standing ties with the kingdoms and communities of Nanyang, but it was only during the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) that the connections between southern China and Nanyang intensified due to trade. During this time maritime trade surpassed the overland Silk Road trade that had been going on for centuries and Chinese merchants defined two routes, the eastern and the western along which to sell their wares. The Western route gave them access to Vietnam, Cambodia, Siam, the Malay Peninsula, and the Indonesian archipelago, and via the eastern route they could reach Luzon, Mindanao, and the Spice Islands in the eastern Indonesian archipelago (Figure 3.6). In both cases the trade was conducted by merchants from the region known as Fujian, and at different times some ports were more active than others. Quanzhou was a major port for much of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) but later Xiamen gained importance as did Guangzhou, or Canton.

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27 Guy, 13.


30 Ptak, 274-5.
In the fifteenth century when the Ming emperor banned maritime trade, merchants found ways to continue their trading activities surreptitiously and some even chose to migrate to the places where they had strong ties. The mercantile relationship between China and the peoples of Nanyang was reciprocal in that both sides wanted particular goods that the other could produce or provide. The products from Nanyang that were most in demand in China included frankincense, sandalwood, aromatics, drugs, spices, tortoise shell, rhinoceros horn, beeswax, and pearls. In return for these goods the Chinese traded their finished products such as silk, lacquerware, and ceramics, along with copper coins and iron.

Chinese merchants were not the only ones traversing the waters of the South China Sea. Merchants from the various kingdoms and polities in Nanyang conducted trade with each other, and during periods when the Chinese emperor restricted trade they even took tribute to the Chinese capital. Merchants from the Indian subcontinent, Japan, and the Arab world were also present in the region. For hundreds of years the area was a place of great cross-fertilization of ideas, tastes and technologies. As Islam spread to new places, there was a great demand for spices and finished Asian goods in the Arab world and the ships and boats of all the different trading communities began to have common or shared features. Interactions between these various peoples was not always harmonious and violence was known to erupt, but the region did not have a history of combining commerce and warfare as was the case with the trading practices of the Europeans, especially when they wanted to participate in Asian trade.

One of the reasons that the South China Sea region saw such tremendous commercial activity was because there was a demand within China for the goods from Nanyang and there was an extensive interior network, much of which relied on river transport that made these goods available inland. Great river junks sometimes manned by up to fifty or sixty men would transport local foods, such as rice and salt, as well as foreign goods that were in demand.

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33 Ibid.

34 The Ming Shilu (Annals of the Ming Dynasty) includes records of visits to the capital from representatives from different kingdoms, including ones from rulers of places like Luzon and Borneo, which were smaller polities and not large kingdoms or empires like those of Champa and Srivijaya.


Chinese goods that were sent overseas were transported in even larger vessels. Unlike the river junk the sea-going ships had more masts and sails. Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, who was in China in the fourteenth century, commented on the design of these vessels:

People sail on the China seas only in Chinese ships, so let us mention the order observed upon them…A single one of the greater ships carries 12 sails, and the smaller ones only three. The sails of these vessels are made of strips of bamboo, woven into the form of matting. The sailors never lower them (while sailing, but simply) change the direction of them according to whether the wind is blowing from one side or the other.37

Battuta’s talk of sails is pertinent because this was a significant difference between European and Asian ships, since the two types of vessels had to deal with different kinds of winds (Figure 3.7). However, Battuta’s insistence on “Chinese ships” is misleading because as early as the eighth century Chinese shipbuilding was being influenced by Javanese ships and this collaboration of shipbuilding techniques only increased in later periods when contacts intensified and Chinese merchants had their ships built in parts of Southeast Asia (Figure 3.8).38 This is an example of the cross fertilization of ideas in the region promoted by the trade of goods between the various polities.


38 Reid, 39.
In addition to having developed the appropriate shipping technology to transport goods both within China and overseas, there were extensive merchant networks that were responsible

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for bringing foreign goods in and selling Chinese products abroad. During the Song and Yuan Dynasties the merchant trade in southern China was divided into the two broad categories of overseas traders and passenger merchants. Overseas traders most often belonged to the local elite and had access to capital and political contacts who helped facilitate their business. They either owned or handled some aspect of the operation of the ships and mostly traded luxury products because that insured a return on the heavy investment required to make and take out an ocean going vessel and they often traded with nobility and the elite of more centralized states.

The passenger merchants dealt in more lower quality and cheaper products. They formed a group and paid for a certain amount of space on board, and in that space they carried with them as many goods as they could. These passenger merchants were significant to the overall trade because despite the fact that their business was smaller in scale they expanded the trade by including less valuable commodities and trading with non-elites.

When Europeans arrived in the South China Sea region to join the trade in the sixteenth century much of the shipping technology required to transport goods already existed, as did merchant knowledge about where to procure those goods. The Europeans did not demand anything of the Chinese merchants that they were not already accustomed to providing or that they did not have the resources to provide. In the case of the Manila Galleon Trade, certain timely factors helped the Spanish develop their transpacific trade network with the Chinese. By the time they were beginning their conquest of the islands in the 1560s, the Ming emperor was lifting the bans on trade. The economy of the Chinese Empire was in need of silver at the time,

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41 Ibid.
and the Spanish could provide the metal from the mines of their New World colonies. Thus the meeting of the two sides in Manila was fortuitous.

**From Junk to Galleon**

Spanish exploration of lands across the Pacific began in the mid sixteenth century under the aegis of the Viceroy of Mexico. Enmity with the Portuguese meant that both Malacca and Macao were beyond the reach of the Spanish. After a series of expeditions, in 1564 a man by the name of Miguel López de Legazpi set out from Mexico to establish a colony in Asia on the islands of the Philippines. He succeeded and in 1571 named Manila the capital of the islands.

The first few decades after the trade began and into the early seventeenth century, the galleon trade experienced great prosperity. Manila could not maintain its status as the major port in the South China Sea region for too long due to several factors, including strained relations with the Portuguese and the Japanese, Dutch incursions, fear of Chinese uprising, as well as internal issues of lack of proper administration and development of the colony.

The city did experience a decline in fortune, but it did not cease to be a hub for trade between the Spanish and the Chinese. French scholar Pierre Chaunu has claimed that the Manila Galleon Trade severely declined in the mid-seventeenth century and was thereafter not important to global trade, but in recent years this theory has been challenged. We know that the trade continued and silver from the New World mines found its way to China. We also know that the

42 Schurz, 29.

43 Ibid., 31.

demand from the Spanish American colonies for Asian goods did not abate. Even after the
Crown banned trade between the viceroyalties of Mexico and Peru fearing the loss of Peruvian
silver to Asia, repeated edicts throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are proof that
the bans were ineffectual.⁴⁶ Other ports in the region eclipsed Manila, but it continued to be
important to the groups who benefited directly from the transpacific trade.

In 1765 the Spanish, under the control of Charles III, decided to commence trade directly
with the Philippines going around the coast of South Africa. Galleons were still going to
Acapulco at this time, and the volume of the trade to Spain was smaller than that to Mexico.⁴⁷
Eventually this trade led to the creation of the Royal Philippine Company in 1785, which was a
much broader organization that conducted trade in the Philippines directly from Spain. However,
this signaled the beginning of the end of Spanish trade with Asia. The Royal Philippine
Company was not successful and it encroached upon the Manila Galleon Trade despite provisos
made to protect it.⁴⁸

In the two hundred and fifty year period of trade between Manila and colonial Mexico,
Manila became a more significant hub than it had previously been. The arrival of galleons laden
with New World silver attracted people from all over the world. A seventeenth century
description of Manila written by Franciscan Friar Bartolome Letona depicts Manila as the center
of the world:

⁴⁵ Hang-sheng Chuan, “The Inflow of American Silver into China from the Late Ming to the Mid-Ch’ing Period,”
⁴⁶ Flynn, Giráldez and Sobrédó, “Introduction” in European Entry into the Pacific: Spain and the Acapulco-Manila
Galleons, xxix.

⁴⁷ María Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo, “Eighteenth Century Philippine Economy: Commerce,” in European Entry into
the Pacific: Spain and the Acapulco-Manila Galleons, eds. Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giráldez and James Sobredo
(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 299.

⁴⁸ Flynn, Giráldez and Sobrédó, “Introduction” in European Entry into the Pacific: Spain and the Acapulco-Manila
Galleons, xxxv.
The variety of nations seen in Manila and its environs is the greatest in the world, for there can be found peoples from all the kingdoms and nations: Spain, France, England, Italy, Flanders, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Moscow, from all the East Indies and West Indies, Turks, Greeks, Moors, Persians, Tartars, Chinese, Japanese, Africans, and Asians. And in the four corners of the world there is hardly a kingdom, province or nation from which people do not [come to Manila], as a result of the frequent voyages that are made here from East, West, North, and South.\textsuperscript{49}

Letona boasts of the diversity of people in Manila, but other port cities in the region also attracted merchants from around the world. However Manila was significant at the time because only with its founding did the whole world become entwined in a system of global trade networks.

Another factor that made Manila unique was the fact that it was founded and operated under the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. It was a colony under the control of a colonial state. The silver was important for attracting Chinese and other merchants to Manila, but it was also important to the merchants in Mexico City whose direct access to the mines in the New World made it possible for the Manila Galleon Trade to continue. Unlike later European trading enterprises, such as those of the Dutch and the British that came in the form of trading companies, the Manila Galleon Trade operated under the aegis of the Viceroyalty in Mexico and the ties between Manila and Mexico were stronger than the ties between Manila and the Crown by sheer virtue of the fact that information between the Asian colony and Spain had to go via Mexico.

The trade was controlled by the Viceroyalty in Mexico, not only because it was closer in terms of distance, but because the colony in the Philippines was financially supported by an annual subsidy that arrived on the galleons from Mexico. This subsidy, known as the \textit{situado},

paid for the salaries of the officials, the military, buildings and other civic expenses. The close ties between the two colonies were a problem for the Spanish Crown because industries in Spain suffered from the competition from Asian commodities, while at the same time the Crown also lost silver to Asia. Textile manufacturers in Spain and merchants in Seville wanted to see an end to the Manila Galleon Trade. Yet, despite their protests, the trade continued for more than two hundred years.

This was possible in part because those in favor of letting the trade continue, ensured that the commercial activity was seen as second to the larger and more important mission of evangelizing. In a memorial addressed to the King in 1635, the procurator-general of the city of Manila argued for the preservation of the Asian colony by stating that its main purpose was to spread Catholicism:

Don Juan Grau y Monfalcon, procurator-general for the distinguished and loyal city of Manila, the metropolis and capital of the Filipinas islands, declares that the preservation and protections of these islands are of utmost consideration and importance, and deserve the most careful attention, on account of the great advantages and profits which they afford—to say nothing of the principal consideration, namely, the service of God, and the propagation of religion and the Catholic faith.

The painting in the chest also faithfully represents the presence of Catholicism in the city. The landscape is dotted with crosses indicating the existence of numerous churches and chapels. In the Parián there is a large cross placed in the center of the market so that there is no doubt as to whether the religious mission is being carried out. Commercial and religious activities not only coexisted in Manila, but also mutually supported each other.

50 Bjork, 41.

51 “Memorial to the King by Juan Grao y Monfalcon in the year 1635,” The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803, vol. 15, 49.
Regulations regarding the trade changed over the years depending on the political situation, but for the most part goods were brought to Manila from other parts of Asia and then sold at a fair or in the Parián. We saw earlier from the Chinese chronicler Zhao Rugua’s writings that when Chinese merchants went to the islands to conduct trade they did not disembark from their ships, instead the natives of the islands came aboard and carried away the goods themselves. When trade with the Spanish commenced the Chinese played a more active role in selling and distributing these goods since they worked and operated in Manila. The process was described by Antonio de Morga in his Sucesos de las islas Filipinas:

“When the [Chinese] vessel has arrived and anchored, the royal officials go to inspect it and the register of the merchandise aboard it. At the same time the valuation of the cargo is made according to law, of what it is worth in Manila; for the vessel immediately pays three per cent on everything to his Majesty. After the register has been inspected and the valuation made, then the merchandise is immediately unloaded by another official into champans, and taken to the Parián, or to other houses outside of the city. There the goods are freely sold.”52

The painting shown at the beginning of the chapter portrayed this very scene described by Morga. We see the larger ships in the back and the smaller boats in the river coming into the city. The part of the city where the Spanish lived was walled off and separated from the market as shown in the painting.

The Parián went through several iterations in the time that the Mania Galleon Trade was active. It was first built in 1581 by Gonzalo Ronquillo. According to the first bishop of Manila, Domingo de Salazar, initially the Chinese did not have a specific place where they lived and worked. In a letter to the King in 1590 he wrote:

These Sangleys [Chinese] were scattered among the Spaniards, with no specific place assigned to them, until Don Goncalo Ronquillo allotted them a place to live in, and to be used as a silk-market (which is called here Parián), of four large buildings. Here, many shops were opened, commerce increased, and more Sangleys came to this city.  

According to Salazar trade was improved by the creation of a dedicated space where the Chinese merchants could operate. It was not enough to merely have a port where the merchants could meet, more organization as seen in the creation of a marketplace was necessary for the trade to develop.

The buildings described by Salazar could very well have been the kinds of wooden shops with thatched roofs that we see in the painting of the Parián in the chest. Those structures are not very different from the kinds of shops seen in the image of Bantam in Figure 3.2. Such shops were susceptible to fires and the Parián was damaged several times. After one of the reconstructions Salazar described the Parián to be a site worth seeing:

This Parián has so adorned the city that I do not hesitate to affirm to your Majesty that no other known city in España on in these regions possesses anything so well worth seeing as this; for in it can be found the whole trade of China, with all kinds of goods and curious things which come from that country. These articles have already begun to be manufactured here, as quickly and with better finish than in China; and this is due to the intercourse between Chinese and Spaniards, which has enabled the former to perfect themselves in things which they were wont to produce in China. In this Parián are to be found workmen of all trades and handicrafts of a nation, and many of them in each occupation. They make much prettier articles than are made in España, and sometimes so cheap that I am ashamed to mention it.

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54 The Chinese were not allowed to build with stone, which was a privilege reserved only for the Spanish part of the city that was walled. See Alberto Santamaria, “The Chinese Parían (El Parian de los Sangleyes)” in the Chinese in the Philippines 1570-1770, vol. 1, ed. Alfonso Felix (Manila; New York: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1966), 111.

Salazar was clearly in favor of Chinese and was impressed with their ingenuity. The wooden chest seen at the beginning of the chapter is the kind of object Chinese craftsmen could expertly reproduce in the Parián even though it was a Spanish design. Accounts like Salazar’s might have already started concerning merchants and imperial administrators in Spain who could see the threat of the goods that were bought in Manila to their own manufactured goods that were meant for sale in the colonies.

By the time Morga wrote his history in the early seventeenth century the Parián was a “large enclosed alcaicería of many streets, at some distance from the city walls.” An alcaicería was the market in southern Spain where silk was sold. It was a remnant from the Moorish past that continued to be used even after the Muslim rulers were defeated. The association with silk, also seen in Salazar’s comment, is relevant because in Manila too silk was the Chinese commodity most in demand and of most value. However, the Parián in Manila was not only a marketplace for fine luxuries, it was also where one went to have his shoes mended or to have a table built. It was a place where barbers set up their shops and where people could buy food supplies as well.

56 Letona, who boasted about the diversity of peoples seen in Manila, was also positive about Manila (which he compared to Puebla and Mexico) and the Parián. He wrote: “On the eastern side of the city, but outside of it and in front of its walls, at the distance of a musket-shot is a silk-market which they call Parián. Usually 15,000 Chinese live there; they are Sangleys, natives of Great China, and all merchants or artisans. They possess, allotted among themselves by streets and squares, shop containing all the kinds of merchandise and all the trades that are necessary in a community. The place is very orderly and well arranged, and a great convenience to the citizens. It is [an indication of] their greatness that although they are so few, they have so many workmen and servants assigned to their service.” Bartolome de Letona, “Description of Filipinas Islands,” Blair and Robertson trans., The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803, vol. 36, 204-5.

57 Morga, 312.

58 For more on the alcaicería in Spain see José Luis Garzón Cardenete, Real sitio y fuerte de la Alcaicería de Granada (Granada: Caja General de Ahorros de Granada, 2004).

59 Juan Gil, Los Chinos en Manila: Siglos XVI y XVII (Macau: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2011), 156.
From early on the Parián had been assigned its own alcalde, or mayor, who was supposed to be in charge, another aspect borrowed from the alcaicerias of southern Spain. This mayor, rather than ensuring the safety of the Chinese was meant to keep an eye on them, as is clear from Morga’s description: “their own governor, who has his tribunal and prison, and his assistants; these administer justice to them, and watch them day and night, so that they may live in security, and not commit disorders.” 60

Morga in particular was not in favor of the Chinese who came to trade in Manila and would have preferred to limit their numbers. Earlier in his book he wrote:

They [the Chinese] are people who, the less they are admitted, the better will it be for us in every respect. Hence there is no need of there being more of them than the number required for the service of the community; and then they would neither raise the price of provisions, nor retail what remains in the country, as they do now. Thus many pernicious sins which they commit and teach to the natives would be avoided. 61

Morga’s suspicion of the Chinese is clear from his writings and as a colonial official he had the power to monitor and limit the activities of the men and women coming to Manila from China.

Foreigners visiting Manila noticed the hostility between the two groups as can be seen in Italian traveler Gemelli Careri’s description of the Parián. It seems wherever the Chinese were they were under constant surveillance and within range of cannons:

Tho’ Manila be small, if we look upon the circumference of its walls, and the number of inhabitants, yet it will appear large if we include suburbs, for within musket shot of the gate of Parián, is the habitation of the Chinese merchants call’d Sangley, who in several streets have rich shops of silk, purcellane, and other commodities. Here are found all arts

60 Morga, 196.

61 Morga, 116-7.
and trades, so that all the citizens are worth, runs through their hands, through the fault of the Spaniards and Indians, who apply themselves to nothing.\textsuperscript{62}

Careri also confirms what we learned from other accounts about importance of this marketplace to the city, saying that all citizens had to depend on the trades of the Parián and the Chinese who ran it.

Relations between the Spanish and the Chinese must have improved somewhat because by the eighteenth century the Parián could be seen as a symbol of cooperation between the two groups. In 1756 the government in Manila decided to construct a new, more permanent market where the offices for accounting would be housed together with the shops along with residences for merchants (Fig 3.9). It was known as the Alcaicería de San Fernando and was a unique double-storied structure in the shape of an octagon, with a courtyard in the middle surrounded by shop fronts. It was designed to make the movement of goods from boat to market easier, as shown in the model of the market in Figure 3.10. In this way several of the procedures of the trade, from unloading to selling and accounting could be done in one place. This structure was designed by a Spanish architect, Lucas de Jesús María, and built by a Chinese Christian by the name of Antonio Mazo.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{62} John Francis Gemelli Careri, “A Voyage Around the World” in \textit{A Collection of Voyages and Travels: Some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English...}, Volume IV (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704), 420.

\textsuperscript{63} María Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo Spinola, \textit{Arquitectura Española en Filipinas: 1565 – 1800} (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1959), 35.
Figure 3.9. Plan of the *Alcaicería de San Fernando* from the *Archivo General de Indias*. The plan itself is not very detailed, but the caption in the center points out some of its features. The parts outlined in blue are the shops and stair cases leading up to storage spaces. One of those spaces was delineated as an accounting office. The structures with red roofs are the quarters of officials.

Figure 3.10. Model of the Alcaicería from the Museo Naval in Madrid that shows how a boat would have docked in the river and the ease with which goods could be unloaded and taken directly to the shops.

By the time the *Alcaicería de San Fernando* was built, Manila was past its heyday, as other European powers operating in the region grew more powerful. But even if the city had lost its global importance, the building of this structure suggests that the trade was still very important to the Spanish and Chinese merchants who had a great deal to gain from it. The care

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64 “Alcaicería de San Fernando de Manila,” MP-Filipinas, 38, 1756. *Archivo General de Indias*. 
and attention to detail that went into making the building is again telling of the importance of such spaces for the trade.

The porcelain objects brought from China could have been sold individually or in bundles. Objects that were specifically custom ordered would not necessarily have been sold in the Parián or even displayed in the shops there. It has been suggested that amongst the Chinese, different merchants specialized in different goods, so that it is quite possible that the porcelain from Jingdezhen was under the purview of a particular set of merchants, while other goods under others and so on.65 Over time the shops in the Parián also were specialized, and according to one source, in 1755 the Parián had 15 stalls out of 627 stalls that sold porcelain.66

In the various Pariáns the transactions between the Spanish and the Chinese often entailed a trade in Chinese or other Asian goods in exchange for silver. The Chinese preferred Spanish reales, which they trusted because the coins were standardized by weight.67 They were found in values of eight reales, four reales, two reales and one real.68 The silver was mined and cut in Mexico and Peru and the coins were marked with the Spanish coat-of-arms on one side and the castle of Spain and two lions on the other (Figure 3.11).69 The engravings on the coins

69 The excavation of the shipwreck of San Diego revealed that passengers of the ship in addition to having coins from Mexico were carrying silver coins from Peru and China and gold coins of the Islamic Sultanate of Johor, these might have been the possessions of certain passengers on board or an indication that several different kinds of currency were circulating in Manila in the late sixteenth century.
could serve as models for motifs painted on porcelain. In China when these very coins went into circulation they were chopmarked with Chinese reign symbols to test the silver as well as to put the foreign coins into local circulation (Figure 3.12).

![Figure 3.11 Front and back of a Peruvian coin recovered from the San Diego shipwreck. It is from either the reign of Philip II (1556-1598) or Philip III (1598-1621).](image1)

![Figure 3.12 Spanish coins with Chinese chop marks. From Peru, AD 1780 in the British Museum collection.](image2)

Once the goods had been bought, they had to be re-packaged and accounted before they were loaded on to Spanish galleons to be sent to Acapulco. In Jingdezhen the porcelain was wrapped with straw and packed into bundles. These might have been unpacked and displayed or shown to the person buying them and then repackaged to put on the Spanish galleon. The ships that went from Spain to Mexico across the Atlantic also carried ceramics. The techniques developed to transport ceramics for the transatlantic journeys could have been employed for the journey across the Pacific as well. For the trade across the Atlantic smaller ceramics were placed in larger earthenware jars, which were also filled with straw, aromatic herbs and other fibrous

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70 Desroches, Casal and Goddido, 190.
material to protect the ceramics. 71 Such materials were readily available in Southeast Asia and could have been used in a similar manner.

Scholar Maria Bonta de la Pezuela conjectures that Chinese porcelains were packed in cylindrical wooden crates, huacales. She writes that inferior pieces were packed on the outside, and the more valuable pieces were hidden on the inside so that the value of the entire crate would be evaluated based on the visible pieces, thus enabling merchants to cheat when their goods were inspected. 72 Such techniques to evade official rules developed in Manila as a necessity since the Crown tried to restrict the value and amount of goods that were to be shipped across the Pacific to Mexico.

The manner in which notaries kept records of the ships’ cargoes also allowed the illegal shipment of goods. The ship manifests of the transpacific trade very rarely specify individual objects, especially for the early period, so it is very difficult to trace particular porcelain objects through the archives from a merchant in Manila to a consumer in Mexico. 73 Ship manifests listed the goods in categories of how they were packaged, such as cajones (boxes), fardos (bundles or bales), churlos (linen sacks used for spices), bolsas (bags) and piezas (pieces). Generally the records list how many of these larger packages belonged to a particular individual and to whom they were consigned on the ship. The contents of these packages were not usually specified. This list of goods would be part of a larger Libro de Sobordo, Books of Freight, that also included a list of the officials, crew, passengers, and soldiers aboard, the rations, artillery and at times even

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72 Bonta de la Pezuela, “The Perils of Porcelain,” 44.

73 Rocío Díaz has found individual porcelain items listed in ship manifests from the late eighteenth century. These were commissioned pieces with families’ coats-of-arms depicted on them. See her Chinese Armorial Porcelain for Spain (London: Jorge Welsh Books, 2010).
an index of the official correspondence that was being sent to Mexico and then perhaps on to Spain. 74

As with the improvement of the Parián, we see a development in the methods of noting the contents and values of the ship’s cargo. In some instances, the manifests become better organized, but are not necessarily more revealing about the specific goods being shipped as compared to the records of the early years of the trade. Judging from the documents that have survived, there are more complete records for the later period, from the 1730s onwards. As the trade came under increased scrutiny, especially under the rule of the Bourbons, there were stricter regulations and officials were more judicious about creating and preserving these records, even if they were not entirely truthful about the exact contents of the cargo.

Figure 3.13 is an image of a shipping record from 1592, one of the earliest found in the AGI in Spain. It is a report on the cargo of the galleon San Philippe, whose captain was Geronimo de Mendicabal, that came from the Philippines and arrived in Acapulco on the 2nd of December with tonnage that valued thirty-two ducats. 75 In one particular list in this document titled “Freight charges for private individuals,” an individual is listed as specifically having carried porcelain.

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74 For more on the importance of Mexico as point through which this correspondence was mediated on to Spain see Luke Clossey, “Merchants, migrants, missionaries, and globalization in the early-modern Pacific,” Journal of Global History 1.1 (2006): 41 – 58.

75 “Relacion de los fletes del galeon San Felipe maestre Geronimo de Mendicaval vino de Philipinas y surgio en Acapulco a dos de diziembre de que se cobra treinta y dos ducados tonelada,” Contaduria 897, 1592, AGI.
Figure 3.13. Document from the AGI specifying porcelain items in the cargo. At the top of the document is a description of when and where the ship sailed from and the name of the captain. Underneath it tells us what part of the cargo this particular list is referring to. In this case it is the freight of the private individuals. The right margin consists of the values of these various individuals’ holdings. The left margin consists of a note on how much money (perhaps in taxes) was put into the coffers in Acapulco and on what date.

Juan Bauptista Moroso had 900 pieces of ceramics, or loza, on board the ship. Other individuals had different numbers of caxones or fardos, which might have contained ceramics, but from the manner in which they are listed it is not clear what exactly was contained in these packages. From this document it is unclear how these various packages would have been identified once they arrived in Acapulco, but in a 1602 document we see that a system of monogramming was used to identify a person’s holdings in the cargo (Figure 3.14).
In the 1602 document there are symbols in the margin with the contents of the different boxes that bore that symbol. The boxes are numbered and in this particular document the contents are specified to a greater degree of detail than even later documents. For the most part the boxes contained different kinds of textiles such as *tafetas* (taffeta), *seda cruda* (raw silk) *damascos* (damasks), amongst others.\(^7\)

A 1731 document is similar to the document from 1602 seen in Figure 3.14, but it is more a description of the packages, without much information about the contents of these packages or their value (Figure 3.15). The first entry reads as follows: “Captain Don Joseph loaded 12 sacks

\(^7\) “Memoria de las mercadurias de china que yo el…(?) pido sumiga embarco en este Puerto ano e mil y seiscientos y dos,” Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4976, Expediente 6, 1602, AGN.
(bolsas) of the following numbers 2, 3, 4, 8…until 16. 10 blocks of wax of ordinary weight, two medium bundles numbered 1, 2, [all] marked with the symbol in the margin…." The document consists of forty-five pages. One entry on the fourth page mentions porcelain. It reads: “Captain Don Antonio Levino (?) stowed ten sacks of ceramics numbered 1 to 10 marked with the impression seen in the margin." In the 1592 document shown in Figure 3.13 we saw that a precise number of pieces of porcelain was listed. It is much more difficult to know how many pieces were in a bag and in this manner more goods could be exported than the amount allowed by imperial edict.

Figure 3.15. 1731 Ship manifest showing the monogram in the left margin with the numbers of packages corresponding with the individuals.

77 Indifirente Virreinal Caja 3504, Expediente 36, 1731, Archivo General de la Nación.

78 Ibid.
We know that the imperial officials were aware that such techniques were being employed because edicts were issued about how specifically goods were to be packed and shipped. An early eighteenth century memorial demonstrates the Crown’s concerns:

The annual galleon shall carry no more than 4,000 piezas [pieces], 500 of these being half-chests containing the silken fabrics and the finer ones of cotton; the rest shall be half-bales, bags of cinnamon, cases of porcelain, and cakes of wax. The size or weight respectively of these packages is prescribed: the half-chests and half-bales shall be each 1 ¼ vara long, 2/3 vara wide, and 1/3 vara deep, an allowance of two dedos [fingers] on each measure being made for the outside cover or packing of the half-chest and for the compression used on the half-bale. The bag of cinnamon shall weigh 150 libras [pounds] gross (that is including all packing and covers), but at Acapulco it may be allowed four or five libras more of weight, the difference between the weight of Manila and that of Nueva España [New Spain]. The case of porcelain must be one vara high and 2 1/4 varas in circumference at the mouth, no allowance being made. The cakes of wax must weigh twelve arrobas at Manila, four or five libras being allowed at Acapulco for the difference in standards of weight. Besides the 4,000 piezas, unlimited pepper and storax may be shipped; and Chinese cabinets and screens may go in larger boxes than the regulation size, provided that the capacity of these be figured in terms of piezas.  

These instructions are very specific but it is not clear that they were followed. The records discussed thus far did not include precise measurements or weights of the packages. The memorial itself makes allowances for different systems of measurements used at the two ends of the trade making it more convenient for merchants to carry more than what was allowed.

The diversity of forms in which the cargo of the ship was documented shows that the notaries experimented with the best way in which to record and communicate what a ship was carrying. Although at times they are disappointing for historians due to the lack of detail, they did accomplish the goals of satisfying officials and ensuring that the goods bought in Manila and

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79 From “Period VIII” of the *Extracto Histórico* by Antonio José Alvarez de Abreu (Madrid, 1736) as excerpted in Blair and Robertson, eds. *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803*, volume 44, 311. This particular Period, “Relates the plan presented by the deputies for the Philipinas for regulating the commerce of that country in the year 1724; and its results up to that of 1730.”
loaded on to the galleons reached the right people in Mexico, while at the same time being ambiguous enough to allow people to carry more than the official allowance.

In comparison to the records of other European trading companies, studying the ship records of the Manila Galleon Trade gives the impression that people involved in this trade were not concerned with its proper functioning. However, as seen earlier in the development of the Parián, the merchants—both Chinese and Spanish—were interested in ensuring that they could provide and procure goods that could be sold in the colonies in the Americas. The lack of a textual record is peculiar to the situation where much of the exchange and transfer of goods was unofficial, both for Chinese and Spanish merchants. The transpacific trade was under the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain and primarily benefitted consumers in the Americas so the records were intentionally sparse in order to keep imperial officials from knowing how much silver was actually being sent to Asia.

Even if the ship manifests are scant or vague, those involved in the commerce took care to ensure that the goods shipped reached the right owners once the galleon arrived in Acapulco. This was done through a multi-lingual system of marking the various bundles and boxes. Some goods, such as spices, would have been transported in large jars, which were marked so that whoever had to move them would know where they were going, who they belonged to or what they contained. Archaeologists have found marks in Spanish, Tagalog and Chinese indicating that members of all three groups were involved in the process and had developed a visual language to facilitate the trade (Figure 3.16).⁸₀

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Figure 3.16. Archaeological drawings of shippers’ marks recovered from the Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, which was shipwrecked in 1638. The ones seen on the bottom towards the right are Chinese symbols. Some of the other marks resemble the monograms seen in the ship manifests and yet others are not alphabetical symbols.

A wreck discovered off the coast of Oregon revealed that at times even beeswax was stamped in order to show ownership (Figure 3.17). Not all the beeswax on the ship was marked, but archaeologists have been able to identify similar marks from different shipwrecks, namely the San Diego (1600) and the Nuestra Señora de a la Concepcion (1638). Sometimes the marks are legible letters, like monograms that could have been matched with the ships’ manifests.⁸¹ This was a technique that was developed on the transatlantic voyages since shipper’s marks are found from shipwrecks in the Atlantic as well.⁸²

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Ship-building techniques developed in Europe and the New World were also used to build galleons in the Philippines. Soon after Luzon was colonized ship construction began in different sites on the island. The shipbuilding industry in Spain had not been competitive or productive for most of the sixteenth century so that the colonies had taken it upon themselves to build and supply the ships as they needed them.83

Due to the availability of labor and materials, shipbuilding in the Philippines was relatively inexpensive. In a report sent to the Crown, an official discussed the pros and cons of building ships in the Philippines:

There is in these islands an abundance of wood and of men, so that a large fleet of boats and galleys may be built. There is a quantity of cheap iron from China, worked by the natives here, who can make what is necessary from it – which they can not do with Castilian iron, for it is exceedingly hard. We have no pitch, tallow, or rigging worth mention, because what there is is so scarce and poor that it amounts to nothing. There is no oakum for calking. Large anchors cannot be made; but the rest of the tackle can be obtained here in good condition. There is good timber also; to my way of thinking,

therefore, the ship that would have cost ten thousand ducats in Guatimala [sic], and in
Nueva España thirty [thousand], can be made here for two or three [thousand], should
strenuous efforts be employed.84

The official is not overwhelmingly positive about the prospects of building the ships in the
Philippines due to the lack of certain materials, but it was certainly more affordable than building
them in Spain or the American colonies and there was no shortage of good quality timber (Figure
3.18). In the 1620s and 30s the rate of construction of a galleon in the region was roughly one
per year.85

The ships that traversed the Pacific were known to be some of the largest seafaring
vessels. Even in the building of these galleons it seems rules were broken as they were made
bigger than what was officially sanctioned so that they could carry more goods.86 The ships were
meant to have a deck for cannons since they were built according to Spanish design, and despite
the fact that there were threats from several different parties, the deck space was not used for
cannons, which were carried in the ballast hold. Passengers and crew used that space to ship
more cargo.87 Sometimes the ship was overloaded to such a degree that it became necessary to
throw some of the merchandise overboard in order to keep the ship from sinking or to allow for
easier maneuverability.88

84 Francisco de Sande, “Relations of the Filipinas.” First report sent by Sande to the home government dated June 7,
1576, in Blair and Roberts, eds. The Philippine Islands volume 4, 74.

85 Mathers, Parker, and Copus, 30.

86 Ibid., 29

87 Ibid., 30

88 Bonta de la Pezuela, “The Perils of Porcelain,” 44.
Most of the goods that were being shipped would be stowed in the *bodega* of the ship, a chamber at the bottom of the ship that could be locked so that these goods would not be disturbed during the journey (Figure 3.19). In 2010 the Council of Andalucía, along with others, sponsored the construction of a ship resembling the Manila galleons, known as *La Pepa* (Figure 3.20). This fully functional galleon has made one voyage from Spain to China and back. It serves as an excellent tool for understanding the construction and the mechanics of long-distance travel in the early modern period. On a ship similar to *La Pepa* the goods would have been brought on to the deck and then lowered into the bodega at the bottom of the ship with a system of levers.
and pulleys. The storage for food items was separate, and it was locked as the provisions had to last for the long journey back.\(^\text{89}\)

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Figure 3.19. Eighteenth century drawing showing the cross-section of a ship from Museo Naval Madrid. In this particular model there are 74 cannons seen on two different levels below the deck. The cabins for the passengers and crew members are located on the two sides of the ship and the merchandise is stored at the bottom.

Figure 3.20. *La Pepa*, a model of the Manila galleons, docked in Cadiz in Southern Spain. In this photograph we see the back of the ship. Its sails are folded since it is not sailing. The Spanish flag is seen flying from the mast and there is an oval image of the Virgin on the body. The sailors knew the dangers of their journey and hoped for divine help as they crossed the ocean.

\(^\text{89}\) Private conversation with the foreman of *La Pepa*, Alfonso Pérez Martínez, in Cadiz, Spain. For more on this project, consult their website: http://www.fundacionnaovictoria.org/es/presentacion.html.
The lading space on the ships was supposedly allotted according to regulations put forth by the Crown. The ships’ crewmembers were given a certain amount of space based on their rank. Besides these people, officially only citizens of the Philippines were allowed to have the boletas, or permissions for lading space, on the ships. However these could be bought and merchants from Mexico or their agents in Manila would often use their purchasing power to get as much space as possible on the ships and transport more goods than what they or the entire ship was allowed to transport.

It is often conjectured that ceramics served as ballast for sailing vessels. This might have been true for the transportation of porcelain on river transport within China but for the journey from Manila to Acapulco there is no evidence to suggest that porcelain was used for this purpose. A royal decree from the late seventeenth century dictated that mercury should be bought from China and sent to New Spain, presumably for use in the mines. The decree also stated that the mercury should be transported on the galleons as lastre, or ballast. For transatlantic journeys iron and other metals were often used as ballast, and in the late eighteenth century a royal decree to the governor of the Philippines approved the transportation of iron from Manila to Mexico as ballast.

Even if porcelain was not used as ballast other goods could have been stored under the bodega where the ballast is supposed to be and thus not be accounted in the evaluation of the cargo. In Manila the task of preparing the cargo consisted of ensuring the goods were packed, marked and stowed properly for their safe arrival in Mexico, but a correlated goal of these

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90 Bjork, 43.
91Ibid., 44.
procedures was to evade official rules or cheat on inspections so that contraband could be carried aboard the ship without penalty. This was an important aspect of preparing the cargo in Manila because if the everyone adhered to the rules, the Spanish American colonies would not have access to as diverse or as many commodities as they did.

**The Commodities of the Trade**

We now know more about how the goods were brought to Manila, traded and loaded on to the galleons going across the Pacific. We also know that various groups were involved in the functioning of this trade in different capacities. However, since the ship manifests were not very revealing about the exact contents of the ships’ holdings, we still do not know what goods were held in the *bodega*. Material evidence from shipwrecks, museums and evidence from the archives can reveal the kinds of commodities bought and sold in Manila. Morga’s *Sucesos* has a very extensive description of the variety of commodities he saw brought to Manila and sold in the *Parián*, and serves as a good starting point for this discussion:

These vessels [Chinese junks] come laden with merchandise, and bring wealthy merchants who own the ships, and servants and factors of other merchants who remain in China. They leave China with the permission and license of the Chinese viceroy and mandarins. The merchandise that they generally bring and sell to the Spaniards consists of raw silk in bundles, of the fineness of two strands (dos cabeças), and other silk of poorer quality; fine untwisted silk, white and of all colors, wound in small skeins; quantities of velvets, some plain, and some embroidered in all sorts of figures, colors, and fashions--others with body of gold, and embroidered with gold; woven stuffs and brocades, of gold and silver upon silk of various colors and patterns; quantities of gold and silver thread in skeins over thread and silk--but the glitter of all the gold and silver is false, and only on paper; damasks, satins, taffetas, gorvaranes, picotes, and other cloths of all colors, some finer and better than others; a quantity of linen made from grass, called lençesuelo (handkerchief) and white cotton cloth of different kinds and qualities, for all uses. They also bring musk, benzoin, and ivory; many bed ornaments, hangings, coverlets, and tapestries of embroidered velvet; damask and gorvaran of different shades; tablecloths, cushions, and carpets; horse-trappings of the same stuff, and embroidered with glass beads and seed-pearls; also some pearls and rubies, sapphires and crystal-stones; metal basins, copper kettles, and other copper and cast-iron pots; quantities of all
sorts of nails, sheet-iron, tin and lead; saltpetre and gunpowder. They supply the Spaniards with wheat flour; preserves made of orange, peach, scorzonera, pear, nutmeg, and ginger, and other fruits of China; salt pork and other salt meats; live fowls of good breed, and very fine capons; quantities of green fruit, oranges of all kinds; excellent chestnuts, walnuts, pears, and chicueyes (both green and dried, a delicious fruit); quantities of fine thread of all kinds, needles, and knick-knacks; little boxes and writing-cases; beds, tables, chairs, and gilded benches, painted in many figures and patterns. They bring domestic buffaloes; geese that resemble swans; horses, some mules and asses; even caged birds, some of which talk, while others sing, and they make them play innumerable tricks. The Chinese furnish numberless other gewgaws and ornaments of little value and worth, which are esteemed among the Spaniards; besides a quantity of fine crockery of all kinds; canganes, sines, and black and blue robes; tacley, which are beads of all kinds; strings of cornelians, and other beads and precious stones of all colors; pepper and other spices; and rarities—which, did I refer to them all, I would never finish, nor have sufficient paper for it.⁹⁴

Morga’s description includes goods that were sent to Manila for local consumption as well as goods that were meant for the Spanish colonies in the Americas. Supposedly Morga’s list of goods are the ones brought to Manila by the Chinese, but we know that other merchants from the region also came with their wares to Manila. For example, Morga mentions many different kinds of textiles, but the variety was even greater since textiles from the Indian subcontinent were also sent to the colonies. Most of the textiles that were part of the trade have not survived, especially items that would have been for domestic use, but inventories are evidence that these textiles were exported to the colonies.

In 1622 an official in the mining city of Taxco had textiles from both India and China in his possession. In his inventory he lists the following items: “Una cama dorada con dos colgaduras una de raso de oro de china y otra de damasco mandarin (a gilded bed with two bed hangings, one of golden satin from China and the other a Mandarin damask)...una colcha de la india (a bedspread from India)...dos colgaduras una de damasco y otra de tafetan de china (two

⁹⁴ Morga, 302-303.
bed hangings, one of damask and the other of Chinese taffeta).” The city council records of Puebla have similar records of Chinese textiles and fabrics that they bought and had made into uniforms for bullfighters or official attendants. These objects, although shipped in great numbers, have unfortunately not survived.

The kinds of textiles from the Manila Galleon Trade that have survived include items such as the one shown below (Figure 3.21). It is an altar frontal for a Dominican church showing Jesus with a saint from Peru. Textiles made for religious purposes had higher chances of being preserved. Judging from the embroidery and the material, this one was made by Chinese artisans in the eighteenth century. A textile such as this could have been commissioned or ordered by religious leaders in Manila.

![Figure 3.21. Altar frontal. Embroidered silk with metallic threads. The central panel shows Jesus with Santa Rosa of Lima standing next to a fountain. Angels playing musical instruments are shown in roundels around the central panel and on the border with a floral motif covering the rest of the altar.](image)

95 “Autos del inventario de bienes de Fernando Arias de Rivadeneira….administrador de los azogues de Minas de Tasco,” Mexico, 259.20, 1622. *Archivo General de Indias*.


Religious themes were not restricted strictly to textiles. Artisan workshops run by clergymen in different parts of Asia, including the Philippines, made religious sculptures, often carved out of ivory, that were sent to the colonies in the New World (Figures 3.22). In addition to benefiting trade such commissions also spurred local craftsmanship. Morga does not mention these sculptures specifically in his account, but they would have been a valuable part of the cargo. Carved ivory objects were especially popular export items judging from the holdings of museums and private collections.

Figure 3.22. Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, 18th Century, Hispano-Philippine. Ivory with glass eyes and silver halo. Although she is a Catholic figure her features and her clothes are telling of the Chinese origins of the artisan that carved her.

Religioulsly commissioned objects such as these serve as reminders of the significance of the presence of clergy to the trade. In this entire process of getting the goods from Chinese junks on to Spanish galleons there arises the question of communication between the different groups of people. In order to decide prices, to order certain objects, build ships or to get any number of

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98 For more on such art see Gauvin Bailey *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

99 Museo Bello in Puebla has an entire room dedicated to ivories.
things done in the city, the different groups had to be able to understand each other. In this endeavor the clergy in Manila played an important role. We know that soon after the establishment of Manila, members of the clergy were making efforts to learn Chinese.100 As early as 1593 they also established a printing press and from the very beginning it was publishing books in Chinese and Spanish, as well as dictionaries of Tagalog.101

The clergy in Manila helped facilitate the trade in several other ways as well. They also spoke in favor of continuing the trade when it was threatened by the Crown by appealing to the evangelizing mission of the colony. They also materially contributed to the trade by providing monetary support through *obras pias*, funds collected for charitable purposes that were sometimes used to give loans to merchants for the galleon trade.102 In addition, they also commissioned and bought goods, as seen in the previous two examples of objects. As some of the earliest commissioners of specific objects, they strengthened the trade networks because

100 In the late sixteenth century an Augustinian friar deciphered and annotated a Chinese map into Spanish with the help of Chinese informants in Manila. In the introduction to the index he provided with the map he wrote: “The Chinese brought to this city [Manila] a print made in their land and it describes the land of China and a few of the neighboring islands and includes many Chinese letters that explain the painting. In order to know what the letters of the painting say, the same Chinese have interpreted it and have shared the explanation here so that anyone who sees the painting can understand what the letters signify and what the painting is trying to convey.” Filipinas,6,R.2,N.21, Archivo General de Indias. The original in Spanish: “Los chinos trujeron a esta ciudad una ypresión de molde hecha en su tierra, y en ella estauba descripta la tierra firme de China y algunas yslas comarcanas e muchas letras chinas que declaravan la pintura. Procuróse sauer lo que decian las letras de la pintura y los mismos chinos por yntérpretes lo declararon y pónese aqui la raçón dello para que quien biere la pintura pueda entender lo que sinifican las letras y lo que quiere decir.” The map and the corresponding index in Spanish was sent to the Crown with a letter from the governor of Manila at the time, Guido de Levazaris in 1574 (MP-Filipinas, 5 Archivo General de Indias.) They served as examples of the kind of knowledge the Spanish were gaining about China from their base in Manila.

101 This press published two important books in Chinese, one of which was titled *Tratado de la doctrina de la Santa Iglesia* (Treatise of the Doctrine of Santa Iglesia) in Spanish. It explained western astronomy, geography and other subjects making it the first book to introduce European philosophy to a Chinese audience in print. The other book was an explanation of the Christian doctrine titled *Doctrina Christiana en letra y lengua china* (The Christian doctrine in the Chinese language) written by Miguel Benavides. Juan Cobo the author of the *Tratado* is also credited with translating the first Chinese work into a European language, *Mingxin Baojian* or in Spanish *Espejo rico del claro corazón* (The valuable reflection of the light heart). For more on the printing press in Manila see José Toribio Medina, *La imprenta en Manila: desde sus orígenes hasta 1810* (Santiago de Chile: Impreso y grabado en casa del autor, 1896).

shopkeepers and merchants had to convey special orders on to producers in China and bring them back.

The late sixteenth century jar shown below is an example of an object commissioned in the early years of the trade by clergy residing in Manila (Figure 3.23). It bears the emblem of the Order of St. Augustine, which was a heart with arrows in it. The Augustinian Order was the only one that used the imperial eagle, which is situated atop the heart.\(^{103}\) The friars might have shown an image or a design to a Chinese merchant in Manila, who would have then communicated it to someone in China for it to be eventually transposed by Chinese artisans on to a porcelain object, embellishing or adding details as they saw fit.

![Figure 3.23. Porcelain with underglaze blue. China, ca. 1590 – 1600. The jar is hexagonal and the six central panels have different images of shrubs, phoenixes, horses, lions, etc. The panel shown in the picture shows the Hapsburg emblem with double headed eagle on top of the Augustinian emblem with a heart and arrows. The motif seen along the base is reminiscent of certain Kraak ware pieces.](image)

The \textit{San Diego} shipwreck (1600) has revealed that the cargo held some very well crafted porcelain made in Jingdezhen, such as the \textit{guan} shown in Figure 3.24 depicting Chinese sages in

\(^{103}\) Rocío Díaz, \textit{Chinese Armorial Porcelain for Spain} (London and Lisbon: Jorge Welsh Books, 2010), 84.
contemplation. The *San Diego guan* never reached Mexico, but others of a similar form did, like the one seen in Figure 3.25 depicting a literati gathering. Both of these objects were made for domestic Chinese consumers since the themes would have resonated with those familiar with Chinese philosophy and literature. Despite the foreignness of the motifs, merchants in Manila, both Chinese and Spanish, thought there was an audience for such objects in colonial Mexico and the motifs painted on such objects went on to influence the aesthetics of Mexican ceramics.

![Figure 3.24. Porcelain with underglaze blue, made in the Wanli period (1563-1620) before 1600. The jar has four lobed panels each showing a seated sage. This manner of dividing the surface of the jar was adopted by potters in Mexico in the 17th and 18th centuries.](image)

![Figure 3.25. Porcelain with underglaze blue. Late seventeenth century. The jar depicts a literati gathering with men playing games and children playing in the foreground. The figures represented here were used by potters in Mexico as motifs for their creations.](image)

Other objects recovered from the *San Diego* shipwreck included sets of porcelain bowls and bottles. As discussed in the previous chapter, having the multiple copies of the same porcelain objects allowed consumers to create dinner and tea sets, or in the case of Mexico, sets for the chocolate service. Multiple copies of the same object were also useful for decorative purposes to create symmetry. While much of Europe was still awaiting access to Chinese
porcelain in large quantities, by the end of the sixteenth century, residents of colonial Mexico and other parts of the Spanish colonies were adorning their tables, cabinets and kitchens with these blue-and-white objects.

Amongst the various kinds of ceramics sent to Mexico, *kraak* ware was a popular type (Figure 3.26). This was an export ware that was sold to many different groups of people around the world and was distinguishable by the paneled design on borders and central motifs that were either symbols of good omen or scenes of flora and fauna.\(^\text{104}\) Other styles of porcelain objects were also sent to Mexico and many of the different types of porcelain produced in Jingdezhen are represented in various collections in Mexico, including blue-and-white objects from the Transitional Period (1620-1683) and colored enameled porcelain from the Kangxi period (1654-1722) and armorial porcelain from Qianlong period (1735 – 1796).\(^\text{105}\)

![Figure 3.26. Porcelain with underglaze blue, mid seventeenth century. This type of dish is categorized as *Kraak* ware. The central panel is decorated with a scroll and artemesia leaf, both auspicious symbols. The rim is decorated with alternating panels of sunflowers and symbols of good omen.\(^\text{106}\)](image)

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{105}\) For more on the different types of ceramics exported to colonial Mexico see Kuwayama and Maria Bonta de la Pezuela, *Porcelana China de Exportación: Para el Mercado novohispano: la colección del museo del virreinato* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2009).

\(^{106}\) Kuwayama, 37.
As time went on and ceramic industries in China developed and the Chinese and Spanish merchants in Manila strengthened their networks, more sophisticated items were made especially for the Mexican and Spanish markets (Figures 3.27 and 3.28). Aristocratic families could have their coat of arms painted on porcelain plates, or specialty items like the *mancerina*, an object used for serving and holding a chocolate cup, could be custom ordered.

![Figure 3.27. Soup dish. China, 18th century. Porcelain with overglaze enamel. The center is decorated with the coat of arms of the city of Puebla based on silver medallions that were used as models.](image1)

![Figure 3.28. Mancerina, Porcelain with overglaze enamels. Jingdezhen, eighteenth century. In this object, a cup full of chocolate would be placed in the middle.](image2)

In addition to porcelains from Jingdezhen, porcelain from kilns in other parts of China and other imitation blue-and-white ceramics were also bought in Manila and sent to Mexico. Among these were Zhangzhou porcelains from Fujian, also known as “Swatow ware” which are identified as having sturdy bodies and grit at the bottom or the foot because they were produced more swiftly and not as carefully as the porcelains of Jingdezhen.\textsuperscript{107} Dehua porcelains, characterized by their creamy white bodies, also from Fujian, were amongst the ceramics sent to

Mexico as well. Cargoes also had porcelain from Japan produced during the time the kilns in Jingdezhen were disrupted.

Other valuable and noteworthy commodities of the Manila Galleon Trade included furniture items from Portuguese India, folding screens from Japan, lacquerware, and decorative objects made with mother-of-pearl (Figure 3.29). Often such goods do not appear in the archives, in the ship manifests or inventories. We know they were exported to colonial Mexico because we see the influence of the aesthetics of these objects reflected in the local crafts of the colony, a topic that will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Figure 3.29. Writing desk. Wood inlaid with painted and sgraffito ivory. Vishakapatnam, India, eighteenth century. Part of the collection in Museo Bello in Puebla.

The hold of a galleon going from Manila to Acapulco contained goods as varied as ivory carved sculptures and beeswax. It contained objects that were not made specifically for the colonial Latin American market as well as objects that were commissioned exclusively for clergy
or elite colonial families. The holds of the galleons also reflected the changing trends in commodities so that the different kinds of porcelain produced in Jingdezhen were represented in collections in colonial Mexico. In the eighteenth century when Indian textiles were gaining popularity in the world they also began to take up more of the cargo space in the Manila galleons. It was through these many objects and the people on board the galleons that the Spanish American colonies were introduced to Asia.

**Conclusion**

Manila was shaped by the need for a space for exchange between the Spanish who wanted Asian commodities and the Chinese who wanted silver. It had already been a place for exchange between the Chinese and the natives who also had reciprocal trade relations prior to the arrival of the Spanish and this local history of the region was important to the inception of the transpacific trade. Once established as a Spanish port, the influx of silver from the Spanish American colonies made Manila into an even larger hub than it had been in the precolonial era.

The trade in Manila depended to a large degree on the main marketplace, the *Parián*, which was the center of the commercial activity in the city. We saw from Bishop Salazar’s comment that the dedication of such a space improved the trade and over the years as the market itself developed architecturally the process was streamlined so that the various activities, such as unloading, storing, selling and accounting of the goods could all happen in one location. In addition, the trade also depended on the less obvious tasks of packing goods, marking them with

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the appropriate symbols, noting the information in a Book of Freight and loading them on to a ship, which was also built locally.

These various tasks were synchronized to ensure that the goods arrived in Acapulco safely and could be transferred to their rightful owners once they were unloaded. These tasks were also synchronized so that goods could be transported across the Pacific illegally. The proper value of the cargo could be hidden in the way the goods were recorded in the ship manifests, in the way they were packed and in the way they were marked. The ships built in Manila were larger than ships built in other parts of the Spanish Empire to allow for extra stowage space. Thus the commercial activity in Manila was such that it gave the appearance of functioning according official stipulations while at the same time undermining them.

In addition to being a site where techniques for transporting contraband were developed, Manila was the place where decisions were made about what would be sent to Mexico from Asia. These decisions depended on a variety of factors, including the tastes of the people present in Manila, such as the clergy. Chinese and other merchants’ also made choices about the sorts of goods they would bring to Manila and they communicated the designs for commissioned objects back to production centers in China and elsewhere. The passengers and crew members also took with them items that they had procured during their stay in Manila. The decisions of these different groups of people had a direct influence on the make up of the cargoes, which then represented Asia to the Spanish American colonies.

The ship once loaded and stocked had a long and perilous journey ahead. The weather and the waters were a natural threat, but enemy ships were also a big concern. The ships were often named for religious figures, such as San Diego, Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, Espíritu Santo, an indication of the trust put into divine hands for the voyage across the ocean. Often an
image of the Virgin or the Christ would also be placed on the ship (Figure 3.20). In Jingdezhen the potters prayed to the gods before lighting the kilns because despite careful preparation, kiln loads could be ruined. Similarly, in Manila the image of the Virgin seen on the back of a ship as it sailed off was a sign of the fragility of the trade. The various groups of people who worked to prepare the hold of the ship could not protect its valuable contents from the dangers of the sea once the ship had sailed.
CHAPTER FOUR
A Parián in the Plaza Mayor: Making Space for Asia in Colonial Mexico

Who will say of your rich fleets,
the wealth with which they enter replete and leave laden,
if you are the sum of all of them?

Your plenteous grandeur resides in you,
You supply them with gold and fine silver;
and they [supply] you with more prized things.

In you Spain meets with China,
Italy with Japan, and finally
an entire world of trade and order.

La Grandeza Mexicana by Bernardo de Balbuena

Introduction

According to the poem La Grandeza Mexicana (1604), to which these verses belong, this bounteous place where Spain meets with China, is Mexico. The author, Bernardo de Balbuena (1562 - 1627), was a Spanish cleric who went to Mexico as a young man. He originally intended the poem as a guide to Mexico City for a friend, the widow Isabel de Tobar. It is a bombastic ode to the viceregal capital, replete with references to its prosperity:

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1 Original Spanish, “Quien de tus ricas flotas los averes/De que etran llenas y se van cargadas/Dira sit u la suma dellas eres? En ti estan sus grandezas abreviadas/Tu las basteces de oro y plata fina/Y ellas a ti de cosas mas preciadas/En ti se junta España con la China/ Ytalia con Japon, y finalmente un mundo entero en trato y disciplina” in Bernardo de Balbuena, Grandeza Mexicana: Reproduccion facsimilar de la edicion princepe (Sociedad de bibliofilos Mexicanos: Mexico, 1927), 89.

2 Barbara Fuchs and Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel, “La Grandeza Mexicana de Balbuena y el imaginario de una ‘Metrópolis Colonial,’” Revista Iberoamericana vol. LXXV, 228 (2009), 676.

3 Stephanie Merrim, The Spectacular City, Mexico, and Colonial Hispanic Literary Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 96.
It is the richest and most opulent city

The one with the greatest trade and the largest treasury
That neither freezes like the north nor gets hot with the sun.

The silver of Peru and the gold of Chile
Come to stop here and from Terrenate

Fine clove, and cinnamon from Tidoro…

From the Great China colorful silks,
The Bezar stone from the uncultivated Andes,
Illustrations from Rome, and delicacies from Milan…

There are several other such stanzas that describe the variety of goods that could be found in Mexico City. Balbuena mentions goods from every corner of the world, creating a web of connections, at the center of which he places Mexico where all these exotic goods made their home. He puts Mexico in the middle of the proverbial East and West thus raising its political status, and in writing that it was the richest city he deems it equal, if not superior, to Spanish and European cities.

However, Balbuena’s praise of the New World metropolis was not necessarily a belittling of Spain. Two of the chapters of the poem are dedicated to the church and the state and in order to get the poem published he changed the dedication of his work from Isabel de Tobar to the new archbishop of Mexico, García de Mendoza y Zuñiga who arrived in Mexico not much before the publication of *La Grandeza Mexicana.* Even though Balbuena was not writing a revolutionary text, already in the early years of the seventeenth century he was suggesting that Mexico’s commercial ties gave it an advantage over Spain. His orienting of the colony away from the

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4 Balbuena, 76-77. Translation mine. Original in Spanish, “Es la ciudad mas rica y opulenta/ De mas contratacion y mas Tesoro/Que el norte enfria ni que el sol calienta/La plata del Piru de Chile el oro/Viene a parar aqui y de Terrenate/Clavo fino, y canela de Tidoro…De la gran China sedas de colores/Piedra Bezar de los incultos Andes/De Roma estampas, de Milan primores…”

5 Stephanie Merrim, *The Spectacular City, Mexico, and Colonial Hispanic Literary Cultures,* 96.
metropole is understandable because by the time he wrote the poem, the Manila Galleon Trade (1571 – 1815) had been operating for more than three decades. An official report from 1574 states that a ship brought in 22,300 pieces of porcelain along with gold, silk, cotton cloth, cinnamon and wax. Every year such galleons laden with Asian goods arrived in the port of Acapulco and satisfied the Spanish colonies’ demands for Asian luxuries.

In this chapter the aim is to understand the ways in which colonial Mexican society made space for these goods and the people that came across the Pacific into their world. I use the phrase “making space” because in colonial Mexico there was already a struggle between the European colonizers and the native Indians for the assimilation of their cultures and peoples. Furthermore, in the mid sixteenth century the Spanish colony also became home to African slaves who were brought over to work in the silver mines, in homes and for hacienda service. Thus, by the time the Manila Galleon Trade began in the late sixteenth century, the colony was settled but it had not resolved the conflicts and anxieties that arose from contact amongst the various groups of people. There were ongoing and concurrent processes of assimilation and incorporation of certain cultural practices, as well as resistance to and erasure of others and it was in such an atmosphere that objects and peoples from Asia were introduced into the Spanish colony.

So far we have already encountered two places, namely Jingdezhen and Manila, that developed in different ways based on local factors and their particular involvement in global

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6 “News from the Western Islands by Hernando Riquel and Others,” in The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803, vol. 3, 248-9. The letter includes items added by officials in Mexico about what the ship brought on it. In addition to the porcelain they list 448 marcos of gold, of different degrees of purity, 712 pieces of all kinds of silks, 312 quintals of cinnamon, 11,300 pieces of cotton cloth, 930 arrobas of wax and 334 arrobas of cotton thread.

trade. Jingdezhen was a site of production and Manila was the place where a wide array of goods were bought and packed to be shipped across the Pacific. In colonial Mexico we see examples of places that consumed these goods and the ensuing changes that were a result of that consumption. In these places too local conditions were important because they determined the manner in which Asian goods were appropriated into the colonial society.

The galleons also brought Asian peoples to the shore of the Spanish colony, and their presence will be discussed briefly, but much of the chapter will focus on the material objects that were a part of the trade and the reason for its existence. Due to the variety of Asian commodities brought to Mexico we cannot say that there was one space or one way in which Asian objects were incorporated into the colonial society, however, there is enough evidence to suggest that the trade with Asia gave the colony a way to distance itself from the metropole and distinguish itself in the world, the way Balbuena does with his poem.

In addition, some of the objects that came from Asia, such as Japanese folding screens or Chinese porcelain, were imitated by craftsmen in Mexico suggesting that Asian aesthetics provided an alternative mode of expression from the Spanish and native craft traditions that were prevalent in the colony. A study of the use and influence of Asian objects in colonial Mexican society shows that the colony developed its own tastes for Asian goods based on local conditions and concerns, a fact that is not obvious from just studying archival records on the Manila Galleon Trade.

Before discussing the ways in which Asian goods were incorporated into colonial Mexican society, we begin with an example of the kind of syncretic or hybrid objects that existed prior to the inception of the transpacific trade so that we know the context in which space was made for Asian objects. The feather painting pictured in Figure 4.1 is an example of colonial
Mexican art that has been particularly interesting for historians because it is evidence of the contact between European colonizers and indigenous peoples. Soon after the conquest religious art and architecture was already becoming syncretic, combining local and foreign designs, materials, and techniques.

In the feather painting the subject matter is European but the techniques and materials used to make it were native. The production of such art was an important part of the process of evangelization of the natives, and feather painting in particular was promoted because the iridescence produced by the feathers could be used to represent the divine light of the Christian lord. Even though the craft of feather painting survived the conquest, it was only accepted on terms that it be used for the promotion of the religion of the colonizers. The texts that were used as teaching aids for these arts in precolonial times were destroyed during the conquest because they were seen as idolatrous. The painting then is not only a type of syncretic artwork that was prevalent in colonial times, but also a reminder of the subjugation of the people who practiced the art.

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9 Pierce, Ruiz Gomar and Bargellini, 96.

10 Ibid., 95.
Figure 4.1. Detail of *Mass of Saint Gregory*, 1539. Feathers on wood with touches of paint. The devotion of Mass of Saint Gregory became popular toward the end of the fifteenth century and images of the theme were in abundance in Europe and engravings were sent to the New World where clergymen were evangelizing the native populace. To reproduce an image using feathers, the image would first be drawn on a base prepared with paper, cotton, feathers and glue. On this base feathers precisely cut to size were applied, sometimes in layers to create visual effects. The feathers would be of various birds, including of the quetzal, hummingbird, parrot, heron, spoonbill, troupial, and blue contiga.

In a seminal essay that problematizes the use of the term “hybrid” for colonial Latin American art, scholars Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn have argued that objects such as the feather painting have received the attention of historians because they are easily identifiable as hybrid and because they bear a trace of the violent history between the colonizers and the natives.11 Dean and Leibsohn write that colonial art forms bearing Asian influences have been “less engaging” for art historians because they are the result of trade and exchange and therefore

do not bear as strong a “political valence” for contemporary scholarship.\textsuperscript{12} Such treatment of the Asian presence in Mexico reveals the historians’ own agenda rather than portraying the colonial reality. Building upon their criticism, this chapter argues that while it is true that the use of Japanese furniture pieces in sitting rooms in colonial Mexico does not represent a history of the subjugation of the Japanese, the incorporation of these objects cannot be considered apolitical. Consumers in colonial Mexico made deliberate choices about the kinds of Asian objects they appropriated and the manner in which they did so. In focusing on the material world of the colony from the perspective of the Asian objects, the chapter argues that the trade with Asia was influential in the formation of a colonial Mexican identity.

The history of the introduction and appropriation of Asian arts in colonial Mexico differed from the contentious and often bloody process of acculturation between the natives and the Europeans. In many instances the manner in which Asian, especially Chinese goods were used, displayed, and imitated suggests an admiration and respect for Asian arts, to the point of being appreciated more than the goods that were made available through trade with Europe. It is true that certain crafts of the Indians, such as feather art, were also admired by the Spanish but their incorporation often had to register the victory of the colonizers. The incorporation of Asian objects and aesthetics, on the other hand, was a way for the colony to boast of the riches available to them, as shown in Balbuena’s poem, or a means to create new objects and develop a colonial Mexican aesthetic that was not entirely Spanish or native, as seen with the blue-and-white ceramics made in the city of Puebla, which are the subject of the next chapter (Figure 4.2).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 13.
Fascination with Asian goods was not a phenomenon that began in colonial Latin America, but a trend that was brought from Europe to the Americas. Silk textiles and porcelain objects were known in Europe as early as the thirteenth century and were valuable at that time. The men and women who traveled to the colonies in the Americas would have been familiar with the status of such objects and thus were eager to procure them from across the Pacific. However the argument made in this chapter is that once the transpacific trade began and access to Asian commodities was direct and unmediated through Spain, the colonies appropriated and adopted Asian objects in novel ways, often suiting local needs and tastes.

The chapter is divided into several sections, and each focuses on a different space in colonial Mexican society where the presence of Asian objects and/or people can be observed. The first section is on the annual fair that took place in Acapulco upon the arrival of galleons from Manila. The celebration that was held for the sale of Asian goods signified the importance of the transpacific trade to the colony and its disregard for the Crown’s efforts to stem the flow
of silver to Asia. In this section we see that Asian commodities not only made space for themselves in the port of Acapulco, but they also had the ability to transform Acapulco from a village into a city for the duration of the fair.

After the fair we move to the central square of Mexico City, the Plaza Mayor, the location of the market where many of the Asian goods were sold. Discussion of this space focuses on a few different ways in which Asia has been a part of its history. Some of the earliest visual depictions of the central square were made on imitations of Japanese folding screens. These objects show that as early as the seventeenth century colonial society was taking inspiration from Asian art forms to record its history and memorialize its spaces. The demand for Asian goods in the colonial society was further proven when the market in the square was given the name of Parián after the Chinese market in the city of Manila. The adoption of the Asian name was a clear indication of the importance of Asian trade in colonial Mexico.

In the last chapter the discussion of the Parián in Manila showed the importance and necessity of such a space in the context of a port city where people from different places could gather to buy and sell goods and services. The space was significant to the commerce of the city but at the same time was a space that was at times fraught with tension between the Spanish and the Chinese. Unlike the Parián in Manila, which was located outside the walled city in which the Spanish lived, the Mexico City Parián was in the very center of the capital city, where it could also be monitored, and there were tensions between different groups in that space as well. However, the difference between the two markets was that the Parián in Mexico City was a matter of pride for the city. Referring to it by the same name as the Asian market suggested its popularity and those of the Asian goods sold there. It was not a space that was looked down upon, or feared, as was the case with the Parián in Manila.
Yet, although Asian goods were regarded so highly, Asians themselves were not as welcome in the *Plaza Mayor* as seen in the repeated efforts by some members of the colonial society to remove them or make them pay for use of the space. These incidents indicate that in colonial Mexico making space for Asian objects was easier than making space for Asian peoples. Asians were not barred from coming to the colony, but finding a place for them in the racialized social hierarchy was a complicated matter, whereas appropriating Asian objects into an already diverse material world did not pose similar problems.

The last two sections of the chapter focus on Chinese porcelain: its display and its use for the consumption of chocolate. The section on the display of Chinese porcelain considers several paintings that depict carefully placed porcelain objects and argue that the use of these blue-and-white ceramics for display was not accidental. These objects could be used to signify class status within the society. Or they could be used to show the colony’s privileged status within the Spanish Empire.

In the section on the use of china for drinking chocolate we see that the native beverage dictated the way in which some Chinese porcelain objects would be used. The colonizers in Mexico learned how to prepare and drink chocolate from the natives and the practice was subsequently introduced to Spanish society by people who returned from the colony. Thus the cultivation and education of this particular taste went from the Indians to the Spanish colonizers on to the metropole. When the Manila Galleon Trade began and porcelain objects were incorporated into the chocolate service, the kinds of objects used and the manner in which they were used were also practices introduced to the metropole by the colony. The combination of chocolate and china shows that there were instances when the colony could educate the metropole.
Asia at the Fair in Acapulco

The fair in Acapulco was a yearly event that attracted merchants from around Mexico to partake in the sale of the goods brought from Manila. The custom of holding such a fair was introduced to Mexico from Europe where such fairs were meeting grounds for regional trade networks.13 As in Europe, the gatherings in Acapulco and Veracruz helped merchants from different colonies connect with each other as well as with the transatlantic and transpacific networks (Figure 4.3).

The fair in Acapulco was an important event for the colonial society, as we will see from the first-hand accounts, but the Spanish Crown was not pleased with the colony’s desire for Asian goods. In a late sixteenth century letter to the viceroy of Mexico, King Philip II wrote that the

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Manila Galleon Trade was not beneficial for the greater good of the empire and that the goods that were brought from Asia were in fact not of great value or quality:

To the Marques de Villamanrique, my kinsman, and viceroy, governor, and captain-general of Nueva España. Having understood that the silks brought from China and the Philipinas Islands to your realms are quite worthless, but that nevertheless, because of the low price set upon them, they are sold and distributed; and because, if that trade continues, the trade in cloth exported from these realms would cease or be greatly decreased; and also that these silks, like other articles brought thence (all of which are of trifling value, and of no profit to the country), are bartered only for gold, silver, or coin, for there is abundance of everything else there – a matter, too, of considerable importance, both on account of the large amount that is withdrawn and would be withdrawn for the benefit of a foreign kingdom, and because these kingdoms [Spain and Portugal] lose that whole amount, their trade being more profitable for the common good, on account of the excellence of its wares, which in their lasting qualities more than make up for the difference in price; neither is this the best means for the settlement of the said islands since they serve only as a lading-station for this trade…therefore, having carefully considered this as well as other inconveniences set forth, it has seemed best to discontinue this trade with the Philipinas Islands and China…

Silk was one of the most valuable commodities of the Manila Galleon Trade, which is why the King singles it out for admonishment. The colony’s buying of Chinese silk not only meant that the empire lost silver to China but the silk industry in Spain also suffered from the competition posed by the cheaper silk available for sale in Manila. The King’s letter has the tone of a parent telling his inexperienced child that he does not understand the value of certain things and does not know how to appreciate quality. It tries to mask the worry of losing the child to the more attractive commodities provided by someone else.

14 “Decree regarding China Trade,” in The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803; Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and Their Peoples, Their History and Records of the Catholic missions, as Related in Contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, Showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of Those Islands from Their Earliest Relations with European Nations to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Volume 6, translated and edited by Emma Blair and James Robertson (Cleveland: The A. H. Clark company, 1903-09), 282-3.
The King’s anxieties with regards to the trade between the colony and Asia were not unfounded since the Spanish Empire lost considerable amounts of silver to this trade, but his orders were clearly not followed as the trade continued into the nineteenth century. In his response to the King, Viceroy Villamanrique cited proselytization as one of the reasons to keep a hold on the colony in the Philippines, although the commodities that the king describes as being of “trifling value” were clearly another significant reason to carry on with the trade. According to some estimates, in the seventeenth century the Manila galleons carried two million pesos in silver annually to Asia. With such amounts of silver being sent to Asia, it is no wonder that the arrival of the ship returning with the merchandise was so eagerly awaited and celebrated with great fanfare.

When a galleon was spotted off the coast of Acapulco news of its arrival was sent to Mexico and merchants thronged to the port city so they could partake in the sale of the goods brought over from Asia. For a few weeks every year Acapulco became a commercial hub. In the early nineteenth century Alexander von Humboldt referred to the trade fair in Acapulco as the “most renowned fair of the world.” Acapulco was not the only port in Mexico to host a trade fair of this sort, but perhaps since the traffic from Asia was less frequent, its arrival was more eagerly anticipated. The fair was the only time the port came alive, the rest of the year it was a desolate place with not much to recommend it (Figure 4.4). Italian traveler Gemelli Careri described the transformation of the port in his travel accounts:

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…Friday 25 Acapulco was converted from a rustick (sic) village into a populous city; and the huts before inhabited by dark mulattos were all filled with gay Spaniards; to which has added on Saturday 26th a great concourse of merchants from Mexico, with abundance of pieces of eight and commodities of the country and of Europe. Sunday 27th, there continued to come in abundance of commodities and provisions to serve so great a multitude of strangers…

Usually there was only one galleon per year that came to Acapulco from Manila and it was not only anticipated by the merchants who were awaiting their goods, but also by those who could benefit from providing provisions and entertainment to the population that gathered in Acapulco. Careri recounts a curious event that suggests the significance of the work provided by the fair for some:

Thursday 31st the Express returned from (sic) Mexico with the Settlement of the Duties the Galleon was to pay, being 8000 pieces of eight, so that on Friday the first of February, they began to land the bales…Thursday 7th, when all the goods were unloaded, the porters of Acapulco made a sort of funeral, carrying one of their number on a beer, and bewailing him as if he were dead, because their Harvest was at an end; for some had got three pieces of eight a day, and the worst of them one…Saturday 9th, I saw abundance of mules come in loaded with goods and provisions…

From Careri’s account we see that in addition to attracting workers for menial labor, the arrival of the galleon also brought officials from Mexico City to the port so that the cargo could be inspected and the requisite tax collected. Careri witnessed these proceedings and wrote that before anyone was allowed to disembark from the ship, an officer went on board to check the merchandise and take the tax payment. Once the tax was paid, the goods could be unloaded. By the early nineteenth century, at the time of Humboldt’s visit, it seems there were times when

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19 Careri, 504.

20 Ibid.
powerful merchants in Mexico City bought much of the cargo almost immediately and this was done without even opening the bales.\textsuperscript{21}

Figure 4.4. Nicolas de Cardona. *Acapulco*, 1614. Watercolor. From *Descripciones geograficas y hydrograficas de muchas tierras y mares del norte y el sur en las Indias* (1632). Although cartography was not Cardona’s skill this view of the port shows its desolation. There are a few huts and a castle. In his account Careri complains that Acapulco did not even have an inn to host the travelers, which explains how empty the port was for the rest of the year when a galleon was not docked there. Another image by Dutch painter Adrian Boot similarly portrays Acapulco as a small village with some huts. These images present a striking contrast to the kind of activity described during the time of the fair thus highlighting the importance of the arrival of the galleons.

Returning to Careri’s account we see that the fair did not end once the goods were unloaded. There was a continuous supply of provisions to Acapulco because the fair also included entertainment, albeit not all of it was enjoyable, at least not for Careri:

Monday 11\textsuperscript{th}, the Castellan invited the General of China, Admiral of Peru, D. Joseph Lopez, the Viceroy of Treasure, me and several officers of the ships to see some very indifferent juggling, performed by an old Genoese; and the best of it was, that the guests paid for the entertainment, the old man going about when he had done, to receive every man’s benevolence, without receiving anything from the Castellan…Sunday 17\textsuperscript{th} being Shrove-Sunday, the blacks, mulattos and mesticos (sic) of Acapulco, after dinner ran races with above an hundred horses; which they performed so well, that I thought they far outdid the Grandees I saw ride at Madrid, tho’ these use to practice a month before they appear in publick…\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} von Humboldt, 206.

\textsuperscript{22} Careri, 504-5.
The fact that preparations were made for the fair in Acapulco in advance is further evidence of the importance of the trade for colonial Mexican society. Since there were lucrative goods being brought in, it seems no cost was spared in the festivities, and apparently they were even grander than what could be seen in Madrid, the seat of the Spanish Empire.

The trade fair was a European custom that flourished in the New World colony. Not only did the transpacific trade continue despite efforts on the part of the Crown to prohibit it, but the success of the trade was flaunted since the festivities were conducted with such great pomp and circumstance, enough so that the fair was renowned around the world. This celebration is proof that Balbuena’s orientation of Mexico towards Asia was not a mere figment of his imagination, but a reality for the colonial society. The goods that were brought on the galleons from Asia were so eagerly anticipated that they already had places awaiting them even before they were unpacked. It was the Spanish Crown that wished to restrict the trade, but within the colony Asian textiles, ceramics, furniture, and even beeswax were given space.

**Asia in the Heart of the City**

From Acapulco the goods could have been taken to several different places, either to one of the larger cities such as Puebla or Guadalajara or to the port of Veracruz from where they were sent on to Spain. A large percentage probably went to the capital, Mexico City, where they were resold for great profits at the main marketplace in the city. This market was built in the center soon after Hernando Cortés conquered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521. It was situated in the central square of the city, known as the *Plaza Mayor*, which is also where the Royal Palace, home of the viceroy, was built. The *Plaza Mayor* was not only the center of the city but also the place from which the rest of the colony was governed.

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In this section we consider three instances of Asian presence with regards to this space. The first is a study of biombos, or folding screens, that were used to depict and memorialize the central square. Following the discussion of the Asian-inspired objects we look at two images that show the market as it was when it was named the Parián and finally focus on the presence of Asians themselves in the Plaza Mayor. In each of these instances Asian objects were used or treated differently and suggest that there was a difference in the kind of welcome given to Asian commodities versus Asian peoples. However, before delving into the topic of Asian presence in the heart of Mexico City, we need to know the significance of the market and its central location in the colonial period.

We know from accounts of early colonizers that in the time of Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler who was in power when the Spanish arrived, there was a big market held every day in a place called Tlatelolco, north of the Tenochtitlan, which was the seat of the Aztec empire.\textsuperscript{24} Both Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, another conquistador, wrote extensive descriptions of this market, part of Castillo’s account was as follows:

\begin{quote}
The moment we arrived in this immense market, we were perfectly astonished at the vast numbers of people, the profusion of merchandise which was there exposed for sale, and at the good police and order that reigned throughout…Every species of merchandise had a separate spot for its sale...In short, every species of goods which New Spain produces were here to be found; and everything put me in mind of my native town Medina del Campo during fair time, where every merchandise has a separate street assigned for its sale.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Díaz’s amazement with the market was not only with regards to its size and the variety of goods available there, but also with its orderliness. He found it similar to the fair in his hometown in


\textsuperscript{25} Bernal Díaz del Castillo, The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo written by himself, containing a true and full account of the discovery and conquest of Mexico and New Spain, translated by John Ingram Lockhart (London: Hartchard, 1844), 235-6.
Spain, although the significant difference was that the Aztec market took place every day rather than seasonally. According to Cortés the square where this market was held was twice as big as the square in Salamanca in Spain and attracted more than sixty thousand people every day.\(^{26}\)

During the conquest the Tlatelolco market was destroyed as were many other places and structures of importance to the indigenous peoples. In 1527 it was declared that six plots of ground in the Plaza Mayor would be used for the construction of a city council, a prison, a slaughterhouse and shops.\(^{27}\) As time went on the market grew and eventually became the most important place in the city, at least according to one visitor to Mexico City:

> The chief place in the city is the market-place, which though it be not as spacious as in Montezuma’s time, yet is at this day very fair and wide, built all with arches on the one side where people may walk dry in time of rain, and there are shops of merchants furnished with all sorts of stuffs and silks, and before them sit women selling all manner of fruits and herbs. Over against these shops and arches is the Viceroy’s palace, which, with the walls of the house and of the gardens belonging to it, taketh up almost the whole length of the market.\(^{28}\)

This account of the central marketplace was written by Thomas Gage, an Englishman who traveled in the New World in the early seventeenth century and published his travel memoirs in 1648.\(^{29}\) Gage had been informed that the market in Mexico City was in the likeness of the market in Moctezuma’s time.


\(^{27}\) Ignacio Cumplido, ed. *Coleccion de Documentos Oficiales Relativos a la Construccion y Demolicion del Parian, y a la Propiedad Reconocida e incontestable que tuvo el Escmo. Ayuntamiento de Mexico en Aquel Edificio* (Mexico City: Mexico City Ayuntamiento, 1843), viii.


\(^{29}\) Ibid., v.
Moving the market from the north of the city into the center was a conscious decision on the part of the colonizers. This spot in the city had also been the heart of the city of Tenochtitlan.\(^3^0\) The new shops attracted various groups of people, including natives, to the center where they could see symbols of the new ruling power built in places where their own temples used to stand. The symbolism of imperial power was not just important for the natives, but for the Spanish population as well. The Royal Palace, which housed the residence of the Viceroy and his family, as well as various chambers and courts of the imperial government, the treasury, an armory and a prison, served as a reminder to the Spanish and creole population of the colony’s connection and subservience to the Crown.\(^3^1\)

Although not many visual images exist of the Royal Palace from the early colonial period, its imposition on the central square can be detected from a painting on a seventeenth century biombo. The eight panels of the screen show the Palace, the market in front of it and the Alameda, a park adjacent to the Plaza Mayor (Figure 4.5). Art historian Michael Schreffler has pointed out that the depiction of the Royal Palace on this screen is such that it gives order to the rest of the spaces shown in the image. There are men of authority on balconies looking out at the plaza and the market, but we the viewers cannot see into the Palace.\(^3^2\) The power to observe and survey only belonged to those who had the privilege to be able to look out from inside the Palace. The painting also shows the viceroy’s procession, another symbol of authority.

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 20.
Schreffler’s arguments about the imperial authority presented in the painting are compelling, but he ignores the implication of the fact that the scene is depicted on a folding screen, a form borrowed from Japan, and the painting style too is inspired by images on Japanese screens. The word *biombo* itself comes from the Japanese *byobu* for folding screens. The use of Asian aesthetics to depict a colonial scene, even one that seems to be imposing imperial power, suggests that the colony was looking to foreign forms to record its history and memorialize its spaces.

Furthermore, art historians Teresa Castelló Yturbide and Marita Martínez del Río de Redo have suggested that the coat of arms painted on this particular *biombo* belonged to an

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34 Ibid.
indigenous noble family. If this is the case then the use of the Asian form becomes even more politically motivated. This particular *biombo* is thought to be the earliest example of this colonial Mexican art form and if it was commissioned by an indigenous family then it shows that some native peoples were participating in the recording of the colony’s history and they also had access to Asian objects, which they used as an alternative to Spanish or European forms of recording history.

In Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the folding screens were a preferred format for depicting an event or designating a particular space. Examples of such objects were brought to Mexico, which then inspired the making of *biombos* and their use for similar purposes of memorializing an event or a place. There exists a second *biombo* with the same scene of the Plaza Mayor and the golden cloud motif (Figure 4.6). Another one decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay shows a large plan of the entire city on one side and the history of conquest on the other. The image gives equal space to both the Aztecs and the Spanish and displays them in similar grandeur. The fact that by the seventeenth century an Asian form had already been appropriated to the extent of spurring local imitations, and that too for depicting important places and events, suggests the eagerness with which members of the colonial society were willing to incorporate the goods that were made available to them through the trade with Asia.

The folding screen might have been an attractive alternative medium for painting important places and events because of its very form. The size and mobility of the screens made the images painted on them more interactive than they would be if they were on a mounted painting. The screens were taller than an average person, sometimes as tall as eight feet, and the

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36 Katz, 22.
panels were connected by hinges that allowed them to be folded in various ways. This in-and-out folding of the screens gives a sense of movement to the scenes painted on them, making it easy to imagine the viceroy’s carriage riding across the plaza. Sometimes these screens were referred to as *biombos de cama* (screens for the bed) because they could be used to give more privacy around the bed.\(^37\) Another word for them was *rodoestrados* because they were used in the *salón del estrado*, sitting room.\(^38\) These screens then not only created actual space in bedrooms and salons but also invited the people in those spaces to partake in the activities of another place, such as the Plaza Mayor. The beholder of the painting had the ability to manipulate the image by moving the panels or by moving it into different parts of the room or simply by viewing it from different vantage points.

It has even been suggested that some of the screens were made up of panels from different *biombos* thus giving the owners of these screens the power to literally change the images as they saw fit.\(^39\) This can be seen in the *biombos* seen in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 where the Alameda begins abruptly in the scene. The owner might have decided that s/he wanted the *biombo* to include both the Plaza Mayor and the park. Thus this Asian art form also gave the colonial society a new means to portray important places, but also gave them the option to depict these places the way they wanted to see or remember them.

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\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Katz, 23.
Figure 4.6. Seventeenth century biombo depicting the same location as seen in Figure 5, the Plaza Mayor with the Viceroy’s Palace and the Alameda on the left. This biombo also bears the golden cloud motif borrowed from Japanese screens and it too seems to be a composite of two different screens. However, there are several differences between the two screens. The procession of the viceroy does not have as much of a presence in this example as in the other biombo. Instead it is the shops of the market that are more prominent. The Viceroy’s Palace is also not as imposing.

When the two biombos depicting the Plaza Mayor were made in the seventeenth century, the market that is shown in the forefront most probably had not yet been named the Parián, the same name as the market in Manila where Chinese merchants conducted trade with European and Asian merchants. We know that the temporary shops in the plaza had to be rebuilt and reinstalled due to fires, most notably after a riot in 1692 when parts of the Royal Palace were also destroyed.40 The reconstruction of the market after that incident entailed making it more permanent by using stone for some parts of the building. To the east of the stone structure were stalls where fruits and vegetables would be sold.41 In the permanent structure many of the shops

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41 Ibid., 28.
were dedicated to the sale of goods brought on the Manila Galleons, which is probably when the market was given the name *Parián*.\(^4^2\)

A late seventeenth century painting by Cristóbal del Villalpando gives an idea of the expanse of the new market that was constructed after the riot (Figure 4.7). It shows the partly destroyed Royal Palace in the back, the Cathedral on the left and the bustling market takes up most of the canvas. From Villalpando’s painting it is easy to see why Gage might have called the market the “chief place in the city.” As with the *biombos* that depicted the Plaza, in this rendition too the viceroy is represented by a carriage shown in the bottom left corner. However, the viceroy’s presence does not overwhelm the painting as it does in the *biombo* in Figure 4.5. Instead he is just one of the many different kinds of people shown engaging in the commercial activity of the market.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{villalpando.png}
\caption{Cristóbal del Villalpando, *View of the Plaza Mayor*, ca. 1695. Oil on canvas.}
\end{figure}

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\(^{42}\) Ibid.
The painting can also be seen as a visual rendition of Balbuena’s poem where symbols of authority are shown in the background, but the main focus of the painting is the market and its grandeur. The fact that the Royal Palace is depicted as damaged perhaps also portends the waning power of the Crown, even though the city itself looks like it is thriving considering the commercial activity. The city as a marketplace as expressed by Balbuena in words was given visual form by Villalpando.

Giving this market an Asian name can be likened to the fair at Acapulco and the colonial society’s celebration of its ties with Asia. Instead of giving it a Spanish name or taking a word derived from a native language, the choice of the Asian name is a deliberate association with its counterpart in Asia. In the Plaza Mayor the Royal Palace and the Cathedral represented the colony’s connection with Spain but the marketplace clearly represented its ties with Asia.

We know for a fact that at the latest by the late eighteenth century the market was known as the Parián because there is a painting titled as such that was made around 1770 (Figure 4.8). The painting focuses on just a few shops of the market and gives a better sense of the kinds of interactions that took place there. It shows customers inspecting various goods and vendors mingling with them trying to make sales. This painting belongs to the genre of casta painting, a form particular to colonial Mexico that recorded the racial mixing between the three main groups that inhabited the colony: Indian, Spanish and African. The painting of the Parián is unlike most other casta paintings because it does not follow the traditional format of depicting a mixed race couple with their child. Instead there are numbers written next to some of the figures in the painting which correspond with a key on the back of the painting that lists the “types of people

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that inhabit Mexico City. These might have included castizos, negros, indios, mestizos, mulattos, and even chinos. However, the chinos in casta paintings did not refer to people from China, even though there were Asian vendors present in the Plaza Mayor. These chinos were progeny of different races.

In addition to documenting the racial mixtures found in the colony, casta paintings were also a means to present the bounties available in the colony. Furthermore, many of these casta paintings were meant as souvenirs on life in colonial Mexico for Europeans and Katzew argues that in presenting colonial life to Europeans these paintings were also a means of fashioning colonial identity. As such, the racial mixing shown in these paintings would have been looked down upon in Spanish society as a sign of the inferiority of the colony as compared with the racially pure metropole, but the display of material wealth would have countered this sentiment to some extent. In many of the paintings the couples are shown against a backdrop of lush local produce, or in commercial situations where they are selling local products. The painting of the Parián then falls into the category of showing a marketplace that sold products available in the colony and at the same time representing the diversity of races present there.

The shops in the painting are shown selling furniture, glass or crystal ware, cloaks and other textiles, proving that the colony was well supplied with both luxury goods and basic necessities. There are vendors shown carrying smaller wares in baskets, peddling them amongst the crowd at the market. The customers are a diverse group of people, mostly men, shown in various states of dress that indicate their social class or wealth. By showing people of different races and classes, the painting tells us that the Parián was a space that was important to all the

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44 Ibid. I have not seen the back of this painting and have listed the various castes that might have been represented from what is seen in other casta paintings.

45 Katzew, J.
different groups of people in colonial society, it also shows that it was a space in which these
groups came into contact with one another and interacted. In the painting this interaction seems
harmonious, but this was not always the case, and there were moments when groups did not get
along. There was especially some tension between the Chinese and the creoles who worked in
the Parián.

![Figure 4.8. Anonymous, El Parián, ca. 1770. Oil on canvas. On the left right hand corner of the painting the location of the scene is named.]

We know that along with Asian commodities the Manila Galleon Trade also brought
Asians to Mexico. According to low estimates between 40,000 to 60,000 Asians went to Mexico
while the trade was active, but 100,000 is the more probable number.46 In the archives these
people are listed as “indios chinos.”47 However these chinos that appear in the archives are not


47 Archival documents list names of men who were hired to work on the galleons, such as “indio chino, Andres Paganiban, para servir su majestad como grumete en el galeon Real San Felipe…” (Indio chino, Andres Paganiban,
the same as the *chinos* represented in *casta* paintings. These paintings only depict Indians, Spaniards or Africans and the progeny that were possible from various different combinations amongst these three groups. The *chinos* of *casta* paintings were not men and women of Asian descent but rather the result of combinations such as lobo and *india* or *barcino* and *mulata* or *chamizo* and *cambuja* amongst others. In the tripartite caste system of black, white and Indian as presented by the *casta* paintings there was no space for the people who came to the colony from Asia.

There are several possibilities for the omission of Asians from these paintings, which in other ways do record the influence of Asia in colonial Mexico. Scholar Ilona Katzew has argued that anxiety regarding miscegenation might be partly responsible for the emergence of the genre of *casta* painting. The production of paintings that clearly ordered and listed the different racial mixes was a way to create order in such a society. The exclusion of Asians from these paintings perhaps means that this anxiety did not extend to that group of people. Either their numbers were not significant enough or they did not pose a threat to the order of the society in the same way that Africans or Indians did. Another possibility is that the only way the artists who made *casta* paintings could think to include Asians was to deny their foreign origin and instead made them the progeny of local racial mixtures. Either possibility indicates that there was confusion with regards to depicting Asians in *casta* paintings.

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48 Slack, 59.

49 Katzew, 39.
Such an ambivalence towards Asians was also seen in judicial matters regarding their presence in the Plaza Mayor. There were two situations of conflict between the Spanish or creoles and Asians who were working in the plaza. The first conflict took place in 1631 when a group of six retailers of Asian origin filed a suit against a tax collector who unjustly demanded taxes from them.\(^5^0\) In 1592 the king had decreed that indios chinos, referring to natives of Asia, did not have to pay the sales tax on the goods they sold in their shops if they paid their royal tribute.\(^5^1\) Even though the court ruled in favor of the Asian vendors, tax collectors continued their harassment and probably many Asians who did not want to take the matter to court paid the extra taxes.\(^5^2\)

The second incident occurred in 1635 when a group of Spanish barbers filed a petition with the cabildo of Mexico City criticizing the Chinese barbers who worked in the Plaza Mayor for their lack of skill and for the inconvenience they caused by taking away business. In this instance, the viceroy banned the Chinese barbers from the plaza, although the ban was ineffective since a few years later Chinese barbers were given licenses to open shops in the same location. However again they faced resistance from Spanish barbers and the conflict continued in this manner for much of the seventeenth century.\(^5^3\)

Both instances discussed above show that the colonial state also did not know how to treat the new additions to their society. The authorities would ban barbers from the Plaza Mayor but a few years later issue licenses for them to open shops again. Or the authorities would take the side of the Asian vendors when they were treated unjustly, but could not enforce the law.

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\(^5^0\) Slack, 47.

\(^5^1\) Ibid.

\(^5^2\) Ibid.

\(^5^3\) Slack, 46.
These incidents as well as the case of the chinos in casta paintings indicate that making space for Asia was easier in the case of Asian commodities than Asian peoples. The main market in the city could be given an Asian name, but Asians themselves could not freely sell their wares or services in that same space. And Asian objects could be appropriated to the point of giving rise to new colonial art forms, such as the biombo, but incorporating people from Asia into colonial society proved to be more problematic.

The Parián served several different functions for the colonial capital. By dedicating the central square of the city to a daily market, the colonial authorities could offer some sort of continuity to the natives who were used to such markets. The space was such that it could be monitored and also serve as a reminder of the rule of the Spanish Crown in the form of the surrounding monuments. This reminder was also necessary for the creole population in later years and having a large market in the central plaza was a good means of gathering people at that site. Yet, the fact that it became popularly known as the Parián was also subversive, connecting the center of the city to Asia rather than to the metropole. Not unlike images of the square where the monuments symbolizing the Spanish Empire retreated into the background and the market was shown as its overwhelming feature. Perhaps the best explanation is that all these aspects of colonial Mexican society coexisted in the Parián, even if they were contradictory, just in the same way that Asian goods sold in the shops in the market could be valued highly, but Asian people were not.

**Asia on Display**

One of the reasons that Asian material objects were easier to incorporate in colonial Mexican society was because they did not pose a threat. In the case of Chinese porcelain, scholar
Lothar Ledderose has argued that one of the factors that helped popularize Chinese export porcelain around the world was the “apolitical” and “unhistorical” character of the motifs.\(^\text{54}\) These characteristics of Chinese porcelain made it particularly appropriate for display, where the motifs and designs of the objects were pleasant for decoration and could not be construed as heretic or revolutionary. Yet, the manner of displaying them and the contexts in which they were displayed could be deliberate and become an expression of ideas other than the beauty of the objects themselves. In this section we study paintings of scenes where porcelain objects are on display. These scenes, or artists’ imaginations of scenes, show that even if the objects themselves were apolitical they could be used in ways that made them signifiers of specific identities or ideas.

The eighteenth century painting of the Christ of Chalma by Pedro Calderón that includes two porcelain bottles is an example of such a scene (Figures 4.9 and 4.10). While these porcelain square bottles can be dismissed as mere decorations, their juxtaposition with the Christ of Chalma was not accidental. The Christ of Chalma, one of several “Black Christs” particular to Spanish America, first appeared in a cave in the region of Chalma, which was known for its medicine-healing, “witchcraft” and artisanship in prehispanic times.\(^\text{55}\) Jeanette Peterson argues that the mythic and political importance of the region allowed the local indigenous communities to adopt the new religion in ways that aligned with their own needs, which is probably why the Christ was initially dark-skinned.\(^\text{56}\) The mountain shrine dedicated to this Lord began attracting devotees and hermits by the late sixteenth century and eventually became the second most


\(^{56}\) Ibid.
important pilgrimage site in Mexico.\footnote{Ibid., 50.} Even though we have evidence that suggests the earliest renditions of the Christ of Chalma were dark skinned, by the time of Calderón’s painting he had turned white. Peterson suggests that this may be due to the extirpation campaigns of the late seventeenth century as well as renewed sensitivities regarding racial distinctions at the time.\footnote{Ibid., 56. Nineteenth century versions of this Christ were again dark-skinned.}

In light of this argument, the porcelain bottles could represent a further “elevating” of the native born lord, helping to create a distance from his native beginnings. However, the use of Asian objects to do so begs the question of why the artist chose Asian objects to create this distance rather than using something Spanish or European, such as glass or silverware objects. As in the case of the Japanese folding screens, the accessibility of Asian objects through trade

Figure 4.9. Underglaze blue porcelain. Two opposing sides of the bottle are decorated with landscapes and the other two sides have flowering trees and shrubs.

Figure 4.10. Pedro Calderón. Cristo de Chalma. Early eighteenth century. Oil on canvas.
afforded colonial artists an alternative if they did not want to emulate the metropole or align themselves with native Indian customs.

It is also possible that by the eighteenth century the display of Chinese porcelain on altars was common. Such a juxtaposition of Asian objects next to a powerful religious image served to make both the Christ and the porcelain bottles more local; the bottles served as symbols of Mexico’s connection with Asia and the Christ of Chalma was a colonial Mexican creation, or reincarnation, of the lord from the Old World. The painting represents a colonial Mexican reality in which a local Christ, created by native indigenous believers, is adorned with Chinese porcelain.

This reality is reinforced in yet another painting from the eighteenth century with the same theme where the artist again depicted the Christ of Chalma with square blue-and-white porcelain bottles with flowers in them and thus legitimized the incorporation of Asian objects into local religious rituals. We do not know which painting was made first, but if one artist was inspired by the other he clearly approved of the use of the Chinese porcelain bottles as adornments for the Christ of Chalma.
The careful placement of an Asian object in a local scene can also be seen in an eighteenth century biombo (Figure 4.12). The screen, which consists of ten panels, depicts three different couples, each of a different class, placed in a hierarchical order. The pairings are reminiscent of casta paintings.59 Towards the left side of the screen there is a conspicuously placed blue-and-white vase with flowers. An entire panel of the screen is dedicated to this object, suggesting its importance and the status of the Spanish or creole couple it is placed closest to.60

It is not possible to know with absolute certainty that this blue-and-white vase was of Chinese origin. The vase could have been made in the city of Puebla, which was known for its blue-and-white earthenware ceramics and the potters there frequently borrowed Chinese designs and motifs, but this particular form is not common in the repertoire of the Puebla potters.


60 Ibid.
Regardless, of the origin we know that by the time the screen was made the blue-and-white ceramic aesthetic was firmly associated with China and was highly valued in colonial Mexican society. The placement of the vase next to the upper class couple gives both the object and the couple a certain stature as compared to the other couples who are not given the benefit of props in their courtship.

![Figure 4.12. Mexico, mid-eighteenth century. Oil on canvas.](image)

A *casta* painting from the early eighteenth century offers another example of how Asian objects could be used to denote status in colonial Mexican society (Figure 4.13). The painting depicts the pairing of a *castizo* (a mix of Spanish and mestizo) with an *española* (Spaniard) and their child is considered an *española*. The three figures are dressed elegantly with the mother and daughter adorned in pearls. In the top left corner of the painting there is a small blue-and-white
vase with flowers placed on top of an armoire. Again, it could be argued that the vase in this case is also not of Chinese origin, but the shape very closely resembles the onion shaped bottles that were brought to Mexico from China (Figure 2.6). Since the *casta* paintings were concerned with racial hierarchy, and the Spanish were at the top of this hierarchy, the juxtaposition of the vase next to the Spanish woman cannot be accidental. It is a gesture to her wealth and her access to Asian luxuries.

Figure 4.13. Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De castizo y española, produce española*, ca. 1715. Oil on Canvas.

There are other examples of *casta* paintings where the Spanish person in the painting is shown with goods brought to Mexico from Asia, most notably of Spanish men wearing fashionable chintz robes from India as in the painting shown below. 61 In the painting below the man is Spanish and the woman is black, and their child mulato (Figure 4.14). The woman is dressed simply, with a scarf or *rebozo* draped around her shoulders. The man is shown wearing a

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61 As seen in a painting by José de Alcázar, *De español y negra, mulato*, ca. 1760 pictured in *Painting a New World*, 244 and in a painting by José de Páez, *De español y castiza, español*, ca. 1770 – 80 pictured in Katzew (2004), 23.
robe that would have been typical for a garment worn inside the home. This kind of garment is known as a *banyan* and was imported from India. Another slightly later painting shows a Spanish man wearing a similar garment and he is also shown resting at home.\(^\text{62}\)

The *casta* painting in Figure 4.13 reveals the opulence of some wealthy Spanish couples, but there are also examples that show that blue-and-white ceramics were available to lower class couples as well, although they displayed them in a different manner.\(^\text{63}\) In these scenes the ceramics shown are almost always the ones used for eating and drinking and they are placed

\(^{62}\) Research on Asian textiles in colonial Mexico is still sparse because not much material has survived. The archives make it clear that many different kinds of textiles were exported to the colony and some varieties must have been affordable even for the lower classes, but we still do not know much about how they were used. *Casta* paintings could be a good source for pursuing this topic further. These paintings also indicate the wide availability of Chinese ceramics.

\(^{63}\) Other paintings that show blue-and-white ceramics: Francisco Clapera *De español y negra, mulato*, ca. 1785; José de Ibarra, *De español y negra, mulato*, ca. 1725; Andrés de Islas, *De español y negra, nace mulata*, 1774.
alongside other household goods (Figures 4.15 and 4.16). Unlike the paintings where the blue-and-white ceramics are singular pieces and displayed by themselves, making them more conspicuous, in these paintings several objects are shown together and are part of the overall kitchen or domestic display.

In some of these examples it is also impossible to know whether the blue-and-white ceramics were Chinese or local productions although it is quite likely that they could be porcelain since in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most households in colonial Mexico had one or two pieces. Without knowing the exact origin of these ceramics what we can surmise from these scenes is that the blue-and-white aesthetic introduced by Chinese ceramics had been appropriated and made a part of daily life in colonial Mexico.

Such an appropriation of the foreign aesthetic is apropos with the theme of these paintings. For example, in the painting shown in Figure 4.15 at the forefront we see a mixed race couple and their offspring engaged in routine tasks. The black mother is preparing chocolate and the mulatto child is offering his Spanish father a brazier for his tobacco. The setting is almost identical to the one seen in Figure 4.14, where the child is also offering his father tobacco and the mother is shown holding a copper pot that would have been used to make chocolate. In the painting in Figure 4.15 there is a shelf behind the woman that holds what look like cups and plates for household use and amongst these there are blue-and-white ceramics.

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64 Pierce, Ruiz Gomar and Bargellini, 224.
Chocolate and tobacco were both New World products that were popular in all levels of society. If a mixing of customs and races was the theme of the painting, the inclusion of blue-and-white ceramics was not meant to be conspicuous but rather a part of the theme. A cup and saucer are shown on the counter, with a piece of bread of biscuit on the saucer to accompany the chocolate. In the painting the ceramics serve both as objects of display and as objects used in daily life.

In another painting we see ceramics on display but mixed with another kind of locally produced ceramic known as tonala ware. The artist, Francisco Clapera, is the only known Spanish painter of casta paintings. Perhaps he included the tonala ware because they fascinated him or because he knew they were prized ceramics in Spain. He also painted blue-and-white
ceramics, showing that both types of ceramics, one indigenous and the other foreign, or inspired by foreign aesthetics, could be part of a domestic scene in colonial Mexico.

Figure 4.16. Francisco Clapera. De chino e india, genízaro (From Chino and Indian, Genizaro), ca. 1785. Oil on canvas.

There is one painting from the eighteenth century that specifically depicts Chinese porcelain with other household objects. Antonio Pérez de Aguilar’s Painter’s Cupboard is a depiction of a cabinet with various objects in it that are visible to the viewers through the cabinet’s glass door, which is locked (Figure 4.17). The many objects in this painting can all be singled-out for interpretation, but for our purposes the Chinese porcelain plate on the bottom shelf is most interesting. It stands out because it is the brightest object in the painting, even brighter than the silver plates with scalloped rims on the middle shelf. Yet, it is not necessarily meant to be more special than the other objects, especially not if we consider that the items are
placed in a hierarchical order with the ones on the top shelf being most valuable to the painter. The top shelf consists of items that were intellectually nourishing, such as the violin, the books, and the paintbrushes. The bottom two shelves consist of objects and goods that were more for a physical nourishment.

There is an air of dishevelment to the cupboard. Many of the objects in this cupboard seem to be placed haphazardly, even precariously. Aguilar’s painting quite literally seems to be a glimpse of daily life in Mexico of a person of humble means. It proves that porcelain objects were widely available in the colony and were not just accessible to the elite. Yet, they were not so commonplace as to not deserve display and the care of being locked in a cupboard.

Figure 4.17. Painter’s Cupboard, Antonio Pérez de Aguilar, 1769. Oil on canvas. The painting is made in the trompe l’oeil style of still life painting meant to be so realistic that it could trick the eye. The painting shows a variety of every-day objects a painter possessed. The top shelf contains some books, a violin and the painter’s brushes. The middle shelf has food items, including bread loaves and round boxes that would have held the cacao paste used to make chocolate. The bottom shelf mostly consists of vessels and utensils of different kinds, such as the wicker baskets, the porcelain plate and the glasses. The copper pot was for making chocolate and the handle of molinillo is shown sticking out of it as well as a jicara.

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65 Ibid.
66 Pierce, Ruiz Gomar and Bargellini, 222.
In all the various images discussed so far, we see that blue-and-white ceramics could have a utilitarian purpose, as a flower vase or a dish to be used in the kitchen, but they were also used for display. A blue-and-white ceramic in itself was decorative even if it did not hold flowers, and depending on the kind of object, or the manner or location of its display, it could denote a person’s status. Thus, even though they were widely available their incorporation into the daily life depended on the person who owned them. There was not one way of using or displaying these objects.

**Chocolate and china in colonial Mexico**

One of the most conspicuous ways in which Chinese porcelain was used was for the consumption of chocolate. Since chocolate was a native beverage, the Spanish learned to cultivate a taste for it and prepare it from the Indians. The Spanish living in Mexico were educated by Indians in this custom and those who went back to Spain then educated the society there. The first Spanish colonizers could not be discouraged from drinking chocolate in the early years after the conquest even though there was fear of contact between the natives and the Spanish. Later on the colonial population also did not give up chocolate for tea when Europe was enthralled by Chinese tea. They followed their own tastes, literally in this case, and adapted the Asian goods available to them, to fit their needs.

Chocolate is made from the seeds of the cacao fruit, and the use of the fruit in beverages was a common trait of all the diverse communities of Mesoamerica. After the conquest the colonizers, despite being victorious, needed to rely on native knowledge and products to survive.

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in the foreign land, which is how chocolate was first adopted by Europeans.\(^6^8\) In the years following the conquest there were groups that discouraged the consumption of chocolate due to anxieties about contact between natives and the Spanish population.\(^6^9\) However, just as miscegenation could not be stopped, the detractors of chocolate were also not successful, and by the early seventeenth century chocolate was being consumed both in Mexico and Spain.\(^7^0\)

Historian Marcy Norton has argued that even though the manner of consuming chocolate changed over time, the Spanish society first learned how to appreciate the taste of chocolate and the methods of consuming it from the natives.\(^7^1\) One of the examples she uses to support her theory is the use of *jicaras* to drink chocolate in both Mexico and Spain. *Jicaras* were the vessels that the indigenous people used to drink chocolate. They were most often made of lacquered gourd and the name was derived from the Nahuatl word *xicalli*.\(^7^2\) Norton has shown that in ship manifests of the transatlantic trade between the colony and Spain there is reference to *jicaras* being exported for chocolate consumption, indicating that when people in Spain began drinking chocolate they too used utensils that the natives used.\(^7^3\) She argues that this continuity between the prehispanic ritual and colonial custom is further proven by the fact that when the lacquered

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 676-7.


\(^{70}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{71}\) Norton, “Tasting Empire,” 678.


\(^{73}\) Ibid., 683.
gourd cups were replaced by porcelain and mayolica vessels they were still referred to as
*jicaras*.\textsuperscript{74}

In the colonial period chocolate was a familiar custom for all classes and races that
inhabited the colony. In the late eighteenth century the viceroy of Mexico is known to have made
a statement regarding the wide availability of this beverage: “In this country cacao is a primary
food not only for persons of means as in other countries, but also among the poor people,
especially servants both rustic and urban, who are given a ration of chocolate.”\textsuperscript{75} The viceroy
seems to be making a gesture to the colony’s wealth and status because all members of colonial
society could drink chocolate, and this sentiment was also expressed in *casta* paintings that
showed both upper and lower class couples indulging in the beverage, as seen above.

In these paintings the chocolate is almost always served in blue-and-white cups, similar
to the shape of Chinese cups like the one shown below (Figure 4.20). In Figure 4.15 we saw an
black woman preparing chocolate and it was served in a blue-and-white cup. In another *casta*
painting we see a couple being served chocolate by their son while they play a game of cards
(4.18). The manner in which the figures are dressed, the setting and the fact that they are shown
engaged in a leisurely activity indicates that they are a family with some wealth. Yet, they are
drinking chocolate and using cups similar to the ones shown in the much humbler setting with
the black mother. Even though the cups look similar it is possible that the ones being used by the
upper class couple were of a higher quality, but regardless in both instances these cups would be
referred to as *jicaras*.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} As quoted in Sophie and Michael Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 181.
Chinese cups were probably used to drink chocolate as soon as they were brought to Mexico since porcelain is ideal for drinking warm beverages. Norton argues that giving the Chinese vessels the native name was simple since the two types of vessels were similar in size and shape. It is true that smaller jícara would have been similar in size to Chinese porcelain cups, but for the most part the two objects were very different. A jícara is a very light object and its shape is bulbous, with the rim of the vessel caving in. Large jícaras require two hands for a comfortable grip. The porcelain cup on the other hand is heavier and feels like glass and the rim protrudes out. The experience of drinking chocolate from the two vessels would have been different. Recognizing this difference makes Norton’s point about the Spanish learning from the natives much stronger. Chinese teacups were referred to as jícara not because of a visual or material similitude between the two kinds of objects, but because the Chinese vessel was being

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77 Based on my personal experience of handling the pictured jícara in Museo Bello in Puebla. The curators were not able to tell me more precisely when the object was made.
used for a custom that the Spanish had adopted from the natives, and they used native referents for anything to do with chocolate.

Jícara made with different materials. Figure 4.19 is a jícara made with a hollowed out and lacquered gourd. It is part of the lacquerware collection in Museo Bello and lacks information on its provenance. I did have the chance to handle it and the object, although bigger in size than porcelain cups (approximately 14” in height) was very light. It was decorated with motifs of birds on the outside and lacquered on the inside. Figure 4.20 is a Chinese porcelain jícara from the mid-eighteenth century made in Jindezhen. It is decorated with the double-headed eagle, symbol of the Hapsburg Empire (approximately 7.5” in height). Today it is housed in the Museum of Ceramics in Barcelona, Spain and its caption identifies it as a xícra, the Catalan spelling of jícara. Figure 4.21 is a jícara made in Puebla in the eighteenth century. It is tin-glazed earthenware and decorated in a paneled design borrowed from Chinese cups. The three vessels are made with different materials. The porcelain cup was made for the Spanish market and was referred to as a jícara even though it has very little in common with gourd vessel. The cup made in Puebla clearly borrowed from such Chinese cups that were made available in Mexico through the Manila Galleon trade.

The association between Chinese teacups and chocolate is significant because the same porcelain cups could have been used to drink other beverages, such as tea, which became popular in many parts of Europe and gave a boost to the porcelain production industry in China. However, while Europeans were using Chinese cups to drink Chinese tea, in Mexico the same objects were being used to drink chocolate. Tea did not become a popular Asian commodity in colonial Mexico. The ship manifests of the transpacific trade do not bear evidence of tea being exported to Mexico. On the contrary, we know that cacao was one of the goods sent to Manila

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from Mexico for the colonial populace living in the Philippine Islands.\textsuperscript{79} Peter Mundy, an English traveler, tasted chocolate for the first time on a Manila galleon that was docked in the bay of Macao:

\begin{quote}
It seems they make rich voyages from Manilla (sic) to Nova Hispanna and back again. Aboard this ship was the first time I tasted Chacculatte (chocolate), although I had heard it spoken of. It is made of a certain grain growing in the West Indies. These they dry, grind to powder, boil in water, add sugar, spice, odours etc; drinking it warm in the mornings is accounted very wholesome.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

Mundy’s account is from his travels to India and the East Indies in the 1630s and in that region too it was known that the Manila galleons carried valuable cargoes. At that time tea had not yet become popular in Europe, but clearly chocolate was already a staple in the Spanish Empire since those traveling to Asia from Mexico chose to bring it with them. The refusal to drink Chinese tea but the adoption of Chinese porcelain cups to drink a native Mexican beverage proves that the colonial society followed its own tastes and introduced them to Spain and Europe.

A late seventeenth century painting \textit{Still Life with Ebony Chest} by Spanish artist Antonio de Pereda (Figure 4.22) shows that chocolate was also incorporated into the daily life in the metropole. In addition to adopting the custom of drinking chocolate from the colonial society, Spain also borrowed the colony’s way of using Asian ceramics in the chocolate service. This is seen in the painting, which depicts many objects brought to Spain from the New World and amongst them is a Chinese blue-and-white porcelain cup. The hue of the blue color used to paint the cup, the faintly discernable motifs and an outward-curving rim all suggest that the cup in the painting was Chinese, much like the ones shown in Figure 4.23. Other objects in the painting

\textsuperscript{79} Schurz, 275.

\textsuperscript{80} Peter Mundy, \textit{The Travels of Peter Mundy} (Cornwall : Dyllansow Truran,1984), 45.
include an Andean textile, ceramics from Mexico and Spain, and sugar from the Caribbean possibly used to sweeten the chocolate. The ebony chest could have been to store the cacao beans used to make the chocolate.\textsuperscript{81} On top of the chest sits a \textit{jícara} and behind it a \textit{tonala} ware double-handled jar.\textsuperscript{82}

![Figure 4.22. Antonio de Pereda, \textit{Still Life with Ebony Chest}, 1652. Oil on canvas. State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg Russia](image)

\textsuperscript{81} This use of the ebony chest has been suggested by Marcy Norton, among others, in “Tasting Empire,” 685.

\textsuperscript{82} For more on this see María Concepción García Saíz, “Mexican Ceramics in Spain” in \textit{Cerámica y Cultura: The Story of Spanish and Mexico Mayólica}, Albequerque: University of New Mexico Press (2003), 186-202.
Pereda’s painting does not tell us for a fact that the Chinese cup was brought to Spain from Mexico, but given that it is presented with so many other products and objects from the New World it is highly likely that it too was brought to Europe from across the Atlantic. In addition, although the Chinese cup was an anomaly due to its origin, the painting suggests that it did not actually stand out in that particularly setting, it was a jícara like the others in the painting. By the time Pereda painted the still life scene, Chinese porcelain cups had been incorporated into the custom of drinking chocolate in Spain, via Mexico.

In colonial Mexico the interaction between Chinese ceramics and chocolate went beyond the use of the cup. Another Chinese shape that was adapted for the use of chocolate consumption was the Chinese guan that was recreated by potters in Puebla into a chocolatero. Chinese jars that lost their lids on the journey across the ocean would be fitted with iron lids that could be locked. This shape inspired local creations that were also fitted with iron lids instead of being
given ceramic ones. Both kinds of jars would be used to store valuable products, such as cacao beans. The lid on the porcelain jar shown below is itself exquisitely crafted, matching the elegance of the jar even though the material is a contrast to the delicate porcelain. These lids were often made by blacksmiths in Puebla, which was also known in the colony for its iron works.

Figures 4.24 and 4.25

Chocolateros. Figure 4.24. Porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze red and green enamels. China, Kangxi period, 1690-1700. The jar is decorated with four lappets with chrysanthemum and lotus blossoms. Figure 4.25. Earthenware with overglaze blue. Puebla, eighteenth century. The shape resembles the Chinese guan and the surface decoration is a combination of Chinese, European and Hispano-Moresque motifs.

The connection of Chinese porcelain with chocolate is further evidenced in the creation of the ceramic version of a New World object used for the consumption of chocolate: the mancerina, a saucer like vessel that had a place for a cup of chocolate and could also hold

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83 Kuwayama, 49.
biscuits on its base (Figure 4.26). The origins of this object are not fully known. It is suggested that due to its name perhaps it was invented by a viceroy of Peru, Marqués de Mancera.\textsuperscript{84} According to that story, the first mancerina was made with silver and later ceramic versions were created.\textsuperscript{85} While trading in Asia, the merchants from Mexico chose not to buy tea but bought vessels to drink chocolate and even commissioned the creation of the mancerina by potters in Jingdezhen. The \textit{jicara} and the mancerina then are examples of objects that show that the trade with Asia was not only a means of orienting itself away from Europe as suggested by Balbuena’s poem, but rather to use the connection to make the colonial identity stronger.

The three objects, the Chinese teacup as \textit{jicara}, the chocolatero and the mancerina offer three different ways in which Chinese porcelain was adapted for the consumption of chocolate. The Chinese teacup was used to drink chocolate and was given a local name. The chocolatero was an entirely new object that was created from the meeting of a local custom and an Asian object. The mancerina too was a new object, but created locally, and then reproduced by Chinese artisans. The teacup and the chocolatero are examples of Chinese porcelain objects that were adapted to fit local taste and the mancerina is an object for which Chinese artisans had to adapt their skills to make a novel item specifically for Mexican tastes.

\textsuperscript{84} Donna Pierce, 254.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Conclusion

The appropriation of Asian goods in colonial Mexico was not haphazard. Many of the goods that were brought on the Manila Galleon Trade have not survived and the ones that are in collections in museums do not have adequate provenances for us to know who they were owned by and for what purpose. However, the surviving sources do tell us that the colonial society cared about and recorded the origins of the goods they used. We saw this in the last chapter with the example of the official from the mining town of Taxco who listed the textiles he had according to where they were from in Asia. The city council records of Puebla showed that the officials indicated where the cloth for uniforms had come from and slightly later council records show that wax chandlers in Puebla were required to mix wax from Spain and China in equal quantities.86

Wax is one example of the manner in which Asian goods were appropriated in colonial Mexico. Once brought into the colony the wax retained its identification as being foreign, but it

was also required that it be mixed with wax from Spain, that too in equal quantities, and that mixture was what was then made available to consumers in Puebla. In other examples the blending was not quite as literal where just the name was changed or in yet other cases the Asian object itself was not changed in any way but inspired changes in the local crafts. In these various instances we see that Asian goods provided by the Manila Galleon Trade were influential in the colony, but they were appropriated according to local needs and conditions.

Other examples of the influence of Asian goods in colonial society were seen in the way they changed certain spaces, such as the port of Acapulco, the central market in Mexico City, and the interiors of homes and churches. Although Acapulco was also a port city its participation and involvement in the Manila Galleon Trade was very different from that of Manila. Both cities depended on the transpacific trade network, but Acapulco quite literally required the presence of a galleon to come to life, and it was a more jubilant town when the galleons arrived from Asia laden with goods.

The Parián in the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City was also created by global trade and was a place where many commodities from around the world were sold. We know that the sale of Asian goods in this market was influential because the space was given the same name as its counterpart in Manila. In that same space we saw that Asian people were not accepted into colonial Mexican society as eagerly as Asian goods were. Edward Slack, in his conclusion on the place of Asians in colonial Mexican society writes that, “Chinos occupied an ill-defined, nebulous niche in the race-conscious social hierarchy of New Spain.”87 The place of Asian and Chinese objects in colonial Mexican society cannot be described in the same manner because the Manila Galleon Trade was regarded highly in the colony. Even though in terms of distance Spain was closer to Mexico, there were ways in which the colony’s strong attraction to Asia was

87 Slack, 63.
noticeable, starting as early as 1604 with the publication of Balbuena’s poem, and this attraction had a great deal to do with the commodities that the trade with Asia made available in the colony.

Specific goods, such as Japanese folding screens, had the ability to transform the space in a particular room. Other objects, such as Chinese porcelain or carved ivory sculptures, could transform a space by adding decorative flourishes. Some of these goods were also influential in the development of local crafts, as seen in the case of biombos that were used to record and depict locally important historical events or places. The same was true of the introduction of Chinese porcelain, which gave rise to a genre of ceramic objects used specifically for the consumption of chocolate and provided inspiration to local potters for the new ceramic aesthetic they were developing in the city of Puebla.
CHAPTER FIVE
Blue-and-White Chocolateros: Crafting a Local Aesthetic in Puebla

Figure 5.1. Tin-glazed earthenware with iron lid. Puebla, ca. 1700.

Introduction

One of the most significant consequences of the transpacific trade for Mexico was the incorporation of Asian designs and aesthetic elements into colonial crafts, a phenomenon that is particularly visible in the ceramics produced in Puebla (Figure 5.1). The epic poem La Grandeza Mexicana by Bernardo Balbuena showed that by the early seventeenth century Mexico City was a place where the various trade networks of the world converged because commodities from around the globe could be found there. The city of Puebla could not compete with the importance of the colonial capital, but the eighteenth century jar pictured above is a reminder that it too had access to global trade.

In the previous chapter we saw that trade with Asia provided opportunities to the colonial society in Mexico to distance and distinguish itself from the Crown, especially in the capital,
Mexico City. In this chapter we see the influence of Asia beyond the capital by focusing on Puebla and the ceramics produced there. The chapter is an investigation of the conditions and context in which the potters created an aesthetic that became a matter of pride for the colony, and pays special attention to how the artisans used their access to trade with Asia and accessibility of Chinese porcelain to create their own ceramics.

The very existence of the blue-and-white *chocolatero* shown above is testament to the fact that the goods and people that came into the colony contributed to Puebla’s richness just as they did to Mexico City’s. The jar was made with mostly local material, using techniques introduced to the colony from Spain and was decorated with Asian, European and indigenous motifs.¹ The shape and surface decoration show that the artisans were not afraid to depart from European artistic traditions in order to create objects that appealed to a local market. As a product of Puebla the jar is also proof that the colony could be productive in its own right and did not have to depend on the metropole, not even for its luxury goods, which it also had the option of importing from Asia through the Manila Galleon Trade.

Chinese ceramics brought on the Manila galleons reached the farthest corners of the Spanish American colonies, albeit in different quantities. Porcelain shards have been found in Peru, Ecuador, Panama, New Mexico and Florida.² Despite the wide reach of Asian ceramics and despite the fact that there were several sites in colonial Latin America that produced ceramics, only in Puebla did the ceramic industry take up an extensive reinterpretation and modification of

¹The cobalt used to decorate the jar was probably imported since no local sources of the mineral were known at the time. See Margaret McQuade, “Loza poblana: The emergence of a Mexican ceramic tradition” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005).

Asian designs. This fact speaks not only to Puebla’s access to Chinese porcelain, but also to the right material and socio-political conditions in the city for the creation of a new ceramic style that itself became popular and was consumed widely in the Viceroyalty of New Spain and other parts of colonial Latin America.

The emphasis on the socio-political context in which the ceramics were produced is inspired by an argument made by anthropologist Marie-Claude Mahias who has written that studying technical variants in a craft shows us that technical choices can also be based on social factors.3 Based on her research on potters in India she posits that potters made their technical decisions not only based on skill and material constraints, but also on the socio-economic organization of the society and culture they belong to. This insight was helpful for the investigation of the ceramics of Puebla, which reflected and contributed to the political and cultural situation of the place where they were produced. The potters of Puebla lived amongst and were in direct contact with many of the people they produced ceramics for. Mahias’ arguments were also useful in this study to caution against attributing the potters’ adaptation of Chinese designs merely to technical constraints. It is argued here that often potters’ substitutions, alterations and modifications of Asian aesthetics were deliberate choices in order to make their products locally meaningful.

Puebla is not often discussed as a significant node in global history narratives since it was not a global trade hub like Manila or a capital like Mexico City where important decisions were made about how trade would be conducted and by whom. Puebla’s omission from such narratives is problematic because it was a place where new crafts, aesthetics and tastes developed,

which were then diffused around colonial Latin America. The ceramics produced in Puebla had their own sphere of influence, it was not as large as that of Jingdezhen’s porcelain, but it was sizeable.

The earthenware ceramics from Puebla were sent north to the mining regions and beyond to New Mexico, east to Veracruz, south to Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guatemala and Honduras, to the Caribbean in Cuba and Santo Domingo. Dissemination of *loza poblana* to South America was more difficult since there was no direct trade between the viceroyalties of Mexico and Peru, although there are instances of these ceramics being found in Venezuela, New Granada and one document that states that *loza poblana* was traded in Peru for tin. The fact that the Mexican ceramics also had a wide reach in colonial Latin America alongside Chinese porcelain suggests that they were not necessarily replacements for Chinese porcelain but were wanted for their own unique characteristic.

From the paintings studied in the last chapter, we saw that blue-and-white ceramics, whether Asian or Mexican, were widely accessible across social classes. With regards to the consumers of the finer *loza poblana* ceramics, we know that some of their most significant patrons included members of the church and wealthy elite. They commissioned the production of tiles to decorate the facades of churches or homes, as seen in the case of *Casa de los azulejos* in Mexico City. Clergy also commissioned objects bearing the symbols for their orders or *lebrillos*, or basins, which could be used as baptismal fonts. Objects, such as apothecary bottles, indicate that certain professions also commissioned objects from the Puebla potters. We know that

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5 McQuade, “*Loza poblana*,” 132.
Chinese porcelains were also widely available so in many instances members of the society would have had both kinds of ceramics in churches or in their homes.

The ceramics produced in Puebla were different from their Chinese counterparts in significant ways. The materials and techniques used were significantly different when compared to Chinese porcelains, but even when Chinese motifs were borrowed they were depicted in a new manner or setting, thus creating an entirely new motif. At other times, artisans borrowed the surface pattern seen on a Chinese porcelain but then inserted a symbol, such as local flora, fauna or architectural elements, that would be familiar to their patrons. These substitutions were not just a matter of rendering unfamiliar motifs more familiar because the artisans did not know or understand the Chinese motifs, but rather by doing so they were also able to differentiate themselves from the Chinese porcelains that were also available in the market that they were operating in.

Figure 5.2. Porcelain with underglaze blue, before 1600.
The *chocolatero* pictured in Figure 5.1 is derived from the Chinese *guan* form jars, but the decoration also borrows from Chinese design (Figure 5.2). The surface is divided into four distinct panels and above and below these panels are patterned scrolls. This kind of division was taken from Chinese porcelain, but the painter of the Mexican jar has modified some elements. For example, the vertical motif dividing the panels is reminiscent of Rococo decorative styles. The scroll on the top looks like a modified version of the wave pattern seen in Chinese ceramics. The scroll on bottom, on the other hand, is derived from Islamic art, possibly from the ancient Kufic script. The central motif of the flying creature painted in each panel resembles a phoenix that would also have been seen on Chinese ceramics, but on this jar it is actually a local bird, the quetzal. (See Figure 2.12 for example of Chinese porcelain with a phoenix motif).

The quetzal is a bird native to Mesoamerica and is distinguishable by its magnificent feathered tail. It was considered sacred by many indigenous groups and its feathers were prized for feather artwork. Motifs based on the quetzal could be found stamped on ceramics or sculpted into religious buildings (Figure 5.2). The incorporation of motifs and designs that resonated locally meant that the earthenware ceramics became valuable in their own right precisely because they had a distinct local aesthetic characterized by the incorporation, often in one object, of the different artistic influences that were found in the colony. The *chocolatero* in Figure 5.1 is stylistically closer to Chinese ceramics than the prehispanic tripod vase shown below. However, by substituting the quetzal for the phoenix the painter acknowledged the

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6 Kuwayama, 83.

7 Ibid., 81.


cultural significance of these birds locally while maintaining the integrity of the design of a ceramic that was inspired by blue-and-white Chinese porcelain.

![Figure 5.2. Tripod Vase with Two Blowgunners and Quetzal Birds in Cacao Trees (earthenware with painted stucco), Teotihuacan / Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, USA. This is one example of how the quetzal motif was used in prehispanic times.]

The unique combination of European, Islamic, native and Asian aesthetics is the hallmark of *loza poblana*. Despite bearing the marks of foreign influence, their distinctive style as ceramics made in Puebla made them important to the colony. The political significance of these objects can be seen in the writings of a seventeenth century priest, Agustín de Vetancourt (1620 – 1700). Vetancourt wrote a religious chronicle of colonial Mexico titled *Teatro Mexicano: descripción breve de los sucesos ejemplares de la Nueva-España en el Nuevo Mundo Occidental de las Indias* (The Mexican Stage: A brief description of the exemplary events of New Spain in the Occidental New World of the Indies). This manuscript of four volumes included a treatise each on Mexico City and Puebla, suggesting that in his estimation those were the two cities of
the colony worth writing about. In the treatise on Puebla Vetancourt described the city’s crafts in the following manner:

…there are workshops where they make coarse and fine cloth because in Puebla there are many skilled workers; the spinning of these workshops supports many. There exist all the many trades that are found in the Republic and in ceramics, glass, knives and soap, the workers of Puebla surpass the rest. The pottery is finer than that of Talavera [city in Spain] and can compete with that of China, the glass, although not as nice, looks like that of Venice; the quality of the knives and scissors exceeds that of the rest, like the blades of Toledo…

Vetancourt’s writing presents Puebla as a very active and productive place. He boasts of the city’s artisans’ capabilities and envisions their creations as equal to or surpassing the crafts of Europe. His description of the ceramics is particularly intriguing because he believes Chinese ceramics to be the best and imagines that the pottery produced in Puebla is not only better than that of Talavera in Spain (Figures 5.4 and 5.5), but can even compete with Chinese porcelain. The three kinds of ceramics that Vetancourt mentions are very different from each other but from his writing it seems that he was not concerned with the specific qualities of these objects, instead his purpose was to promote the crafts of Puebla and ensure that his readers understood that the colonial city was seen as self-sufficient and not experiencing a lack of fine-quality goods.

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10 Agustín Vetancourt, *Teatro Mexicano: descripción breve de los sucesos e jemplares, historicos, politicos, militares y religiosos del Nuevo Mundo Occidental de las Indias* (Mexico: I. Escalante y Ca., 1870-71), 360-1. Original in Spanish: “…hay obras donde se labran Rajas, y paños finos, causa de que haya muchos Viruegos en la Puebla; del hilado de los obras se sustenta, y entretienen. Hay de todo gênero de oficios que componen República, e en Loza, Vidrios, Cuchillos, y Jabón hacen raya en la Nueva España. La loza es más fina que de la Talavera, y puede competir con la de China en su fineza, los Vidrios aunque no tan finos se parecen a los de Venecia; el templo de los cuchillos, y Tijeras exceed a los demás, como las hojas de Toledo.”
The chapter is divided into four sections, the first of which focuses on the city of Puebla itself. As one of the first cities to be established in the colony, Puebla functioned as a religious and cultural center for the colony, but it was not always the beacon of Spanish culture and religion that the Crown would have liked it to be. From the beginning the city failed to uphold the stated aim of being a purely Spanish city because the early settlers needed the labor of the Indians. There were other moments in Puebla’s history when different elements of the city vacillated between an alliance with the metropole and striking out on their own.

The first section also discusses Puebla’s role as a religious center in the colony. The city supported a magnificent cathedral as well as numerous churches, chapels and convents and the clergy were influential in the civic life. But as we have already seen from Vetancourt’s remarks, the clergy did not deem the metropole superior to the colony in all regards. In one particular
famous incident in the city, the clergy and the residents of Puebla defied the edicts of the Holy Church in Europe. The case concerned an Asian woman, Catarina de San Juan, who lived in Puebla in the seventeenth century and whose iconic status threatened the Holy Church, which banned all writings and images of her in Mexico. Yet, the Church’s rulings were not immediately followed and she continued to be revered and was eventually credited with inspiring Mexico’s national costume.

Catarina features prominently in the chapter because her story encapsulates many of the themes discussed. She represents Puebla’s ties with Asia, and even more importantly she shows the extent to which local clergy could praise an Asian woman in order to achieve fame for the city of Puebla. Colonial society was diverse and within this society someone originally from Asia could become a hero if she adopted the local faith and customs. The city’s acceptance of Catarina and continued veneration of her inspite of the ban reflect the tension in the colony between an allegiance to the Old World and taking pride in what was happening locally. Such pride was seen in the praise for the locally produced ceramics as well.

After providing the historical and social context of the city of Puebla where the ceramics were produced, the chapter moves to a discussion of the history of the development of *loza poblana* itself and its production techniques. The second section describes the conditions and constraints under which the artisans worked. This part of the chapter provides a contrast to the kind of production system seen in Jingdezhen. Workshops in Puebla were owned and operated by individual potters who sold their wares out of the same building that they made them in. There was a division of labor in the workshops in Puebla, but not to the extent seen in Jingdezhen. The industry in Puebla was also a great deal younger than the one in Jingdezhen, which meant that there was not a ready pool of skilled labor the way there was in China.
The production of *loza poblana* was regulated by a potter’s guild that was established in 1653 and is the focus of the third section of the chapter. The guild created a set of ordinances that set up rules for the potters. The officers of the guild were also responsible for conducting examinations that artisans were required to take to become master potters. The guild ordinances and the records of the potters’ examinations give an official account of the *loza poblana* industry. They were efforts by the leaders of the potters’ community to define and regulate their group, comparable to the city’s moments of self-definition, such as the declaration that it would be a purely Spanish city. However, as with the city, what actually happened in the ceramic industry did not always align with the official records. When we study the objects themselves as well as some of the examination records, it is clear that many of the ordinances were not followed and this breaking of the rules was significant to the creation of a new colonial art form.

The fourth and final section of the chapter is an object-study of several different *loza poblana* creations of the fine ware category that help illustrate the distinctive aesthetic of the ceramics produced in Puebla. It is an opportunity to compare the Mexican ceramics with some of the Chinese ceramics that were used as inspiration. Although *loza poblana* borrowed designs from artistic traditions from different parts of the world, in this section the focus is especially on how the potters reinterpreted Chinese ceramics and designs for the local context in Puebla. Most objects do not look like imitations of Chinese porcelain and certain motifs and themes are quite unique, as seen with the case of the quetzal replacing the phoenix in the *chocolatero* discussed above. By focusing on specific objects, we can study whether the substitutions or changes the potters chose to make were based on technical limitations or their desire to give the object more local flavor.
Puebla: The Second City

Puebla was established in 1531, a decade after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, in a location that was not previously settled by Indians, although there were Indian towns and villages nearby that could readily provide labor.\textsuperscript{11} As a brand new city Puebla faced challenges in defining itself. It was not the capital of the colony and did not have a past that it could refer to in the way that Mexico City did. By establishing an entirely new city in such a manner, crown officials hoped to create a “Spanish” city, one where contact between natives and Spanish could be limited.\textsuperscript{12} It was also made into a religious center of the region. The cathedral in Puebla was built earlier than the one in Mexico City and in the sixteenth century the bishopric of Puebla was wealthier than that of the capital.\textsuperscript{13}

The clergy approved of the creation of a city close to the Atoyac River because it meant they could congregate those members of the Spanish colonial society that had absconded beyond the capital.\textsuperscript{14} However, when building the city it was not possible to keep the Spanish population away from indigenous people because labor was required for construction. When the city was planned in the sixteenth century the authorities kept the residences of the Spanish, Indians and blacks separated from each other, but by the eighteenth century Puebla had a large mixed-race population.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore soon after its establishment the city began to lose its pure Spanish

\textsuperscript{11} Ida Altman, \textit{Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire: Brihuega, Spain, and Puebla, Mexico, 1560-1620} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 51.
\textsuperscript{13} Altman, 50 and 119.
\textsuperscript{14} Ramos, xxii.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 14.
character and by the eighteenth century was comparable to any other New World city in terms of its social make up. In fact Mexico City had a larger Spanish population than Puebla.\textsuperscript{16}

Initially however efforts were made to give the city a good start as a Spanish city. It was given its own founding myth that purported that it had divine origins. The myth was first written down in the second half of the seventeenth century by Jesuit scholar Francisco de Florencia.\textsuperscript{17} According to the myth, the bishop of Tlaxcala (a neighboring city), Julian Garcés, had a dream on the feast day of Saint Michael about where the city of Puebla should be founded. In this dream the bishop reportedly saw a piece of fertile land flanked by two rivers and two angels were delineating the parameters of the city using cords and were also laying out the blocks and streets of the new city.\textsuperscript{18} Puebla was thus established between two rivers and was a city with the streets organized in a grid. Garcés’ dream and the myth based on it was subsequently memorialized in the city’s coat of arms, which depicted two angels holding up a shield with the image of a fortress and a river flowing underneath it (Figure 5.6). As with other heraldic symbols, this coat of arms would have been visible in different parts of the city on flags and shields and used in parades, reminding its citizens of the auspicious beginnings of their city.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 13

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} An early depiction of Puebla’s coat-of-arms can be found in a document dating from 1538 at the \textit{Archivo General de Indias}, MP-Escudos, 45.
Figure 5.6. Facsimile of woodcut printed in *Teatro eclesiástico de la primitiva Iglesia de la Nueva España en las Indias Occidentales : México, Puebla de los Angeles, Michoacan* (Madrid, 1649). This image would have been printed on maps, in books, on banners flown in the city, engraved on the municipal palace. On shields, serving as a reminder of the city’s divine origins and the superiority of its residents. Yet, despite the ubiquity of this image it does not appear on any *talavera poblana* ceramics. There could be two reasons for this. It is possible that design elements of this image could not be incorporated into ceramic decorations easily, especially not the ones that were inspired by Chinese aesthetics. The other reason could be that the myth or the image did not take hold in the people’s imaginations as legends of the quetzal or the founding myth of Tenochtitlan.

The founding myth gave the city of Puebla a moral backing. The colonial capital of Mexico City had the benefit of being the site where the Aztec Empire was vanquished. In the capital the new colonial buildings were built on top of pre-existing Aztec structures, serving as reminders of the glory and power of the city’s new rulers. Puebla, as a brand new city, did not have any such past and a founding myth served the purpose of validating its existence.

Another purpose of this myth was to serve as a Spanish and/or Christian response to the founding myth of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Although the Aztecs were conquered, the legend of their capital city survived well into the colonial period and when the Spanish were building a new city they took the opportunity to introduce a story of their own that they hoped would become a legend and could compete with the Aztec stories that seemed to have lasting power.
This Aztec legend bears repeating here because its imagery survived and was found depicted on *loza poblana* whereas the symbols of the founding myth of the city of Puebla were not used to decorate the ceramics. According to the legend, when the Mexica people were looking for a place to settle down, their deity Huitzilopochtli told them to look for a place where the heart of their enemy had been thrown into a lake. The heart had supposedly fallen on a rock where it had grown into a big *nopal* cactus and perched on top of this cactus was an eagle. The Mexica settled in the marshy area where they saw this apparition and this city was named Tenochtitlan and went on to become the seat of the Aztec Empire.\(^{20}\) This powerful narrative was familiar to the early colonizers and was depicted in the Codex Mendoza, a pictorial and textual manuscript that describes the founding of the capital of Tenochtitlan and gives an account of the daily life of the indigenous people.

The central image on the first pictorial folio of the Codex Mendoza is that of the eagle atop a cactus (Figure 5.7). The blue crisscrossing lines represent water since the city was founded on an island in the middle of the lake and canals were known to be the means of transportation around the city. This was a well-known symbol that appeared in other colonial accounts and today adorns the national flag of Mexico. The people who believed in this myth were themselves conquered and vanquished, but the legend lived on, as seen in the various extant recordings of it.

It seems when foreigners visited the city they were also told about this Aztec legend. During Careri’s travels through Mexico he was shown a sixteenth century map that portrayed the travels of the Mexica people until they found Tenochtitlan. Careri had an engraving made of the map and it was published in his book making the myth known to his readers in Europe. The native legend was resilient and was visually more salient than its Spanish counterpart. The founding myth of the first purely Spanish city in the colony gave Puebla divine Christian origins, but it failed to displace or replace older native legends.

Puebla also never managed to surpass the colony’s capital in political importance, it always remained the “second city.” In the eighteenth century another clergyman, Juan Villa Sanchez wrote of Puebla’s many virtues in *Puebla sagrada y profana: informe dado á su muy

ilustre Ayuntamiento el año de 1746 (The Sacred and Secular Puebla: Report on the Illustrious City Council of 1746), and he too presented it as second to the capital:

The second city of the kingdom of New Spain, second in dignity, in majesty, in ostentation, in the opulence of its workshops, in the number of residents, in nobility, in letters, in its police force and in everything that makes up the body of a city and the soul of a Republic: the City of the Angels is truly the neck and the throat of the vast body of North America, joined with or in proximity to its magnificent and wealthy capital, whose barbarian founder Mexi gave it the name of Mexico, for being such an important part of the kingdom and making it beautiful and perfect, the capital stands out and its beauty is apparent that much more since it is held up on this beautiful neck. There is no nation nor people so devout in the world where word of the fame of Puebla de los Angeles has not reached, applauded in the annals, celebrated in histories, delineated in maps, copied in paintings, noted by all the geographers in their drawings; the diligent writers have pledged to make their pens fly in order to recommend the city to those far away to raise the city to the grandness of its name.22

Villa Sanchez’s remarks make it clear that Puebla had many positive attributes, but they served to make the capital and colony shine more, and he hoped this would bring fame to the city around the world. His analogy of Puebla being the neck that held up the head of the colonial body is apt because Puebla supplied agricultural goods to the colony, and it was also home to many other industries and crafts that became the pride of the colony.

22 Juan Villa Sanchez, Puebla sagrada y profana: Informe dado a su muy ilustre ayuntamiento el año de 1746, (Puebla: Impreso de la Casa del Ciudadano Jose Maria Campos, 1835), 9. Original in Spanish: “La segunda Ciudad del Reyno de Nueva España, segunda en dignidad, en grandeza, en ostension, en opulencia de fabricas, en numero de vecinos, en nobleza, en letras, en policia y en todo aquello que constituye el cuerpo de una Ciudad y el alma de una Republica: la Ciudad de los Ange-les es verdaderamente el cuello y garganta del vastisimo cuerpo de esta América Septentrional, asi por la union ó in-mediacion de su magnifica y opulentisima Capital, que desu bárbaro fundador Mexi trajo el nombre de México, como por ser un miembro tan principal de este Reyno y una nobilisima parte que realiza su hermosura y perfeccion, hacen-do que tanto mas sobresalga y aparezca la belleza de su Capital y Metropolitana Ciudad, cuanto mas se ecsalta y levanta sobre este hermosisimo cuello. No habrá nacion ni gente tan peregrina en el mundo, á cuya noticia no haya llegado la fama de la Puebla de los Angeles, aplaudida y famosa en los anales, celebrada en historias, delineada en mapas, copiada en pinturas y notada de todos los geografasen sus tablas; no le han dado tanto vuelo las plumas de los diligentisimos escritores que se empeñaron en recomendar sus prerrogativas á los distantes, cuanto es bastante a ecsaltarle la grandeza de su nombre.”
Puebla was able to be so productive because it had access to many natural resources and was well located to transport its goods. In the sixteenth century another clergyman, Franciscan priest Toribio Motolinía, commented on Puebla’s fortunate geographic location:

The location of the city is very good and the region is the best in all of New Spain…the port of Veracruz is to the east 40 leagues away; Mexico is twenty leagues. The road from the port to the Mexico goes through the middle of this city; and when the loaded mule packs go to Mexico they pass through here and the residents provide for them and buy the goods at a better price than those of Mexico; and when the mule packs are returning they carry flour, bacon, biscuits for the stores of ships…this city has the best mountains of any city in the world…all these mountains are full of the pretty pastures…There is great abundance of water, both of rivers and springs.23

Motolinía was clearly impressed with the city’s access to water and pastures, but he also points out that it was fortunate in terms of access to foreign goods because it was situated on the route to Mexico City, even implying that the residents of Puebla could get better prices than those of Mexico City. In Motolinía’s time a precedent was set for travelers and merchants who came to the colony from Europe to stop in Puebla on their way from the port of Veracruz to the capital. When the Manila Galleon Trade began, merchants also brought wares directly to Puebla and the residents could buy from them instead of having to go to Mexico City.24 Easy access to the ports and to the capital meant that Puebla could supply provisions for the ships and ensure that its goods were exported to distant locales.

23 Toribio Motolinía, Historia de los indios de la Nueva España (Mexico: Chávez Hayhoe, 1941), 270-1. Original in Spanish: “El asiento de la ciudad es muy bueno y la comarca la mayor de toda la Nueva España…Tiene el puerto de la Veracruz al oriente a cuarenta leguas; Mexico a veinte leguas. Va el camino del Puerto a Mexico por medio de esta ciudad; y cuando las recuas van cargadas a Mexico, como es el paso por aqui, los vecinos se proven y compran todo lo que han menester en mejor precio que los de Mexico; y cuando las recuas son de vuelta cargan de harina, y tocino, y bizcocho, para matalotaje de las naos…Tiene esta ciudad una de las buenas montañas que tiene ciudad en el mundo…todas estas montañas son de muy gentiles pastos… Hay mucha abundancia de aguas, asi de rios como de fuentes.”

24 Ramos, 7.
There is a long list of agricultural products and finished goods that were sent from Puebla to other parts of the colony. Villa Sanchez mentioned some of them in his work:

Coming to the point of commerce, the fruits and particular effects that this city trades in are wheat, corn, beans, barley, soap which is made with cerda, as well as wool bearing sheep, cotton, cloth of all types made with the same, glass, ceramics, hats, pieces of copper, saddles, tanned leather, raw and carded wool, various ironworks. There is trade in seeds and great quantities of wheat is sent to the cities of Oaxaca and Veracruz, where there is a scarcity of wheat and when they have permission they send the seed to Havana and other places across the sea, the workers have some success…

The finer trade goods mentioned by Villa Sanchez could be exported along the same routes as the agricultural products and thus help generate a demand for them and stimulate the crafts to develop and expand. Being able to provide the colony and even other regions with such a wide variety of goods made Puebla fairly wealthy and the city experienced a golden age from the mid sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century. When Thomas Gage traveled to the city in the seventeenth century, he remarked upon the city’s wealth:

We visited all the city, and took large notice of it, judging of the wealth and riches of it not only by the great trading in it, but by the many cloisters both of nuns and of friars which it maintaineth…That which maketh it most famous is the cloth which is made in it, and is sent far and near, and judged now to be as good as cloth of Segovia, which is the best that is made in Spain, but now is not so much esteemed of nor sent so much from Spain to America by reason of abundance of fine cloth which is made in this city of Puebla de los Angeles. The felts likewise that are made are the best of all that country. There is also a glass house [presumably a workshop that produced glass], which is there a rarity, none other being as yet known in those parts.

25 Villa Sanchez, 41. Original in Spanish: “Viniendo al punto de comercio, los frutos y efectosms particulares en que se trata en esta Ciudad…son Trigo,Jaiz, Haba, Cebada, Frijol, Jabon, producido del mucho añado de Cerda, tambien ganado Lanar, Algodon, RopaB todas clases del mismo, Harinas, Vidrio, Loza, Sombre-ros, piezas de Cobre, Sillas llamadas vaqueras, Pieles bien curtidas, Lana en greña y elaborada en piezas ordinarias y varias obras de Herreria. Se comercia en dichas semillas y se remiten grandes cantidades de Trigo á la Ciudades Oajaca y Veracruz, que carece de él, y cuando hay se permite saca de esta semilla para la Habana y otros lugares ultramarinos, tienen algun logro los Labradores…”

Gage writes about the products of Puebla as being able to replace those of Spain and he reiterates Vetancourt’s sentiment about the goods produced in Puebla equaling those made in Spain, even the “best” that was made in Spain.

Puebla’s status as an industrious city deserves attention because it was unique in colonial Mexico and perhaps in the early modern world. At a time when cities were known to specialize in a particular product, as was the case with Segovia and cloth, Puebla was actually home to many different industries, as we have seen from several descriptions of the city. The examples shown in Figures 5.8-5.10 are of some of the other kinds of goods that were produced in Puebla. Although the various groups of artisans worked and even lived with members of their artisanal community, the industrious activity in the city could have influenced the different groups’ productivity or artistic sensibilities. In the case of ceramics we saw that some of the objects were created through collaboration between the potters and the blacksmiths.

Figure 5.8. Writing desk made of wood with inlay of contrasting wood, incised bone and ivory. Puebla, second half of the eighteenth century. The marquetry of the desk on the outside is clearly influenced by Hispano-Moresque art, most notable in the use of the eight-pointed star and geometric patterns. This aesthetic developed in southern Spain when it was under Arab control, and it was introduced to colonial Mexico after the conquest. The inside of the desk is decorated with maque, a pre-Columbian technique that could closely imitate Asian lacquer. The painting on inside of the doors and on the drawers borrows from Asian as well as indigenous aesthetics. Furniture and wood work was one of the other industries that also existed in Puebla, and in this particular example the artisans also combined many different artistic traditions. However, given the nature of the object the inside and the outside of this object are markedly different with two entirely different designs. The decoration on the ceramics on the other hand, combined different aesthetics into one coherent design. Writing desks made in Portuguese India were also brought to Mexico from Manila, see Figure 3.29.

Figures 5.9 and 5.10. Examples of ironwork made in Puebla. Figure 5.9 is a lock with an accompanying key (not pictured) from the eighteenth century. Figure 5.10 shows the detail of a balustrade on a house in Puebla from the second half of the eighteenth century. In this example we see a combination of ceramic tiles and iron work used to decorate the façade of the house.


29 Ibid.
In addition to being the breadbasket of the colony and supplying finished goods, Puebla was also a religious center and could compete with the capital in this regard. When Gemelli Careri visited the city he alluded to the superiority of Puebla in certain aspects and was especially impressed by its religious buildings and spaces:

Almost all the buildings are made of stone and lime and rival those of Mexico. The streets, although not paved, are much cleaner, all are straight and well-made, crossing between the four directions; whereas the streets of Mexico are always fetid and muddy requiring boots to walk on them…the main plaza has three gateways, all uniform and in these entrances there are shops where one can find all kinds of merchandise. On the other side is the Cathedral with a very pleasing façade and tall tower. Although the other tower is not completed, it will be equal. This plaza is more beautiful than that of Mexico.  

Careri noted the orderliness and cleanliness of the city as compared to the capital. And even though Puebla was smaller in size compared to Mexico City, it seems it tried to compete with the capital in ostentation, especially when it came to its churches.  

Both Gage and Careri refer to the richness of the city with regards to its religious structures since building and maintaining them would be costly and it was one of the best ways the city could show off. A mid-eighteenth century map of the city is evidence of the significance of religion in the city as the index to the map mostly only points out buildings such as churches, convents and chapels (Figure 5.11). It also shows the grid-plan of the streets of Puebla that so impressed Careri and was attributed to the work of the angels from the founding myth of the city.

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By the time this map was made in the mid-eighteenth century Puebla’s fortunes were diminishing. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the economy had begun to decline. Several factors contributed to the stagnation, including epidemics, population decline, and competition from other regions. The city’s religious life must have also been a burden on its finances.

La China Poblana: Pride of Puebla

Around the time that the city was experiencing a decline, an Asian woman who lived in Puebla became a heroic figure. As seen above, clergymen were particularly eager to boast of

31 Ramos, 10.
Puebla and it was during this time of the city’s weakening fortunes that some of the city’s Jesuit leaders chose to promote a local hero, Catarina de San Juan or China Poblana, the Asian woman from Puebla, as she was popularly known.

Catarina’s life began in India where she was captured by the Portuguese, eventually sold to the Spanish and brought to Mexico where she became a servant for a family in Puebla. During her life she became an extremely religious person and was well known in the city for her piety and her religious visions, or ecstasies. Upon her death great numbers of poblanos attended her funeral and a Jesuit priest, also Catarina’s confessor, Francisco de Aguilera, delivered a sermon that was later published, *Sermon en que se da noticia de la vida...de la venerable Señora Catharima de San Joan* (Sermon reporting the life...of the venerable Senora Chatarima de san Joan, 1688). This was the first of three works to be published on Catarina, she had definitely captured the imagination of the Jesuit leaders of Puebla who were intent on spreading her fame.

Historian Frances Ramos has written about the power of ceremony in colonial Puebla, especially its ability to legitimize figures of authority, while at the same time creating a sense of local pride and community. This sense of community acknowledged the differences amongst its members but also accepted them into the fold. The elaborate funeral held for Catarina is an example of such a public ceremony that served to galvanize both Catholic and poblano identities of the people who attended it, while at the same time giving her confessor an opportunity to assert himself in the public arena. The public veneration of Catarina’s virtues served as a way to unite people on the basis of their commonalities and feel pride for one of their citizens, and

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34 Ramos, xviii-xix.
therefore their city. Catarina’s foreign origins were acknowledged and at the same time she was
described as a virtuous and pious woman, loyal to her adopted faith and city. Her Asian identity
was not problematic in Puebla even if it was a cause for concern in Europe for the Holy Church.

The year after Catarina’s death the first volume of a three-volume biography on her was
published by another Jesuit, Alonso Ramos, as a means to make the case for Catarina’s
beatification. When completed, this work titled, Prodigios de la omnipotencia y milagros de la
gracia en la vida de la venerable sierva de dios Catharina de San Juan (Marvels of
Omnipotence and Miracles of Grace in the life of the Venerable servant of God, Catharina de
San Juan), was the largest work published in colonial Mexico. However, while the city of Puebla
and its religious elite, especially the Jesuits, were full of praise for Catarina, the Holy Office of
the Catholic Church deemed these works heretical and banned them, as well as all images of
Catarina. This did not necessarily diminish her fame and perhaps made her into more of a cult
figure. In addition, the Holy Office in Mexico was slow to respond to the edicts of the office in
the Vatican so the books were not banned immediately and in 1692 yet another book was
published in Puebla on Catarina’s life.\(^\text{35}\)

The last publication, Compendio de la vida y virtudes de la venerable Catarina de San Juan
(Compendium of the life and virtues of the venerable Catarina de San Juan) written by
José del Castillo Grajeda, was a slim volume that followed the Inquisition guidelines and did not
present Catarina as fancifully as Ramos.\(^\text{36}\) The fact that it was written and published despite the
bans implies that the city was not willing to give up its local hero regardless of the opinion in the
metropole. Grajeda even wrote that she was the darling of the city. He describes her in the
following manner:

\(^{35}\) Myers, 277.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
In her manner Catarina was warm, calm, friendly, the darling of everyone and respected. The attractiveness of her gentleness could overpower all wills, because it robbed hearts; amidst [these qualities] she was earnest, not extremely, but with a great modesty, dressed in a soft blandness, she never singled out anybody in the audience, with a cautious gaze she did not look at any creation with full warning; her eyes focused on the ground and the eyes of her soul focused on the sky. She always preferred clothes that were humble, modest and poor…

Grajeda presents Catarina as the most pious of people, who did not even let her gaze allow her to stray from her reverence and was humble and modest even in her clothing. His description suggests that there was nothing about Catarina and the way she comported herself that anyone could object to. She had earned everyone’s respect because of her gentle personality and piety.

Catarina’s story is peculiar because it shows that in colonial Mexico a local hero could be Asian. Perhaps her Asian origin was even preferable because her extreme piety represented the potential spiritual conquest of Asia. In fact, native women who converted to Christianity never achieved the kind of fame and status that Catarina was able to. Catarina’s story could be made extravagant and full of fantastical details, especially when recounted by her Jesuit confessors, who could claim to be conveying her own words to their readers, but also had agendas of their own.

Catarina did not pose a threat to the locals the way the Asian barbers and shopkeepers in Mexico City did. She was not in competition with anyone and her wholehearted acceptance of the faith made her immune to criticism. Yet, it was precisely her local popularity that made her

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37 José del Castillo Grajeda, *Compendio de la vida y virtudes de la venerable Catarina de San Juan* (Mexico: Ediciones Xochitl, 1946), 53. The original in Spanish: “Era en su trato Catarina familiar, apacible, amigable, querida de todos y respetada. Tenía el atractivo de su apacibilidad dominio en todas las voluntades, porque se robaba los corazones; enmedio de que era seria, mas no con extreme sino con una gravedad modesta, vestida de una blandura cariciosa, nada se singularizaba en las concurrencias; solo si, en el recato de la vista no miraba cosa criada con advertencia plena; llevaba la atención de los ojos en la tierra y los del alma en el cielo. Siempre gusto de vestidos humildes, modestos y pobres….”

38 Myers, 283.
unacceptable to the Holy Office in Europe. Her following was a kind of local cult that the
Church could not allow if it wanted to maintain control and unity. But by the same token since
she was a local darling, the people of Puebla were unwilling to give her up.

Catarina’s story encapsulates the eagerness on the part of the colony to produce local
heroes but at the same time seek approval from the Catholic Church since her beatification
depended on Church’s accepting her. The Church’s refusal to recognize her and the subsequent
mythologizing of her reveal anxieties about the metropole’s ability to control the colony. Later
we will see that in the ceramic industry too there was a tension between the way the guild and
members of the community were expected to operate officially and the realities of building a
new craft industry in a colonial city.

Catarina’s story did not end with the church banning images and writings on her. Her
legend lived on or perhaps was revived when she was credited with the national costume of
Mexico, also known as the China Poblana. The connection between Catarina and the popular
costume has been challenged, especially since semantically the words china poblana can have
two meanings.\textsuperscript{39} China poblana can also mean simply a maid from a village. Although there is
undoubtedly no connection between the original China Poblana and the mestiza women who
inspired the costume, the conflation of the Asian woman and the popular costume is not
surprising or entirely unlikely because Asian textiles were made available in the colony in great
quantities via the Manila Galleon Trade. Ship manifests prove that the galleons carried textiles
and inventories and council records also show that the people in the colony were aware that they
were using Asian textiles since they would identify their origin. In addition, in the previous
chapter we saw paintings from the eighteenth century that portrayed both men and women

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wearing clothes that were brought from Asia or made from imported Asian textiles. If an Asian woman could become a local religious hero in the seventeenth century, conflating her identity with the progenitor of a national dress would not have been seen as problematic.

As with the creation of the founding myth of Puebla, the eulogizing and popularizing of Catarina de San Juan and the creation of China Poblana are yet other instances of the city’s efforts of self-definition. In Puebla, a city that began as a purely Spanish city, by the seventeenth century foreign elements were permitted to be part of the city’s folklore and history. By this time the potters of Puebla had already been incorporating Chinese aesthetics into the ceramics they were making for decades. Like China Poblana the loza poblana ceramics could also be used to represent the city. They reflected the society in which they were made by combining disparate elements into a coherent aesthetic and they were locally popular like she was and thus were appropriate symbols of the city.

**The Making of Loza Poblana**

The initial experiments using Spanish techniques to make ceramics in Mexico were conducted in Mexico City. In the late sixteenth century the artisans active in Mexico City moved to Puebla or other artisans became active in Puebla and a larger more significant industry was established there.\(^4\) In addition to being well located in terms of arable land, Puebla also had access to clay deposits and water, which made it an ideal site for ceramic production. The surrounding areas also had deposits of the raw sodium, which was essential for the glazes used.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 28-29. See also Ana Paulina Gamez Martinez, “The Forgotten Potters of Mexico City” in *Cerámica y Cultura: The story of Spanish Mexican Mayolica*, eds Robin Farwell Gavin, Donna Pierce, Alfonso Pleguezuelo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003). Jean McClure Mudge suggested that Chinese potters might have operated in Puebla, and there are records of some Chinese people working in the workshops, but it is not clear that they were potters in their native land. See Jean McClure Mudge, *Chinese Export Porcelain in North America* (New York: C.N. Pottery, 1986).
Before the arrival of the Spanish, several regions in Mexico produced ceramics. It was a rich and varied art. The ceramics were not made on the potter’s wheel or glazed, but they were used for ritual, utilitarian and decorative purposes much as they were in other parts of the world. The neighboring city to Puebla, Cholula, had been the center of the famous Mixteca-Puebla ceramic tradition since AD 900 (Figure 5.12). Bernal Díaz del Castillo remarked upon the popularity of the ceramics from Cholula in his account. He wrote: “…the land is full of magueys from which they make their wine. They make very good pottery in the city of red and black and white clay with various designs and which supply Mexico and all the neighboring provinces.”

This tradition of making ceramics in Cholula nearly disappeared after the Spanish conquest. In Puebla there was a community of indigenous potters that continued to make a red utilitarian ware, but their ceramics were not nearly as ornate or sophisticated as what was previously made.


43 Juan Antonio García Castro, “Pre-Hispanic Polychrome Ceramics from Central Mexico: General Characteristics,” in Talaveras de Puebla: Cerámica colonial mexicana, Siglos XVII a XXI, eds. Maria Antonia Casanovas and Margaret McQuade (Barcelona: Museu de Ceràmica de Barcelona, 2007), 126.
Figure 5.12. Example of the type of ceramics produced in the Mixteca-Puebla tradition that was popular in central Mexico prior to the Spanish conquest. This is an earthenware vessel made without the use of a wheel. It was fired, burnished with a stone and then painted with different slips of paint, unlike the *loza poblana* ceramics, which were thrown on wheels and glazed and then painted. This pedestal bowl most probably would have been used by indigenous elites. It is decorated with cat-like figures and the base is decorated with geometric shapes. After the conquest the aesthetic of these ceramics mostly disappeared, but the knowledge of working with clay, especially the clay in that region, could not have disappeared and perhaps the expertise of indigenous potters was needed to establish the *loza poblana* industry.

The fact that the same region became well known for its ceramics again in the colonial period, albeit of a very different kind, was not entirely accidental. Local knowledge of clay deposits and other resources would have been helpful in establishing the new industry. It would have also been easier to train artisans who were already used to working with clay. The potters from Spain who began making pottery in Puebla used techniques from their homeland to prepare the clay but they needed to experiment to figure out the manner in which the different clays should be combined to achieve the desired color and plasticity. We do not have records of exactly how they might have arrived at a formula. Studies of the establishment of the ceramic industry in Puebla discuss the importance of the Old World ceramic tradition to the colonial Mexican art form and the influence of indigenous and Asian aesthetics, but this period of experimentation with local materials is not emphasized because we do not have any historical

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44 Margaret McQuade has also discussed the significance of local, indigenous knowledge to the development of the *loza poblana* industry in her dissertation. See McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 29.
records of it. Yet, it is in these moments of working with new materials or introducing new tools and techniques that a colonial aesthetic and craft already begins to take shape. The moments of trial and error that eventually led to a unique and coherent loza poblana aesthetic are obscured by the finished products that survive.

The kind of ceramics that the Spanish introduced to colonial Mexico are known as mayolica, a term adopted in the English language to refer to any tin-glazed earthenware. In the ninth century potters in the Middle East discovered that by adding tin-oxide to the lead based glazes they were using, they could transform the color of the earthenware clay to an opaque, white color and thus achieve the white body they had been in search of.\(^45\) This technique of making tin-based glazes was introduced to Spain when it was under the influence of the Arabs who invaded from northern Africa. The ceramic arts of southern Spain began to develop under the influence of Muslim artisans as early as the tenth century.\(^46\) The technique of tin-glazing ceramics was also introduced to other parts of Europe where different ceramic centers developed the craft and created their own versions, which is why the Delftware of the Netherlands is different from the mayolica of Spain, which in turn is distinguishable from the mayolica of Italy. The ceramics produced in Mexico can be seen as part of this continuum but with significant differences of their own.

The first few years of the development of the loza poblana industry in Puebla were characterized by individual potters working in their own workshops, without the guidance of a formal institution or group. The archival research of scholars Florence and Robert Lister has revealed that in the late sixteenth century a potter, Gaspar de Encinas, lived on the same street as


\(^{46}\) Ibid., 3.
the iron workers. It is possible that in that early period someone like Encinas began collaborating with local ironsmiths to make the lids for the *chocolateros* that became so popular. In the seventeenth century a potter’s quarter began to develop in Puebla, and the artisans had their own neighborhood with their own local parish church known as San Marcos. By that time Asian goods had already been coming to Puebla for a few decades. Thus as the industry and the craft were developing, Asian commodities and aesthetics were being incorporated into the lives and crafts of the society.

As the community began growing, the process for making *loza poblana* began to be standardized to a certain degree. The clay used was quarried in two different places, a black clay that was mined from the hills of Loreto and Guadalupe and a pink clay near Totomehuacan. These two clays were mixed together in equal proportions and then put into water tanks “to rot”. The longer these clays were left in the water the more their quality and plasticity would be improved. Once the impurities were separated the clay had to be prepared for shaping and this was done in a manner similar to the technique in Jingdezhen where the clay was placed on the floor and treaded barefoot (Figure 5.13). After this point the clay was formed into blocks and stored in a dry place, at times for over a year, so that it could ripen and thus increase the plasticity (Figure 5.14).

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49 Ibid.

50 McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 23.
Figure 5.13. The quarried pink clay in the Santa Catarina Workshop. Once combined with the other clay the two would be trampled together in the same area.

Figure 5.14. Blocks of clay ripening in the Santa Catarina Workshop.

Once the clay was prepared it was shaped on the wheel or in molds. The potter’s wheel that was introduced to Mexico by the Spanish was different from the wheels used in China in Jingdezhen. The wheel used in Puebla was operated by rotating a disk with the foot, which in turn rotated a smaller disk attached to it on which the clay was placed and could be shaped (Figures 5.15 and 5.16). The introduction of the wheel meant that certain shapes could be made faster than with the coiling-method. For making shapes derived from Chinese forms, the wheel was essential. The Listers have argued that in the early seventeenth century, due to the influence of Chinese porcelain, artisans in Puebla were more careful about the raw materials they were using so as to ensure a more reliable fine-grained clay and they were also throwing thinner
shapes.\textsuperscript{51} Beginning in the late eighteenth century the use of molds for some of the more elaborate forms also became common.\textsuperscript{52} If contemporary workshops are an indication, in Puebla too the thrown objects were trimmed to make the shape of the object finer.

![Figures 5.15 and 5.16. Potter making a plate in the Santa Catarina workshop in Cholula. The same artisan was responsible for throwing the shapes (left) and trimming (right), unlike in Jingdezhen where the two tasks were completed by different artisans even in contemporary workshops.](image1)

Earthenware clay is a much different kind of clay than porcelain. The properties of porcelain made it more appropriate for making finer pieces, although a great deal of combined skills were required to shape the clay because it was not an easy material to control and was vulnerable to the slightest errors. In Jingdezhen the pieces made on the wheel were made finer in the trimming process. Earthenware, on the other hand, is easier to shape but was kept thicker because it was not as strong as porcelain, the particles did not fuse together as well as they did

\textsuperscript{51} Florence Lister and Robert Lister, \textit{Andalusian Ceramics in Spain and New Spain: A Cultural Register from the Third Century BC to 1700} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 235. One of the ordinances published in 1653 stipulated that the thickness of plates be in between the thickness of one to four real coins because that was the right thickness to prevent cracks and chips. Ordinances printed in Antonio Peñaflie, \textit{Cerámica mexicana y loza de talavera de Puebla época colonial y moderna} (Mexico: Imprimir y Fototipia de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1919), 35-6.

\textsuperscript{52} McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 161.
with porcelain, which is also why it was porous and had to be glazed to be used for cooking and eating. Despite these differences, the fact that potters in Puebla did make Chinese forms is proof that they were paying attention to the material properties of Asian ceramics even if their goal was not to create exact replicas.

In Puebla once an object had been shaped it was left to dry and then fired for up to a twelve hours in a wood-fired kiln.\textsuperscript{53} The first firing of the ceramics made the clay fuse enough so that it could be glazed and painted and in the second firing it could be fired at a higher temperature. In Puebla the clay fired to a reddish color after the first firing as seen in the image below (Figure 5. 17).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{jars_in_production_process.png}
\caption{A set of jars showing the progression of steps (from left to right) in the production process. The second jar from the left shows the red color to which the clay fired naturally. It had to be covered with a glaze to achieve the blue-and-white effect that was popular. The second to last jar shows that the designs were first outlined and the final jar shows the paint being filled in. While the surface decoration was done in two distinct steps, there is no indication to suggest that two different people were responsible for each step. The ceramics made in Puebla were separated into different categories: commonware, fine ware and super fine ware. Author photo taken at the Uriarte workshop in Puebla.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{53} Luz de Lourdes Velazquez Thierry, 18.
The red vessel was then dipped in a tin glaze to make it white. The glaze was also prepared in the potter’s workshop. According to the ordinances it was supposed to be prepared by mixing one arroba (liquid measurement of weight) of lead and six pounds of tin.\footnote{This was stipulated in the ordinances. Original in Spanish: “Que el vidrio de loza fina sea bien dispuesto y beneficiado, con una arroba de plomo, seis libras de estaño…” Peñafiel, 36.} This mixture was prepared over fire so the two would combine and once it had cooled, the crystals were ground to a powder, which was then diluted in water. To this mixture was added some silica, feldspar, sodium and quartz.\footnote{Patricia Acuña, Talavera de Puebla. Lecturas historicas de Puebla 10 (Puebla: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1987), 21.} As with the discovery of the proper clays and combinations, the glaze formula also had to be developed and perfected. For example, the sodium for the glaze was derived from a local substance called tequesquite, the incorporation of which also would have required a period of discovery and experimentation.\footnote{Lister and Lister, Andalusian Ceramics, 87.}

Once the glaze dried the objects could be painted (Figures 5.18 and 5.19). The blue designs were created with cobalt, as they were in China, and this mineral most probably had to be imported and as such would have been expensive.\footnote{McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 141.} Yet, the potters do not show restraint in using cobalt when it came to decorating their wares, at times leaving the surface more blue than white. The vessels would be decorated either free hand or with the help of stencils.\footnote{Ibid., 23.} As we saw in Jingdezhen, in Puebla too first the design was outlined and then colored in.

It is possible that the surface decoration was designed by the master potter and executed by his apprentices or other workers in his workshop, and it was to protect these designs that the potters were asked to sign their names on their creations, although most of them did not. The fact
that native motifs would often be included in the designs suggests that native or mestizo artisans were involved in the decoration of the vessels even though the ordinances prohibited them from joining the guild or making fine wares. Some of the objects made by the potters were also commissioned, in which case the person commissioning the object might have suggested certain elements of the design.

Figures 5.18 and 5.19. Painters in the workshop. Each was responsible for the surface design of the object from beginning to end. In modern day practice the process of painting is no longer divided into two parts.

After the object was painted it was fired a second time, this time for a longer period so that the paint would be affixed to the body. The finer wares were supposed to be fired using saggars but marks on the bottom of vessels show that the potters preferred using cockspurs.\textsuperscript{59} Kilns were part of the same building or establishment where all the other parts of the production process occurred.\textsuperscript{60} Although no surviving kilns have been found so far in Mexico, the potters in

\textsuperscript{59} McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 22.
Puebla most probably used a version of the *horno arabe*, a Spanish Muslim kiln, which was an updraft kiln that consisted of two chambers. It did not have a chimney but the kiln’s domed top had holes to release smoke (Figure 5.20).\(^{61}\) This structure had a chamber at the bottom where the fuel (wood) burned, and another chamber atop where the pottery was placed to be fired. The wall between the two chambers was made of clay or stone with openings to allow the hot air to circulate. And as seen in Jingdezhen, in Puebla too pottery fragments were used to shore up or line the walls of the kilns. However, the kiln model seen in Jingdezhen was more efficient than the one used in Spain or Mexico. With the updraft kiln there was a great degree of heat loss, high temperatures could not be maintained, there were cold spots and the design required large fuel reserves, thus impacting the overall output.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{60}\) Lister and Lister, “The Potter’s Quarter of Colonial Puebla, Mexico,” 91.

\(^{61}\) Lister and Lister, *Andalusian Ceramics*, 51.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 52-3.
The finished ceramics were often sold from the same building where they were made. This meant that each workshop was an individual unit that controlled its designs, outputs and sales, with a master potter in charge of the various operations. In the case of his death, his widow was allowed to continue the business and a son could continue for three years without taking the examination. Labor was divided within these workshops, and although officially there were strict rules as to who could make what type of ceramics, it is difficult to know how exactly the responsibilities were divided behind the closed doors of the workshop.

**Rules and Examinations for the Making of loza poblana**

The overall process for making loza poblana would have been established and routine by the time a potter’s guild was formed in the year 1653. In the same year the guild published a set of ordinances that served as rules of operation for the community of potters. As a whole the ordinances are not particularly descriptive or instructive on the making of the ceramics, but focus more on the social make up of the community, on limiting the privileges of those potters who were not master potters, and keeping different artisans in their respective places and categories.

The first four items of the ordinances were on the process of attaining the status of the “master potter.” The first item stated the manner in which a person was to be examined to become a master potter, which included the presence of a notary and elected officials. The second item declared that at the writing of the ordinances there were no masters so the authors of the ordinances themselves would be the first ones. The third item said that blacks, mulattos and persons of “mixed color” were not allowed to take the exam. The fourth item stated that those who had not passed the examinations could not operate pottery workshops or shops. The fifth item delineated the three types of objects that were to be made by the potters: fine ware, common

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63 Lister and Lister, “Potter’s Quarters,” 91.
ware and yellow ware and stated that only those who had taken the examination for the fine ware were allowed to produce it.

The first half of the 1653 ordinances were concerned with the social makeup of the potters’ community and the divisions within it. The leaders of this community wanted to restrict, at least officially, the involvement or participation of certain members of colonial society and maintain the racial hierarchy that was a defining feature of the colonial society. In addition to keeping people of mixed heritage out of the higher positions, once a person had taken an exam and belonged to the guild he could not move out of the station that he had taken the exam for.

The second half of the ordinances specified the potters’ responsibilities and the manner in which they were to make ceramics. The sixth item was about the transference of a potter’s position on to his widow and son. The seventh item stipulated that all the master potters had to have a copy of the ordinances in their possession so that they could not feign ignorance. The eighth item detailed the manner of producing ceramics, including how the clay had to be prepared, the sizes for plates, and the manner of painting. The most interesting sub clause of this item stipulated that potters sign or mark their pieces in order to prevent fraud (Figure 5.21). The ninth item of the ordinances stated that only potters were allowed to sell this pottery and no retailers should be used for the sale of pottery. The final item detailed the employment of apprentices and stipulated that the apprentice be examined at the end of his term with a potter and if he did not pass he would be allowed to apprentice with another potter at the expense of the first one.

The second half of the original ordinances are not restrictive but rather protective of the potters who were accepted into the guild. They were concerned with ensuring that a potter’s business and family survive even if he passed away or that their designs were protected with the
use of signatures. Even apprentices were offered a measure of security lest they were trained improperly.

Figure 5.21. This particular piece is attributed to potter Damián Hernandez, one of the master potters of Puebla, since his signature has been painted at the bottom. The work of each potter was supposed to carry a mark and a signature, which were recorded at the time of the examination to be referred to in case of fraud. Some of the surviving objects bear such marks although the potters were not consistent in using them. This jar pictures a bullfighter and a horse drawn carriage with a woman seated in it. In an earlier example from Talavera de Reina in Spain (Figure 5.5) we saw a jar that also showed some ladies with parasols seated on horses. In the Mexican jar the figures painted look Chinese and the depiction of flora and fauna also takes its inspiration from Chinese porcelain, however the form of the object the jar with the lobed handles is closer to Spanish forms.

The emulation of foreign ceramics was also stipulated in subsequent amendments to the original ordinances. In 1682 the guild leaders specified the manner in which European and Chinese ceramics were to be imitated. The first item specified that the finest ware had to be painted using the aborronado technique, which comes from the Moorish tradition of filling blank
spaces with dots.\textsuperscript{64} A second item indicated that in order to have diversity some objects were to be painted like those of Talavera de Reina of Spain.\textsuperscript{65} Yet another item said that the fine ware should also be made in the likeness of Chinese porcelain: “The fineware must be painted in the manner of the ceramics of China, very blue, made in the same manner with relief in blue and on this type of pottery should be painted black dots and spaces of color...”\textsuperscript{66}

In addition to the guild ordinances, the potters’ examinations were another way of regulating the community and maintaining quality control. The examinations were supposed to serve as evidence of the skill of the artisan being tested, but they read more as evidence that the guild ran things in a proper manner. All the examinations were recorded in the same way beginning with the date, location and names of the people present, followed by a physical description of the person who was examined and then a few words on the kind of skill for which he was examined. This part was not lengthy and merely stated whether the person was being examined as a painter or a thrower and often no particular skill was specified. Regardless, the examination record only mentioned that the individual was able to answer the questions and capably handle the cross-examination. There was no qualitative description of the individual’s particular abilities and talents. The records end with a summary of the privileges the individual was granted as a result of having passed the exam and the granting of a sealed letter confirming the fact.

While these records are evidence that the examinations were conducted in an orderly fashion, some records show that over time the original ordinances were defied. As early as the

\textsuperscript{64} Peñafiel, 38. Original in Spanish: “Item: en lo fino deben ser Pinturas los armados de Azul, y acabados con Negro con sus pintillas á los bordos ó faldas de todo lo que se pintare dicha Pintura.”

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid. Original in Spanish: “…y porque haya variación la otra pintura que se echare de dicha Loza fina, sera contrahecha á la de Talavera...”

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. Original in Spanish: “En lo fino deben ser sus Pinturas contrahaciendo a la de China de muy azul, labrado asimismo y realizado de azul, y se pinten en este genero de loza puntas negras y campos de colores.”
seventeenth century men of color were making finer wares without taking the exams as assistants or apprentices in workshops owned by men of Spanish ancestry. The archives show that a mulatto slave by the name of Diego de Sandrera was apprenticed as a painter for fine ware with the master potter Diego Serrano y Peña for three years beginning in 1651. Examination records from the eighteenth century show that mestizo and mulatto potters were taking the exams despite the fact that the 1653 ordinances explicitly forbade them:

In the noble and loyal City of Los Angeles on the 20th day of the month of May of seventeen hundred and seventy sixth year in front of Mariano Francisco Zambrano notary of the town council…and trusted executioner of the our King (may the Lord guard him for many years)…appeared Juan Cabesas, Andres Olivos, Manual Maldonado and Joseph Mariano Medrano, officers of the guild of the white and colored ware who say that they have completed their obligation in accordance of the ordinances to examine in the genre of colored ware Joseph Christoval Frias, a mestizo aged twenty-six years, with a regular body, black hair, wheat colored skin, small forehead, bushy eyebrows, small olive-shaped eyes, wide nose, thick lips…in the presence of various experts and officials of both offices, they asked him to make various pieces of colored ware and asked him questions and cross-examined him and he satisfied on all counts…have given him the title of “Examined Master” in said office for him to use and exercise, with a shop, public workshop, with officers and apprentices, registered in this city, and all other cities, villas and places of our King (may the Lord guard him for many years)…

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67 Enrique Cervantes, *Nomina de loceros poblanos durante el periodo virreinal,* (Mexico: Manuel Casas, 1933), 42.

68 Ibid., 70-71. Original in Spanish: “En la Muy Noble y Muy Leal Ciudad de los Angeles a veinte dias del mes de Mayo de mil setecientos setenta y seis años Antemi Du. Mariano Franscisco Zambrano Escribano de S.M. Mayor Publico Propietario del Cavildo Justicia, y Regimiento y del Tribunal de Diputación y Fiele Executoria, por el Rey Ntro. Sennor (que Dios guarde muchos años) Su Notario Publico de las Indias, Islas, y Tierra firme del Mar Oceano; parecieron Juan Cablesas, Andres Olivos, Manuel Maldonado y Joseph Mariano Medrano Alcalde, y Veedores del Gremio de lo Blanco, y Colorado, y dixeron que en cumplimiento de su obligacion, y de sus Reales ordenansans, han examinado en lo Colorado a Joseph Christoval Frias el qual expreso ser mestizo, y tener veinta y seis años deedad, y es de cuerpo regular, pelo negro, color trigueño, frente pequeña, seja poblada, ojos pequenos y aseitunados, naris ancha, labios gruesos, poca barba, cari agileño, y holloso virhuelas, al qual en preciencia de varios Maestros y oficiales de ambos oficios, le hisieron ejecutar varias piesas de Losa Colorada, con otras preguntas y Repreguntas, a dho oficio tocantes, y a todas satisfisio bien, y cumplidamente como avil, capas y sufficiente oficial, por lo quele daban y dieron por Maestro Examinado e dho oficio para que lo pueda usar, y exerser, con tienda y obrador Publico, con oficiales y aprendises, escritudaros, assi en esta Ciudad, como en todas las demas Ciudades, Villas, y Lugares del Rey Nuesto Señor (que Dios guarde muchos años)...”
Not all the men listed as master potters took exams or their records have not survived so there is no way to get an accurate account of what percentage of the potters were of mixed heritage. There are examples of mestizo master potters from the seventeenth century who did not take the exams, and not all the exams list the race of the potter being examined.

The insistence on maintaining a guild, enforcing its rules and conducting examinations was perhaps a means of keeping in touch with the European way of doing things, where guilds were popular in earlier times. However, by the time that guilds were forming in colonial Mexico, they were losing their power in Europe.\(^69\) It could be that there were instances of potters in Puebla not adhering to the rules, such as mulatto or mestizo potters making and selling ceramics and thus creating competition for the potters of pure Spanish ancestry.\(^70\) This would explain why the ordinances were written in a way to be both exclusive and keep certain members of the colonial society out while at the same time provide measures of protection for those who belonged to the guild.

Yet, we also know that these rules were not followed faithfully from the beginning. The artisans who made *loza poblana* formed a community and most of them lived close together in the western quadrant of the city, where the church of San Marcos was the center of their activities and home to their confraternity.\(^71\) In such a tight-knit group regulation might have been an easy task, but each master potter operated a self-contained workshop and what happened within the workshop could not necessarily always be controlled by the guild.

Moreover, all kinds of rules were broken, not just the ones having to do with the exclusion of mestizo or mulatto potters. Potters did not use saggars or sign their wares as was

\(^69\) Lister and Lister, “The Potter’s Quarter,” 90.

\(^70\) McQuade, “*Loza Poblana*,” 83.

\(^71\) Lister and Lister, “The Potter’s Quarter,” 89 and 93.
written in the ordinances. They did not spare expenses in making the finer wares since they were trying to make objects that could compete with European and Chinese imports so they did not always adhere to the specifications of sizes or amount of cobalt and glaze to be used. The transgression of these rules suggests that they were not very well regulated. It is also possible that despite publicizing the rules the guild was not as concerned with regulation since such lapses could not have gone unnoticed for long.

The crafting of a local Mexican aesthetic required a breaking of the rules, whether it was the rules for making ceramics or the ones that were meant to be exclusive. This is not surprising in a city that from the very beginning did not follow the very justification for its founding to be a purely Spanish city, or at one time defied the Holy Church by continuing to venerate an Asian religious figure banned by the Church. Although native and mestizo artisans were not allowed to become master potters, motifs from native arts and visual imagery from indigenous legends made their way into the new colonial craft. The tension described previously of the city wanting to create an identity for itself in the colony while at the same time staying true to the values of the empire can be seen in the city’s ceramic industry as well. The guild represents a semblance of imperial and organizational order, but the actions of some potters and the objects they produced defy that order.

It was not a causal relationship between the city’s religious and political life that trickled into the work of the artisans, but rather the artisans through their work and experience of working in a colonial society added their own inflection to the city’s identity. After all, it was their work that inspired the words of Vetancourt that deemed the ceramics made in Puebla superior to those of Spain and likened them to those of China. These ceramics then were not merely a reflection of what was happening in the city, but they were contributing to the city and
Vetancourt’s sentiments about loza poblana were reiterated by Villa de Sanchez in his work:

The pottery that is made in Puebla is so fine and exquisite that it equals or exceeds that of Talavera and Cartagena, thus achieved by the determination of the potters of Puebla, who emulate and try to make objects that resemble the ceramics of China; there is much of this pottery, especially that of the most ordinary kind, which is consumed the most in the kingdom. 

Villa de Sanchez’s comments are supposedly derived from Vetancourt’s work but his inclusion of the ceramics of Puebla implies that these objects had become a trope for discussing the ways in which the colony could compete Spain. The works created by the potters of Puebla also gave these writers examples to prove that there were times that they did not look across the Atlantic for inspiration, but chose to look across the Pacific instead.

**Objects of Note**

Loza poblana objects were made using similar materials, techniques and tools as compared to Spanish ceramics, but the context and market for which they were produced also made them markedly different from their European counterparts. Given these conditions, in this section we will consider a few objects to investigate what “emulating Chinese ceramics” might have meant and pay special attention to the influence of Asian aesthetics on these ceramics.

It would be easy to dismiss Vetancourt’s remarks as something part of a laudatory discourse on Puebla that had no connection to the artisans’ themselves, but even if these artisans were not aware of what was being said of their work, they were not working in a vacuum. They

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72 Villa de Sanchez, 38. Original in Spanish: “…la Loza de que se labra mucha en la Puebla, tan fina y tan primorosa, que ó iguala, ó escede á la de Talavera y á la de Cartagena de las Indias llega á conseguir el empeño de los poblanos Alfareros, emular y asemejar el primor de la Loza de la China; de estahay mucha saca, especialmente de la mas ordinaria, que tiene mas consumo en el Reyno.”
made concerted efforts to create unique objects. In some examples they clearly imitate Chinese objects and in others they seem to reinterpret the designs to suit their needs. The analysis will begin with three pairs of jars that display direct links between a Chinese porcelain and its *loza poblana* counterpart.

The Chinese *guan* pictured in Figure 5.22 is decorated with large chrysanthemum themed lappets with lotus flowers in the circular spaces between the lappets. Floral sprays adorn the neck and waist of the jar, and a border pattern encircles the base. This jar would have had a lid that did not cover the neck of the jar. Figure 5.23 is a Mexican jar that has been inspired by the Chinese one. It is easy to see a resemblance between the two objects, but the Mexican artisan clearly did not make an entirely faithful imitation. The neck of the Mexican jar is not decorated because that is where the iron lid would have been placed. The shape of the Mexican jar is similar to the
Chinese one but it has not been potted as evenly as the Chinese one. The painting on the Mexican jar is also not as precise and neat as what is seen in the Chinese version. The coloring is uneven, thicker in some parts and lighter in others. The painter of the Mexican jar has stayed true to the floral theme seen in the Chinese jar, but the overall design has been simplified a great deal. The floral spray has been changed to a diamond shaped adornment and there is no border pattern.

Despite these differences there is less white space on the Mexican version than on the Chinese one. We cannot know how the potters or their customers thought that _loza poblana_ actually compared to the Chinese porcelain objects they used as inspiration, but we know the Mexican objects were valued as we have seen from extant writings and from the fact that they were preserved over time. In the example shown above, the painter did not combine the Chinese motifs with other designs. However, in other examples Mexican artisans used Chinese designs as inspirations to create an overall more distinct object, such as in the jar shown below (Figure 5.25).
Similarities between the surface decoration of these two jars is clear even though the Mexican painter made some significant substitutions. This was perhaps due to the fact that he could not imitate the Chinese version exactly. Yet the substitutions were also made in a manner that reflected a local aesthetic instead of looking like ill-fitting substitutions to a Chinese design. The Chinese jar is adorned with a lotus motif and a lotus petal scroll at the base (Figure 5.24). In the Mexican version the shape of the flowers has been altered to be more angular in contrast to the curvier lotus flowers of the Chinese version. The neck and base of the Mexican jar are decorated with abstract forms that have been linked to the Kufic script, also seen above in the Figure 5.1. The geometric flowers and the base pattern together make the overall design on the Mexican jar into a coherent theme. The painter borrowed the visual scheme from the Chinese jar, but then painted according to what he was familiar with or what was popular locally.

73 Kuwayama, 81.
In the next example the aesthetic connection between the two objects is not immediately obvious. The artisan who painted the jar in Figure 5.27 interpreted the Chinese design more radically than the two examples shown thus far. The most obvious similarity between the two objects is the inversion of colors where the shapes of the motifs are made visible by the spaces left white. The Chinese jar is decorated with a plum blossom motif (Figure 5.26). The neck is adorned with a cloud pattern and the lid is missing for this jar too. The center of the plum blossoms are decorated with tiny dots that the Mexican painter noted, but moved to the outside of his flowers outlining the shape of the motif. Although the flowers on the Mexican jar are not exactly like the plum blossoms, the shapes are similar. In the Mexican version the surface has also been divided into four distinct parts with two flowers on each side.

Figure 5.26. Porcelain with underglaze blue. Plum blossom in white relief on blue background. Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico. Author photo.

Figure 5.27. Earthenware with tin-glaze. With iron lid and lock. Puebla, Early eighteenth century. Four lobed lappets divide the surface with flowers resembling plum blossoms in the center of the partitions. Hispanic Society of America, New York.
The least obvious similarity between the two objects, that of the shading of the blue background, is perhaps also the one that is most convincing about the connection between them. In the Chinese jar the artisans have exquisitely painted the outline of the flowers so that they stand out in relief to a blue background that seems to give the impression of a cloudy, but moonlit night. The blue background is intentionally not a uniform color and the Mexican artisan tried to imitate the visual effect he saw in the Chinese jar. He did so by painting dots and then painting over the dots in varying thickness or density of the paint. It is yet another example of the potters of Puebla showing an interest in a specific material quality of Chinese porcelain and reproducing it in their own medium and thus creating an entirely new design.

In the preceding three examples we saw a direct connection between a Chinese porcelain object and its Mexican counterpart in the shape and surface decoration. Sometimes the potters in Puebla only borrowed the shape instead of adopting the entire design. This is seen in the use of the shape of the Chinese cup that was recreated in Puebla and often referred to as a jícara. Originally jícaras were more globular shaped and potters in Puebla made them in both a globular shape and a more slender Chinese cup shape (Figures 5.28 and 5.29). The potters in Puebla do not seem to have made mancerinas although they were imported from China.74

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74 McQuade, “Loza Poblana,” 139.
Another way in which Mexican potters took inspiration from Chinese aesthetics was by borrowing certain motifs that were painted on non-Asian forms. One of the most endearing and long-lasting motifs that the Puebla potters devised combined a Chinese nature scene common in *kraak* ware with local motifs or patterns. In Figure 5.30, the *albarelo*, a shape imported from Europe, is divided into two panels. The side that is pictured shows a natural scene painted inside the panel. The painter has cleverly inserted a *nopal* cactus into the landscape and in so doing made the landscape local. As seen in other objects, the base is decorated with a pattern that is connected to the Hispano-Moresque tradition.

In another example we see a similar landscape scene but this time it has been modified so that the bird, resembling a Chinese crane, is perched on top of the *nopal* cactus (Figure 5.31). The central motif very closely resembles the symbol of the founding of the city of Tenochtitlan that was discussed earlier where an eagle was shown perched on the cactus. The porcelain objects brought to Mexico introduced new motifs to the potters in Puebla who adopted them to expand their repertoire. The allusion to the legend of Tenochtitlan is made even more obvious by the fact that the cactus is shown in a body of water. The base of the jar also shows a snake, which was initially part of the legend, but was not devoured by the eagle as is seen in the national flag today.

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75 The ceramics found in the *San Diego* shipwreck consisted of a large number of objects with bird motifs, including some examples of a singular bird perched on a branch or rock. If the *San Diego* is representative of other shipments to Manila, then we know that potters in Puebla would have access to many examples of Chinese porcelain with bird motifs. See Jean-Paul Desroches, Gabriel Casal and Franck Goddio, *Treasures of the San Diego*, (Paris: AFAA; New York: Elf; Manilla: National Museum of the Philippines, 1996), 342.

This particular combination of motifs of the nopal cactus and the Chinese crane is seen on several different loza poblan objects, which were undoubtedly made by different potters. It became a popular motif since it had various elements that could be combined in different ways. It is not clear who came up with the combination of a Chinese nature scene with native elements. Perhaps it was a native potter who inserted the nopal and the design was approved and popularized so that it become part of the general repertoire of designs made in Puebla.

In addition to experimenting with different effects and motifs, the potters in Puebla were also inventive with their figurative decorations, which were often painted on lebrillos, or basins, where the base of the objects offered a surface to create elaborate scenes (Figures 5.32 and 5.34).

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77 Florence Lister, Robert Lister, and Paul Smutko, Maioloica Olé: Spanish and Mexican Decorative Traditions, Featuring the Collection of the Museum of International Folk Art (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2001), 84.
The shape of these objects is derived from the Hispano-Moresque tradition and the surface decoration combined motifs from various artistic traditions. In the example on the bottom left the walls and lip of the basin are decorated in a European design, but the scene on the inside depicts Chinese figures, seen with their queues and parasols, frolicking in nature.\textsuperscript{78} Such figures could have been imitated from Chinese porcelain objects that depicted scenes of literati gatherings (Figure 5.33). The figures painted on the lebrillo resemble the children seen playing in the forefront on the Chinese jar.

The potters in Puebla did not try to recreate the scene depicted on the Chinese jar. Instead they invented one that included exotic figures but at the same time was also familiar to locals. The surface design of the lebrillo in Figure 5.32 is comparable to the decoration seen in the lobed jar of Figure 5.21. The inclusion of the horse made sense in the Mexican context and is not something that would necessarily have been imitated from Chinese examples because it was not a common motif for Chinese porcelains. The combination of the different artistic traditions was made coherent through the use of the aborronado technique on the entire surface. The foreign influences are obvious but do not seem disconnected from the overall design of the object.

\textsuperscript{78} Kuwayama, 82.
The *aborronado* technique was also applied on another *lebrillo* that included elements of Chinese design but was not imitated from a Chinese example. The scene depicts two women, one is shown with a gun with an animal hanging from it and another woman, shown seated, is playing a lute-like instrument. Such a depiction of women on a ceramic object was not common at the time, and the object was most probably commissioned. The ground is shown with a pattern that resembles the wave pattern often seen on Chinese ceramics, and the flora and fauna in this scene too are inspired by scenes of nature depicted on Chinese porcelains.
The last few examples that we studied were radical interpretations of Chinese designs or playful mixtures of different motifs and aesthetics. To our eyes these objects have a whimsical quality, but at the time when they were made the inclusion of European, indigenous and Asian aesthetics in one object was not just a spontaneous or fanciful act. It was a mélange that reflected the local culture. The emergence of certain distinct motifs and designs suggest that the artisans were paying attention to what was popular and how they could make objects that had local appeal and were distinguishable.

One of the most significant ways in which the potters of Puebla distinguished themselves was with the production of tiles for both religious and secular buildings. Many of the city’s edifices were covered with bold, colorful tiles, distinguishing it from other colonial cities of the time (Figure 5.35). The techniques for producing tiles were introduced to Mexico from Spain, but over time the artisans in Puebla developed their own ways of using them to adorn buildings.
and thus distinguished their tile work from that of the metropole. The tiles were used to decorate interiors, including kitchens. The earliest example of a kitchen decorated with tiles is in the former Convent of Santa Rosa, where even the ceiling is covered with tiles. The motifs on the tiles were at times the same ones as seen on the finer wares made by the potters, but in some cases the tiles were combined to create a larger pattern or figural scenes. In the eighteenth century potters began to make tiles for decorating the exteriors of buildings as well.

Figure 5.35. Earthenware tiles on the fountain of the Convent Santa Rosa in Puebla, eighteenth century. The geometric shape of the flower resembles the geometric rendering of flowers in Figure 5.25.

The exterior decoration with tiles took advantage of the masonry of the buildings and created patterns with the bricks and textures of the edifices. This technique was known in Spain, but as with the ceramics, the potters in Puebla made original creations with them. The originality was especially notable in tableros, which were tiles that together made figurative images. The most notable such tablero was made for the façade of the church of San Marcos, which was also the church for the confraternity of the potters. On this façade the potters made a tablero of the

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79 McQuade, “The Emergence of a Mexican Tile Tradition,” 218.
Virgin of Immaculate Conception, which combined with brick to create a unique visual effect (Figure 5.36).  

Tiles were also at times decorated with Asian motifs in the same way that other ceramic objects were. Such tiles could be used for interior or exterior decoration such as the column of a church in Puebla seen in Figure 5.38. In addition to decorating walls, potters also decorated the domes of churches, which in the sunlight would have glinted and shone in brilliance (Figure 5.37). For someone looking on to Puebla from the surrounding mountains, the shining domes of the churches would have been quite a scene, one that might have inspired the onlooker to write about this colonial Mexican city.

Tiles made in Puebla were also in demand outside of the city. In 1602 Gaspar de Encinas, one of the first potters to settle in Puebla, was asked to make tile panels in one of the chapels and

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80 Ibid, 220.
altar frontal of the Cathedral of Mexico, a project that required more than two thousand tiles. In the eighteenth century an entire house, Casa de los Azulejos, was built with tiles from Puebla because the Countess who had the house built was originally from Puebla and introduced the fashion to the capital. It is another example that shows the craftsmen of Puebla taking advantage of trends coming into the colony and reinterpreting them in a local idiom for the beatification of the colony.

Figure 5.38. Tiles decorating the Church of San Francisco Acatepec, Puebla. Tin-glazed earthenware, Puebla, ca. 1730.

Figures 5.39 and 5.40. Tiles seen in Museo Bello, Puebla. The one on the left depicts a Chinese crane with European Baroque elements. The tile on the right hand side shows a Chinese figure with a parasol painted in manner similar to the ones in the lebrillo shown in Figure 27. In the museum these tiles were fitted into cabinets, but originally they were probably used to adorn walls.

The various objects discussed in this section give examples of the ways in which Puebla was shaped by the movement of goods via trade in the early modern period. Although the city does not figure prominently in studies of global trade networks, the crafts produced in the city reflect the presence and influence of several artistic traditions in colonial Mexico, which the craftsmen of Puebla reinterpreted into a new aesthetic that was then sent out to various parts of colonial Latin America. Amongst these various influences, Chinese porcelain was significant, especially since it offered an aesthetic that was neither Spanish nor native and thus gave the potters more options to choose from when they created their own designs.

**Conclusion**

The dissertation began in Jingdezhen where the original objects of inspiration were created. In the intervening chapters we saw how Asian goods were made available in colonial Latin America and the positive reception of Asian commodities into colonial society that paved the way for the incorporation of Asian aesthetics into colonial crafts. In this chapter on Puebla we ended with a study of how specifically the design elements created in Jingdezhen were reinterpreted in Puebla to create a new local art form. In addition to analyzing the artisans’ manual skills we also considered the sociopolitical climate of the city where they were working to understand how and why a market developed for this new art form.

Puebla’s status as the first Spanish city was meant to set it apart in the viceroyalty. The city did manage to distinguish itself, but not in the way originally intended. From the very beginning the city had a diverse population that also became racially mixed. It was known in the colony for supplying agricultural produce and it was also a religious center but not one that always followed the mandates of the Holy Church. As an economically and culturally significant
city of the viceroyalty of Mexico it could influence the tastes of the colony, as was done through the locally produced *loza poblana* ceramics. These ceramics also served to bolster the political significance of the city and the colony.

A study of ceramic production in Puebla offers a contrast to the ceramic production process we saw in Jingdezhen, where artisans were producing for a global market. In Jingdezhen too artisans incorporated foreign designs into their craft, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the foreign designs, such as heraldic imagery, symbols of the orders of the Catholic Church, and shapes that suited eating habits of different cultures, were meant for foreign consumers. Different types of porcelains were made for domestic consumers. Production in Jingdezhen was such that they could make a great diversity of objects for their varied consumers.

The goals of the potters of Puebla were different. In Puebla the foreign designs were localized, made into forms or motifs that resonated locally. Their products were exported outside of the city, but what was being exported was an entirely new ceramic aesthetic. They were distinguishable from both Chinese porcelains and Spanish earthenwares, and were valued for their uniqueness. The potters of Puebla did not diversify their products to suit the needs of different markets as the industry in Jingdezhen did, instead they created a new product that the colonial society developed a taste for. It became an art form that commentators of the time used as an example to prove the inventiveness and productivity of the residents of the city and the colony.

Puebla was a place that was profoundly influenced by the people and goods brought to the city from across the Pacific and the Atlantic, but it was not a blank space upon which foreign objects could leave their mark arbitrarily. Local factors as mundane as the composition of the earth and as mutable as the political and social situation affected how European, Asian and
native artistic traditions were incorporated into a newly developing colonial craft. The true ingenuity of the Puebla potters was in their ability to harness local resources and then use what was made available to them through global trade to develop a unique aesthetic that was locally powerful.
CHAPTER SIX
Conclusion: Themes from a Connected World

Porcelain objects produced in Jingdezhen were of pivotal importance in the development of several different ceramic industries in the world. In his poem “Keramos,” American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow remembered a Chinese design that he referred to as the Willow Pattern, which was in fact the name of a pattern developed in England based on scenes painted on Chinese plates and bowls. The Chinese design made an impression in England and the potters there popularized it by reinterpreting it for local consumption.

The movement of Chinese porcelain to colonial Mexico had a similar outcome in that potters in Puebla were inspired by the Asian ceramics and reinterpreted their shapes and motifs into new designs for local production. The fact that these Chinese-inspired ceramics made in Puebla were considerably different from those of their British counterparts proves that the foreign design was transformed by the local socio-political context it was introduced to. In the case of Puebla, the ceramics made there were influenced by indigenous, European, Hispano-Moresque and Asian artistic traditions.

We followed just one of these artistic influences from the point of origin in the city of Jingdezhen in China to colonial Mexico where potters combined the motifs and forms from Chinese porcelain with other designs that they were familiar with to create a new ceramic aesthetic. We also learned that the indigenizing of a foreign aesthetic in this manner was dependent on the specific mechanisms of trade that made it possible for Chinese porcelain to be disseminated in the colony. Moreover, the use of Asian aesthetics in local crafts was partly due to the colony’s privileging of Asian goods, often above those brought from Spain.
Studying the multiple sites of production, consumption and trade in a single narrative of a class of objects in motion across continents allows us to see the development and transformation of several towns and cities based on both local factors and their involvement in global trade networks. This methodology also allows for the comparison of similar sites, such as the ceramic production centers of Jingdezhen and Puebla or the ports of Manila and Acapulco that were all part of the same trade circuit but developed differently.

Several themes emerged from investigating this connected world. We saw that a relationship of interdependence existed between the trade network and the places it connected. Although local histories and specific material conditions determined how or why the people in a particular site participated in global trade, once they were integrated into the trade circuit, these places were influenced by the movement of bullion, goods and people between them. Artisans also emerged as important actors in this early modern trade network. They produced the commodities of the trade, as was the case with the potters of Jingdezhen, and used the resources available to them through trade to make locally significant ceramics, as was the case with the potters of Puebla. The ceramics of Puebla were a symbol of Mexico’s unique appropriation of Asian goods and evidence that the trade with Asia was influential in the making of a colonial Mexican identity that was distinct from the metropole.

At the various nodes along the transpacific trade that are investigated in the dissertation we also saw that the reality did not always correspond with the official or textual record. The surviving records on the production process in Jingdezhen are not written by the artisans themselves and do not tell us which aesthetic and design decisions were made by the artisans and how specifically they worked with their bodies to make porcelain objects. We also do not have records of what the Chinese merchants were bringing to Manila because they were often not
operating in accordance with the law in China or reporting the details of their shipments to Southeast Asian ports. Similarly, the merchants in Manila were not consistently reporting how exactly the trade was conducted in the port and even the surviving records cannot be trusted. In Mexico also the textual record is mostly silent on the effects of the transpacific trade on the colony and in Puebla the local ceramics are evidence that the official rules were disobeyed on many occasions.

Given these limitations, the tactile approach—one which contends with the materiality of the ceramic objects at the sites of production, trade and consumption—offers a novel way to study this trade network. We see the different hands, contexts and transactions the objects passed through from the point where they were made to the place where they reinterpreted for local consumption. Studying each place on the journey of these ceramics individually also foregrounds the local histories and conditions of each site that were significant in the making of a commercial network.

**The Local and the Global**

The interdependent relationship between global trade and local conditions can be seen in the different sites of production, trade and consumption. Jingdezhen had been producing porcelain for the domestic, regional and west-Asian markets for hundreds of years prior to commencement of direct trade with Europe. It had the right raw materials to make porcelain and access to waterways to transport the ceramics. The initial impetus for popularizing the blue-and-white aesthetic came partly from foreign merchants, but early modern global trade was not responsible for the creation of Jingdezhen. However, when the trade expanded to include markets in Europe and the Americas, production in the kilns increased and access to capital from that trade protected the kilns when local support, especially from the emperors, was scant.
Over the period of Jingdezhen’s development into the porcelain capital of the world, spurred by demand from emperors and foreign merchants, the production process became highly specialized. The artisans were able to meet their various consumers’ demands but the trade in their goods affected them too. Quite literally since they worked with their bodies and the long duration of their work could be seen on their physiques.

The trade networks that provided the necessary capital were in turn influenced by the local contexts of the places they linked. While the skill of the artisans and the system of production in Jingdezhen made the ceramics produced there the most desirable in the world, indeed the first global brand, it also meant that merchants around the world who wanted to trade in Jingdezhen porcelain had to develop connections at the right ports to access the good and transport it to the respective interested markets. In their new homes the Chinese ceramics also became a standard to imitate and often shaped local production.

Like Jingdezhen, Manila’s history prior to Spanish arrival was influential in its eventual transformation into a major port. Chinese merchants had been coming to the area to trade with the indigenous people for centuries prior to European intrusions. The Spanish took advantage of the pre-existing network and technology to establish their own port and trade with the Chinese in Manila. And yet the development of Manila was not entirely contingent upon the Spanish. The Chinese merchants and migrants who worked and lived in the city were also invested in building the city and facilitating the growing trade.

Once established as a major port, the conditions in Manila had an impact on the transpacific trade to the Spanish American colonies. The city had a natural harbor that made it easy for ships and junks to come in and there was high quality wood available in the vicinity to construct galleons. In Manila Chinese and Spanish merchants made decisions about what kinds
of goods would be exported and how. The many different people involved in the trade devised ways to transport goods in greater quantity than they were officially allowed to by the Spanish Crown. The Manila galleons were built bigger than other Spanish ships that were used for trade in the Atlantic, the bales and crates were packed in a way that more valuable pieces were hidden away from the eyes of inspectors, and notaries created books of freight that only recorded enough information to pass official scrutiny but were ambiguous enough to allow the shipment of contraband.

The largest market in Manila, the *Parián*, was a significant site for the various exchanges that took place before a galleon was loaded and set sail for Acapulco. The *Parián* provided a space for this early modern commerce across linguistic, cultural and political boundaries to happen. In the initial years after the colonization of Manila there was no dedicated place where the Chinese merchants could gather and sell their wares or services; once such a space was created commerce improved. In its various incarnations the market was always located close to the river so that boats could bring in goods and necessary provisions, which would then be sold in the various shops. Over time the structure of the market improved to facilitate a more efficient transportation, sale and accounting of the goods.

The significance of the *Parián* in Manila to the transpacific trade came to be so well known that the largest marketplace in the colony of Mexico was given the same name in the eighteenth century. It was a symbol of colonial Mexico’s demand for Asian goods and it proved that in the early modern consumers’ imaginations the places that commodities moved through were also important. Unlike its counterpart in Asia, the *Parián* in Mexico City was located in the most central place in the city, surrounded by monuments of colonial power. According to extant sources this was also a dazzling place considering the variety of goods sold there, both local and
foreign. Giving it the Asian name, however, implied that the Asian goods were the most significant or most attractive, more so than what was brought from Europe.

The impact of the Manila Galleon Trade on the Spanish American colonies was not the same across the region and responses to or appropriation of the goods and people brought in from Asia were varied. We see the greatest impact of the trade on the port of Acapulco, which was created specifically for the Manila galleons. Its livelihood depended entirely on the comings and goings of ships across the Pacific. Unlike Manila it did not have a prior history of being a point of exchange and even once the trade started it only came alive when there was a ship in its harbor, and when the said ship was one that had returned from Asia, Acapulco was even a festive place, one with a fair that was renowned in the world.

In other cities in the colony, such as Mexico City and Puebla, the effect of the trade with Asia was more subtle. The impact could be seen in the material world where Asian goods found their way into shops in the marketplace, into sitting rooms and kitchens, or on the bodies of the men, women and children who lived in the colony. Asian objects were also found in paintings depicting life in the colony, proving that they were a significant part of the material and visual culture of the society. Artists used Asian goods to create new forms of media, such as the biombos, for depicting important historical events and places. They also depicted Asian goods in paintings to highlight the colony’s trade with Asia or to show distinctions between social classes.

The manner in which Asian goods were incorporated into daily life or into colonial crafts was contingent upon local needs and conditions. For example, Chinese cups were imported to Mexico but Chinese tea was not since chocolate was a more popular beverage. When borrowing Chinese motifs too, artisans used them to their advantage, as in the example of inserting nopal cacti into a design imitated from kraak porcelain. These instances prove that trade with Asia did
shape certain aspects of colonial society, but the local history and context were influential in how Asian goods were received and appropriated.

**Artisans and Craft Knowledge**

We saw two distinct examples of the ways in which artisans and their skill were influential in the early modern world. In China, the skill of the artisans was a factor in producing appealing commodities that influenced tastes and fashions around the world. In Puebla the potters used their skill and different artistic influences available to them to produce a new locally significant art form.

Communicating the skill and knowledge of these artisans was difficult since these were bodily practices. By practicing the craft myself I was able to think about it through my experience and point to the amount of discipline, practice and knowledge that was required to be a competent craftsman. The methodology of investigating the production process in this manner was necessary for understanding how precisely artisans’ skills were significant to early modern trade and how they in turn were impacted by increased interaction between different regions of the world.

In the chapter on Jingdezhen we saw that artisans at different steps of the production process were extremely adept at working with the clay, each in their own way, according to the task that they were in charge of. They used their tools and qualities of judgment and dexterity to finish every step of the process as perfectly as possible. The division of labor into many segments and the high degree of specialization was the key to the success of Jingdezhen’s kilns, which were able to mass produce ceramics of high quality and cater to various consumers, including Chinese emperors, Muslim merchants, Japanese tea masters and European aristocracy.
The ceramic production industry in Puebla was much younger than the one in Jingdezhen and not as highly specialized. The materials and techniques they worked with were also considerably different. Despite the fact that Chinese porcelain was also available in colonial Latin America, there was a local demand for *loza poblana*. This was due to the fact that the potters made their ceramics locally relevant by incorporating a variety of aesthetic traditions and creating designs that resonated with the colonial populace. They were adept at harnessing what was available to them: the local materials, indigenous knowledge of those materials, production techniques from Spain and a variety of artistic traditions to choose designs from.

Indigenous aesthetics were one amongst an array of artistic traditions that were influential in the development of a colonial ceramic aesthetic. Indigenous crafts in the colony were destroyed to a great extent by the conquest but not erased completely. The surviving designs were met with designs brought to the colony from across the Atlantic and the Pacific. The potters in Puebla made choices about how they incorporated and combined these different artistic traditions available to them and created a distinctive ceramic art, which was then exported to other parts of the colony and became an art form that the city and colony could boast about. These ceramics served as reminders of the colony’s ties to places both near and far, but at the same time represented a new colonial aesthetic unique to the place where it was created.

The study of the two different types of production processes also revealed different ways in which artisans incorporated foreign designs into their craft. By successfully appropriating new shapes and motifs the potters in Jingdezhen and Puebla were able to keep adding to their repertoire and maintain a vitality in their craft. In Jingdezhen reproductions were often truer to the original due to the way the labor was organized and the fact that each step of the process was done by a specialist. When imitating designs from different materials, such as metal, or from
foreign cultures, the artisans created objects that took advantage of the properties of porcelain and decorated it in a way that skillfully combined foreign and Chinese aesthetics. Similarly, the potters in Puebla also created coherent and meaningful designs, but they did so in indigenizing the foreign motifs and making a new aesthetic that the colonial society developed a taste for. The fact that *loza poblana* ceramics were unique as compared to both their Spanish and Chinese counterparts made them valuable in the colony.

**Asia in the Making of a Colonial Mexican Identity**

The potters’ ordinances issued by the guild in Puebla specified how exactly Chinese porcelain was to be imitated. Regardless of whether the potters followed the rule, it is clear that even officially the imitation and use of Chinese aesthetics was sanctioned. Although the ordinances also specified how to imitate ceramics from Spain and how to employ Hispano-Moresque techniques, when scholars such as Agustín Vetancourt wrote about *loza poblana* they claimed that the potters were emulating Chinese ceramics and their creations were superior to those made in Spain. The local ceramics and their use of Asian aesthetics then became a way for the colony to distance and distinguish itself from the metropole. They gave someone like Vetancourt something to anchor himself to if he wanted to prove that the colony did not have to rely on Spain for its luxury goods; it could either get them from Asia or produce its own by borrowing from Asian designs.

The appropriation of Asian goods and aesthetics in Mexico was influenced by its position as a colony, which is why we see instances, such as Vetancourt’s writing, where people in the colony used the transpacific trade as a way to challenge its subservient position or at the very least assert their difference by incorporating elements of Asia in their day to day lives. The myth
about the tiles for *Casa de los Azulejos* being imported from China was another case where colonial society linked local history to Asia rather than to Spain. In addition, the pageantry at the trade fair in Acapulco was a symbol of the colony’s preference for Asian goods, as was the use of the name *Parián* for the central market in Mexico City.¹

The case of Catarina de San Juan was another instance when the colony used its ties with Asia to distance itself by proclaiming that one amongst them who had come from Asia was pious and holy enough to become a saint. To her confessors in the colony her Indian origin made her a good candidate for beatification and although the Holy Church in Europe disagreed, her fame did not diminish.

The use of Asian motifs in the visual language of *loza poblana* also shows that Asian aesthetics offered a means for the potters to create a ceramic tradition that was distinctive from the Spanish tradition. They borrowed forms that suited their needs, such as the *guan*, which was refashioned into a *chocolatero*, and decorated these objects with designs that were relevant to the colonial populace, as seen with the substitution of quetzal bird where a Chinese phoenix would have been.

One of the most powerful combinations of motifs was that of the Chinese crane placed atop a *nopal* cactus in a lake. The three elements of the bird, cactus and water together unmistakably referred to the image of the founding of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, which eventually became a national symbol after independence. Although indigenous crafts were destroyed to a great degree, native images remained relevant when potters found ways to combine them with motifs and designs introduced to the colony from Asia.

¹The market in Mexico City no longer exists, but today in the central historic district of Puebla there is a market named the *Parián*. It is not clear when this market adopted the name, but the fame of the market in Manila has lived on to present day
Asia and Mexico: Then and Now

Colonial Mexico’s ties with Asia were relevant to Europe in that they made the colony a conduit through which Spain learned about Asia. Some of the porcelain objects that we followed from Jingdezhen to Puebla went on to Spain. However, in being taken to the metropole through the colony they arrived with an added layer of meaning. This was seen most clearly in the adoption of chocolate and the vessels used to drink it. The incorporation of Chinese cups into a chocolate service was seen in the painting of Antonio de Pereda (Figure 4.22) but it was also mentioned in the memoirs of a French countess, Catherine D’Aulnoy who traveled in Spain in the seventeenth century. She described her experience of drinking chocolate in the following manner:

Afterwards they present you with chocolate, every one a china cup full, upon a dish of agate set in gold, with sugar in a box of the same. There was some chocolate ordered with ice, and some hot, and some made with milk and eggs: you drink it with some biscuit, or else with some thin bread as hard as if it were toasted, which they make so on purpose. There are some women which (sic) will drink six cups one after another, and this they do, very often twice or thrice a day.

From Aulnoy’s account it is clear that by the seventeenth century drinking chocolate had become a daily ritual in Spanish aristocratic households, and Chinese porcelain was a part of this ritual.

Tellingly in the Spanish translation of D’aulnoy’s memoirs, which was published much later in 1891 in Madrid, the same vessels were referred to as “jícaras de porcelana.” The Asian

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2 Another Spanish painting that exhibits the use of Chinese porcelain cups for the consumption of chocolate is Luis Egidio Meléndez’s Still Life with Chocolate Service (1770).


4 Relación que hizo de su viaje por España la señora Condesa D’Aulnoy en 1679 (Madrid : Juan Jiménez, 1891), 111.
vessel had been given the Nahuatl-derived name in Mexico and the association was carried to Spain. Thus the society in the metropole not only incorporated the Chinese vessel the way people in the colony had, but they also referred to it by the name used in the colony. The ceramic mancerina, which was created from the interaction between the colonies and Chinese porcelain, also became a popular object in the Spanish chocolate service. Other Asian objects, such as the Japanese folding screen that was popular in Mexico, might have also been introduced into Spain with a colonial inflection.

Till 1815 colonial Mexico had direct ties with Asia, but with the termination of the transpacific trade, the connection was severed and the new nation was no longer in the privileged position of having access to information and goods from Asia before Spain. Visitors to Casa de los Azulejos can see how Asian aesthetics were introduced to Mexico after the end of the Manila Galleon Trade. The Casa today is home to a famous chain restaurant in Mexico, Sanborns, which characteristically uses blue-and-white dishes. Inside the restaurant a plaque explains that the dishes used are decorated with the “Willow Pattern” which was a favorite pattern of English porcelain manufacturers, the same one that Longfellow named in his poem. Initially the tableware bearing this pattern that is used in the restaurant was imported from the United Kingdom, but today it is produced locally (Figures 6.1-6.3).

The plaque in the restaurant goes on to tell of a Chinese fable encapsulated by the Willow Pattern. The story is about star-crossed lovers, See Koong and Chang, who are forbidden to marry each other by the girl’s father. A wooden fence was built around the girl to keep her from

5 The plaque is in English reads as follows: “The beautiful design that identifies and garnish the dishes in our restaurants is known as “Willow Pattern”…which around 1780 became one of the favorite subjects of English porcelain manufacturers. With the introduction of this ware to our restaurants, the pieces were brought from the UK. Today the company produces table Anfora especially for our company. But in addition to the pottery tradition holds, it holds in its design a beautiful love story. An ancient Chinese tale that revolves around the beautiful See Koon daughter of a powerful mandarin and a humble servant Chang…. The plaque goes on to explain the story and the design elements that correspond with it, which I have abridged above.
seeing her lover, which is represented by the motif seen on the rim of the plate. The seasonal changes in the willow tree, painted in the center of the plate, was a way for the lovers to communicate with each other as to when they could meet. Although reunited, the pair were eventually killed by the girl’s jealous suitor. Touched by their love story, the gods transformed them into doves, which are seen flying above the river in the design. This story, first fabricated in England to go along with the popular design, traveled with the pattern to Mexico.⁶

![Figure 6.1](image1.png) ![Figure 6.2](image2.png) ![Figure 6.3](image3.png)

**Figure 6.1** The making of the willow pattern. From left to right. China. Underglaze blue porcelain, eighteenth century. England, transfer-printed earthenware, early nineteenth century. Mexico, transfer-printed porcelain, twentieth century.

The ceramics used in the restaurant and their history as presented to the customers show that the direction of information and influence from Asia changed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of ceramics, Mexico was being introduced to Chinese aesthetics through Europe. The tables in Sanborns were not set with ceramics from China or by local imitations of ceramics from China, instead they used dishes decorated with a pattern imitated from a European reinterpretation of Chinese designs.

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However, if we leave the restaurant and stand outside to look at the Casa, we see that it tells the story of an earlier time when there was a vibrant direct connection between Asia and colonial Mexico. It was a time when myths were created about a colonial landmark’s connections to China, when potters in Mexico made their own patterns that borrowed from Chinese designs and when Chinese porcelain cups were imported from Asia especially to drink chocolate.
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