

# Porcelain and the economy of china

Economics



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## Introduction

In studying the history of the United States, we come to learn of its rise as a worldwide power. The Global economy has weakened in recent times, especially due to wars and unhealthy banking, leading many economies to major financial setbacks and crisis. China has long been a critical player and worldwide force in the economy, and still stands strong today despite the economic crisis.

As a key contributor to the economy, we have to look at its history and how it has affected the economy in the past. New York City is one of many places that was harbored Chinese immigrants in the early years of this country, and has a great cultural heritage of the Chinese people. At the Museum of Chinese in America, we see a diverse distribution of this installment. An item that I found at the museum was a porcelain teapot, titled “ Teapot with gilded berry knob” (picture show in the appendix). This item caught my eye mainly because of its elegance, but also because of its age.

As the city is so clustered together, one can easily miss the museum. It is a small building in the heart of China town in downtown. This makes it easy to navigate though; the artifacts and items are arranged in a chronological order, starting from the 1400s going to the early 2000s. It shows a historical journey and development the culture and arts of China people.

Being an object dating from about 1775 to 1800, the teapot was displayed at the beginning of the tour. I wondered why the museum chose to include it, as it is the only sample alongside a beer cup, also porcelain. It is about 6 inches in height and 3 diameters wide. Like many porcelain pots it was

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white, with a painting of early Chinese 2 floor building in navy blue. It is cylindrical in shape with a simple handle and a straight spout, unlike modern teapots. The lid is about half of the top, with a small knob in the shape of a strawberry dotted with gold.

The museum included this item donated by the New York Historical Society, to show its importance in the time period and how it became popular in the west. The curator mentioned that it was used mostly by the hierarchy in China; it was a symbol of wealth and power. It is also there as one of items used in trade when china began exploring the West, a popular item in high demand and interest, used by aristocrats and upper middle class in Europe and America.

According to the curator; the hand painted structures were used as residential, religious, or governmental buildings, while the trees in the background were used to show the weight of hierarchy in the Chinese community. In this art form, depiction of items is of great importance, and is used as symbolism to show different attributes. We also see the horizon and few clouds.

Chinese porcelain made its way to the West through the voyages of Admiral Zheng He. Born in 1372, the Ming Dynasty, he was captured by the ruling army at a young age and sent to work in the household of Prince Zhu Di. As he renowned himself during war and became commander of Chinese oceangoing imperial fleet. In his expeditions, he went to different places including India, Arabia and East Africa where he traded “ Ming porcelain

dishes and silks for medicinal herbs, spices, rhinoceros horn, ivory, exotic animals”, among other goods.

Zheng had about 300 ships in his expeditions, given rise to the debate of the reasons he was sent out on the voyages. However, Finlay states the purposes included “ diplomatic displays, military exercises, and trading ventures, with emphasis on these aspects shifting in response to both Chinese intentions”. From this we can we can see the ambition of trade and its significance from early civilizations of China.

From an article entitled “ Prosperity in Porcelain”, the product is commonly believed to have originated from china. The Chinese are well known for their tea, and that it is has been part of their culture for a very long time. Growing of tea for long time has led to the evolution of teapots as well. In this article, we learn that the earliest porcelain products where fine roughcast and light grey. Items made included bowls, jars saucers and even candlesticks. They were usually decorated with lotus flowers symbolizing purity and enlightenment, as Buddhism was growing as well about 420-589.

As generations passed, so did the teapots; reaching a level of excellence around the year 960, with the changing styles and shapes, thinner roughcast and a smooth glaze. After the invention of the Blue and White porcelain, it became the foremost product for a very long time. The article mentions that this was in great demand from a very long time and became the embodiment of Chinese porcelain.

In his article, Shangyun also describes the growth of the industry. Production and exportation boomed to a point that a ban was placed on unofficial  
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maritime trade during the Ming dynasty, but smuggling of the ceramic goods became prevalent. At this time merchants from European countries such as Britain, Portugal, and Holland, began businesses and build companies in East China. The products have become so popular especially among the royalty and nobility, that one of the authors sources recorded 16 million pieces of porcelain were transported to Europe in the 1600s, and another showed half a million pieces per year after 1648. It was after development of companies in Europe that the exportation declined.

I believe that this is when the Chinese economy begins to grow and become insular; from the article “Admiral Zheng He Voyages Across the Indian Ocean, 1405-1433”, we can see that it was after his death that china began to focus more on internal trade. Voyages were disliked by the empire and sanctions on fleets became more widespread, leading to a decline in western trade. A quote from the museum stated: “China possesses all things...and has no use for your country manufacturer”. This was from a letter to king George of England by the emperor Qianlong, showing the confidence he had in his economy.

In today's world the Chinese are still a giant in global economy, despite lagging behind other developed countries. Its leaders are optimistic and assert “...Chinese people are not reticent to boast that the stock market capitalizations of their corporations in energy, telecommunications, and banking are among the largest in the world”.

This portrayal of confidence surely comes from a long tradition of trade that led the world for centuries. The vice president was quoted, saying pride

China's history " is the historical driving force inspiring people today to build the nation", (Lawrence, p. 5). This is the sense of pride and patriotism that the Chinese express.

China is very well known for its cheap labor, cheap goods and growing economy, but also for its political beliefs. It is currently under communist regime, which may hinder its economic growth among democratic states. With booming industries ranging from technology to agriculture, it has had a growing economy for centuries.

In conclusion, resilient economy of China has been influential for many centuries, and still plays a vital role in the world. From creation of porcelain teapots to technological gadgets, its presence is felt all over.

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