The US – China Trade: Capitalism, Consumption and Consumer Identity

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I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Claire P. Dappert
For my Grandmother,
Eileen Coultas
Since the fifteenth century the rise of capitalism and the expansion of global trade networks have ensured that a wide range of consumer goods has become available to people from all walks of life. Paralleling these developments, our attitudes and beliefs about consumer goods have also changed: goods that were once considered luxuries have become commonplace in domestic households. This study celebrates the diversity of this material culture and the variety of symbolic meanings people attach to it. The US – China trade, as a facet of the Spice Trade, is inextricably linked to the development of capitalism and long-distance shipping that ensured the movement of consumer goods to markets around the world. Inevitably, many of these ships sank and archaeologically their cargoes and the artifacts associated with their crew provide an opportunity to glimpse the development of our modern world. This thesis uses the shipwreck *Frolic* (1850) as a case study to discuss how those involved in, and those who were supplied through, this trade used a range of consumer goods to construct distinct identities for themselves and those around them. This study also draws on a wide variety of source material, including material culture (museum collections and archaeological assemblages), images and documentary sources (courtesy literature and newspapers) to paint a broader picture of the US – China trade and consumer society than any one source is capable of doing itself. This study ultimately argues that the range in consumer goods associated with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US – China trade is symptomatic of the increasing complexity of consumer markets able to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a wide array of consumer identities, necessary under the many new social, economic and ideological relationships constructed under capitalism.
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# Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i  
Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Contents .......................................................................................................................................... iv  
Figures ............................................................................................................................................ vii  
Tables .............................................................................................................................................. xii  
Abbreviations .................................................................................................................................. xiii  

## 1 Introduction................................................................................................................................. 1  
  
  Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 2  
  Background – The US – China Trade .......................................................................................... 5  
  Organisation of the Thesis ............................................................................................................ 10  

## 2 Historical and Maritime Archaeology: Two Sides of the Same Spectrum ................. 14  
  
  Historical Archaeology ................................................................................................................. 15  
  Maritime Archaeology .................................................................................................................... 22  
  Linking Historical and Maritime Archaeology through the Consumption of Material Culture ........................................................................................................................................... 29  
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 36  

## 3 Capitalism, Consumption and Consumer Identity ................................................................. 38  
  
  Capitalism ....................................................................................................................................... 38  
  Consumption .................................................................................................................................... 48  
  Consumer Identity ............................................................................................................................ 53  
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 58  

## 4 Material Culture and Documentary Sources: An Inductive Approach to Research ........ 60  
  
  Material Culture .............................................................................................................................. 60  
  Museum Collections ....................................................................................................................... 61  
  Artifact Assemblages ......................................................................................................................... 63
5 Situating the American-China Trade within the *Longue Durée* of the Spice Trade......................................................... 92

- Trade with the Far East before 1500 ........................................ 92
- Portugal: A Race for God and Wealth........................................ 93
- The Dutch and the Capitalistic Spirit........................................ 96
- The British Empire in the Far East........................................... 99
- The US – China Trade .......................................................... 103
  - Commodities to China......................................................... 107
  - Commodities from China to the US........................................ 116
  - Changing Dimensions of the US – China Trade ....................... 126
- Conclusion ............................................................................... 127

6 Case Study: The US – China Trader *Frolic* ........................................ 129

- Gold Rush San Francisco.......................................................... 129
- Trade Between San Francisco and China ....................................... 138
- Augustine Heard & Company and the Shipwreck *Frolic*............ 141
- Salvaging Activities and Previous Archaeological Work on *Frolic* ................................................................. 144
- Conclusion ............................................................................... 147

7 Material Culture Associated with *Frolic*’s Cargo ............................... 148

- Alcohol .................................................................................... 149
- Camphor Trunks, Furniture and Lacquered Ware ......................... 152
- Chinese Porcelain ..................................................................... 158
  - Major Chinese Porcelain Decorative Styles ............................ 160
  - Minor Chinese Porcelain Decorative Styles ............................ 165
- Silk and Grass Cloth .................................................................. 172
Figures

Figure 1. Map showing location of Canton, San Francisco and the location of the *Frolic* shipwreck (Illustrated by Carol Dappert 2008). ........................................ 9

Figure 2. Photographs of a Chinese porcelain sided platter decorated in the Canton style [left] and three Chinese porcelain plates decorated in the Nanking style [right], all of which were recovered from the *Ontario* shipwreck (reproduced from Brown and Thammapreechakorn 2005:4). ................. 33

Figure 3. Satirical illustration of a man standing in front of a fireplace with his hands down the back side of his pants (McLean 1850). ........................................ 85

Figure 4. Satirical illustration of a man picking his teeth with a fork at the dinner table (McLean 1850). ................................................................. 86

Figure 5. Satirical illustration of a man reading a newspaper in a tavern while others wait for him to finish (McLean 1850). ........................................ 88

Figure 6. Interior of a porcelain shop, one of a set of thirteen in the making of porcelain, (circa 1820-1830) gouache on paper by an unknown artist (from the Peabody Essex Museum; reproduced from Crossman 1991:178). ................................................................. 119

Figure 7. Liverpool type Staffordshire creamware pitcher adorned with a stylised seal of the US (left) and a poem concerning a customs dispute over tea duties that occurred after Ontario’s 1797 trip to Canton (right) (from a private collection; reproduced from Miller 1968:115-116). ...................... 122

Figure 8. Photograph of Blue China Wreck site showing stacks of intact Chinese porcelain, black glass bottles and English-produced ceramics (reproduced from Odyssey Marine Explorations 2009). .......................... 125

Figure 9. Photograph of three blue shell-edged sided platters recovered from the Blue China Wreck (reproduced from Odyssey Marine Explorations 2009). ................................................................. 125

Figure 10. Photograph of Ginger jars decorated in the Canton pattern recovered from the Blue China Wreck (reproduced from Odyssey Marine Explorations 2009). ................................................................. 125

Figure 11. Photograph of Chinese porcelain milk jug and sugar bowl decorated with a polychrome floral motif recovered from the Blue China Wreck (reproduced from Odyssey Marine Explorations 2009). .................................................. 126

Figure 12. *View of San Francisco [California] formerly Yerba Buena in 1846-47* (circa 1847) lithograph by Captain William F. Swasey (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American
Figure 13. San Francisco [California], 1849 (1849) lithograph by Henry Firks (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) ................................................................. 131

Figure 14. City of San Francisco [California] (1850) engraving by J. Clark (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) ........................................................................... 132

Figure 15. High and Dry (1855) lithograph by Francis Samuel Marryat (from the collection of Chinese in California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) .................................................................................. 133

Figure 16. View of San Francisco [California]: Taken from the Western Hill at the Foot of Telegraph Hill, Looking toward Rincon Point and Mission Valley (circa 1851) lithograph by Henry Bainbridge (from the collection of Chinese in California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) ........................................................................... 134

Figure 17. Miner’s Cabin, Result of the Day (circa 1852) lithograph by A. Wenderoth (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) .................................................................................. 135

Figure 18. Long Wharf, San Francisco, California (circa 1850) wood engraving by an unknown artist. Hoff’s store is the building on the far left with the American flag flying on its roof (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley). ................................................................. 136

Figure 19. San Francisco, East from Kearny and Clay Streets, with Masts of Sailing Ships in the Harbor (circa 1851) daguerreotype photograph by unknown photographer (from the collection of Cased Photographs and Related Images from the Bancroft Library Pictorial Collections, University of California, Berkeley) ................................................................. 138

Figure 20. The Winter of 1849 (1855) lithograph by Francis Samuel Marryat (from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley) .................................................................................. 139

Figure 21. Edinburgh ale bottle base (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.092; courtesy PAST Foundation) .................................................................................................................. 151

Figure 22. Edinburgh ale bottleneck with cork (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.357; courtesy PAST Foundation) .................................................................................................................. 151

Figure 23. Camphor Trunks (from a private collection; reproduced from Crossman 1991:245). .................................................................................................................. 154
Figure 24. Brass bail (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.427; courtesy PAST Foundation). .......................................................... 154

Figure 25. Chinese furniture maker’s shop, (circa 1820) gouache on paper by an unknown artists (from the collection of Benjamin Ginsberg; reproduced from Crossman 1991:241)................................................................. 156

Figure 26. Chinese lacquered ware shop, (circa 1840) watercolour on paper by an unknown artist (from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Osgood, reproduced from Crossman 1991:265). ................................................................. 156

Figure 27. Drawer Fragment with ring pull still attached (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.07.005; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 158

Figure 28. Fragment of campaign desk with back plate of handle assembly still attached (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.340; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................................................ 158

Figure 29. Major Chinese porcelain decorative type: Bamboo (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.03.016 [left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.16.056 [right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). ................................................................. 160

Figure 30. Major Chinese porcelain decorative type: Fu (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.06.024 [left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.20041.015 [right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................................................ 162

Figure 31. Major Chinese porcelain decorative type: Peach & Fungus (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.03.013 [left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.03.010 [right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................................................ 163

Figure 32. Major Chinese porcelain decorative type: Rocks & Orchid (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.09.001 [left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.10.123 [right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................................................ 164

Figure 33. Major Chinese porcelain decorative type: Snail (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.05.722 [left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.10.004 [right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................................................ 165

Figure 34. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Anchor (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.13.036; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 167

Figure 35. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Bird (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.051; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 167

Figure 36. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Dragon (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.27.004; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 167

Figure 37. Minor decorative type: Canton (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.10.127a; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................ 169

Figure 38. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Ginger Jar (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.24.001; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 169

Figure 39. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Carp (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.058; courtesy PAST Foundation). ......................... 170
Figure 40. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: Catfish (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.054; courtesy PAST Foundation). .......................... 170

Figure 41. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type Waves (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.10.147; courtesy PAST Foundation). .......................... 171

Figure 42. Minor Chinese porcelain decorative type: polychrome (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.10.130; courtesy PAST Foundation). .......................... 172

Figure 43. *Tinqua*, (circa 1855) gouache on paper by Tinqua (from a private collection; reproduced from Crossman 1991:186). ........................................ 177

Figure 44. Oyster shell window fragment from the prefabricated house (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.09.031; courtesy PAST Foundation). ............ 178

Figure 45. Ivory knife handle split in half with central drilled core (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.766; courtesy PAST Foundation). .................. 183

Figure 46. Purse Frame (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.16.102; courtesy PAST Foundation). .............................................................................. 183

Figure 47. Shoe vamp (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.532; courtesy PAST Foundation). .............................................................................. 185

Figure 48. Acorn finial brass hook from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.07.045; courtesy PAST Foundation). ..................... 186

Figure 49. Lead-glazed redware and linear slip redware from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.05.20041.003 [right] and CA.MEN.1947.H.03.063 [left]; courtesy PAST Foundation).................. 192

Figure 50. Rockingham-type yellowware serving/food preparation vessel from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.07.004 [top left], CA.MEN.1947.H.05.33 [top right], CA.MEN.1947.H.07.003 [bottom left] and CA.MEN.1947.H.05.335 [bottom right]; courtesy PAST Foundation). .................................................. 192

Figure 51. Ironstone pitcher or ewer decorated in a light blue variation of Rhine from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.067; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................... 194

Figure 52. Unidentified whiteware holloware decorated in a blue transfer floral pattern from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.128; courtesy PAST Foundation). ........................................... 194

Figure 54. French porcelain plate fragment from the *Frolic* shipwreck (artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.356; courtesy PAST Foundation)......... 198

Figure 55. Utilitarian stoneware vessel fragments from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Numbers CA.MEN.1947.H.16.046 [right], CA.MEN.1947.H.07.001 [centre] CA.MEN.1947.H.05.222 [left]; courtesy PAST Foundation).......................................................... 198

Figure 56. Flat bottle base fragment (Artifact number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.238; courtesy PAST Foundation).......................................................... 200

Figure 57. Cruet bottle from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.05.394; courtesy PAST Foundation). ..................... 200

Figure 58. Detail of spoon with maker’s mark “PMFa” from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.07.092; courtesy PAST Foundation). 202

Figure 59. Pewter plate from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.16.032; courtesy PAST Foundation). ..................... 202

Figure 60. Buckle fragment from the *Frolic* shipwreck (Artifact Number CA.MEN.1947.H.03.152; courtesy PAST Foundation). ..................... 203

Figure 61. Illustration of a carriage dress fashionable for summer 1850. Note the parasol that the lady is holding (*Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, July 1850:287*). ........................................................................................................ 218

Figure 62. Lady walking through a church yard holding a parasol (*Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion, 1848:82*). 219

Figure 63. Illustration of a promenade dress fashionable for late summer 1850. Note the fan held in the lady’s hand (*Harper’s New Monthly Magazine August 1850:431*). ........................................................................................................ 221

Figure 64. A lady holding a silk fan. Note the tea set in the background (*Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion 1848:78*). 222

Figure 65. Celestial Empire in California: Miners/Gamblers (c.1850s) lithograph by Britton & Rey (from the collection of Chinese in California, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).......................... 232
Tables

Table 1. Sales of Ship *Pearl’s* Cargo at Boston, 1810 (Morison 1979:71). .......... 7
Table 2. The Artifact Class fields in the *Frolic* artifact database......................... 66
Table 3. List of the Material Composition fields in the *Frolic* artifact database... 66
Table 4. List of Material Culture Code fields in the *Frolic* artifact database....... 67
Table 7. Furniture hardware from the *Frolic* shipwreck by artifact count, MNA and percentage of MNA................................................................. 152
Table 8. *Frolic*’s Chinese porcelain major and minor decorative types, form, MNV and percentage of MNV................................................................. 159
Table 9. Hooks recovered from the *Frolic* shipwreck by type, number, MNA and percentage of MNA................................................................. 187
Table 10. Ceramics associated with *Frolic*’s crew by ware, type of ware, decoration, pattern of decoration, MNV and percentage of MNV....... 189
Table 11. Ceramics associated with *Frolic*’s crew by form and ware type....... 190
Table 12. Medicinal related artifacts by count, MNA and Percentage of MNA... 206
Table 13. Tools and instruments by count, MNA and Percentage of MNA. ....... 208
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>English East India Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRA</td>
<td>Historical Records of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNA</td>
<td>Minimum Number of Artifacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNV</td>
<td>Minimum Number of Vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TORR</td>
<td>Tubin Oceanic Research and Recovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOC</td>
<td><em>Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WAMM</td>
<td>Western Australian Maritime Museum</td>
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