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Introduction

The aim of this study is to discuss consumer goods associated with the US – China trade as an illustrative facet of the larger global processes of capitalism and consumption. Capitalism is an economic, social and ideological system that expanded to a global scale after the fifteenth century when Spain and Portugal began building their global empires in search of a trade route to the Far East, and has continued in various forms until the present day (Dellino-Musgrave 2006:73; Leone 1999:5; Staniforth 1999:58). Consumption, on the other hand, is in the broadest sense the processes by which commodities are produced, acquired, used, and discarded (McCracken 1988). Commodities have been defined as portable trade goods and the types of commodities available to Westernised consumer societies at large have increased dramatically since the rise of capitalism and consumption (Braudel 1977:15; Kopytoff 1989:68; Orser 1996:112). Daniel Miller (1995b:280) asserts, “One of the main challenges to a focus on mass consumption as ‘Westernisation’ has been to note the relative neglect of the historical importance of areas such as India and China, which dominated Old World trade and production for much of recorded history”. This study intends to fill this gap, arguing 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.

One basic theoretical premise of this study is that material culture is meaningfully constituted and that this meaning is temporarily and spatially dependent. In other words, material culture is symbolic of attitudes, lifestyles and beliefs, and these meanings can change not only over time, but also depending on who uses them and where they are used. For instance, the Spice Trade has traditionally been considered as dealing in luxury products for rich, elite citizens (Toussaint-Samat 1992:448), and

certainly this seems to be the case during fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One contention of this thesis is that by at least the mid-nineteenth century, the US – China trade, and by extension the capitalist system, provided a range of consumer goods that were both high and low quality, as well as goods targeting a range of socio-economic groups. For example, Chinese porcelain was considered a luxury good in Western society at the advent of the Spice Trade. However, as this thesis will discuss, by the middle of the nineteenth century there was such a range of Chinese porcelain being imported into Western markets like those in North America that although some were still considered to be a luxury, others were common utilitarian ceramics, affordable even to those of meagre means. Thus, in a capitalist system bent on increasing its global capacity to produce consumer goods, what was considered a luxury at one time and in one society was often considered a necessity 100 years later (Weatherill 1996; Csikszentmihalyi 1993)

The wide range of goods available through the US – China trade was symptomatic of broader changes identified with what Neil McKendrick (1982) has dubbed the “consumer revolution.” The consumer revolution resulted in a larger supply and availability of consumer goods, the result being that many social groups were no longer merely supplied necessities by the market. Instead consumers began to have a choice amongst non-essential goods. Since a large variety of these goods became available through the market this made it possible for distinct identities to be established and maintained through the consumption of a distinct constellation of goods. In other words, what consumers chose to buy reinforced their identity, both to themselves and to others (Casella and Fowler 2005; Cochran and Beaudry 2006; Gibb 1996; Insoll 2007; Meskell and Preucel 2007; Mullins 2007). Consumer choice and consumer identity to a large extent depend on the symbolic value and meaning of goods.

Research Questions

In light of the relative abundance and variety of consumer goods supplied made available to those involved with and benefiting from the America – China trade, this study is fundamentally concerned with the consumption of material goods and the construction of consumer identity. It is specifically concerned with questions regarding how attitudes towards material culture have changed and how material culture is used to negotiate different consumer identities. The primary questions that

this thesis considers to guide research are: firstly, what relationship can be seen between material culture and consumer identity?; secondly, what role did the media play in the relationship between material culture and consumer identity?; and thirdly, what does material culture associated with the America - China trade reveal about the complexity of capitalism and consumption during the mid-nineteenth century?

In exploring these primary questions, a range of specific, subsidiary questions also need to be addressed: how did these consumer goods range in type, quality and quantity?; what was material culture's role in establishing and maintaining social structures in consumer society?; how closely does the material culture recovered archaeologically mirror the tastes and etiquettes of the time?; and how does material culture reflect the consumer identity of different social groups? Some of the answers to these questions will be found by examining the wide spectrum of material culture and documentary sources concerning the US – China trade and American consumer society at large, including museum collections, artifact assemblages, images, newspapers and courtesy literature.

Beyond this, this study attempts to take a broader and more inclusive view of the US – China trade, with the intent of bringing into focus wider themes such as consumer identity that can be overlooked by narrower approaches. In doing so, this thesis finds it necessary to incorporate a wide variety of sources, 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 than any one source is capable of doing by itself (see Chapter 4).

Although this study draws upon a variety of material culture from historical and maritime archaeology, a major portion of the archaeological data used in this thesis derives from the only archaeologically investigated US – China trading ship that was wrecked while outbound from Canton: *Frolic* (1850) (see Chapter 6 to Chapter 8). As such, the material culture recovered from the *Frolic* shipwreck could be representative of other cargoes and crews found aboard similarly disposed US – China trading ships of the time. However, its cargo and crew may not necessarily be representative of other trading ventures that took place before or after the *Frolic* was wrecked. At the same time the wrecking of *Frolic* represents just one point along a trajectory of goods produced in China and consumed elsewhere. Due to this limitation, other data will be necessary to establish a more holistic picture of the market forces ships like *Frolic* represent.

The market that *Frolic* was intended to supply can be to a significant extent understood through archaeological evidence recovered from the San Francisco waterfront. For instance, the archaeological material recovered from Hoff's store (Pastron and Hattori 1990) reflects the varied nature of goods that arrived in San Francisco, not only from China, but also from around the world. *Frolic*'s cargo, along with other archaeological assemblages from storeships, such as the *General Harrison* and *Niantic* storeships, all provide clues as to the nature of the US – China trade as part of what Delgado (2006, 2009) refers to as the “world maritime system.”

Another area of focus that lends insight into the role of *Frolic* in the world maritime system is through archaeological assemblages from other shipwrecks, such as *Rapid*, *Ontario* and the Blue China Wreck (see Chapter 5). *Rapid* was wrecked before reaching the port of Canton in 1811 (Henderson 1981, 1983:333-334, 1997:100-105, 2007:64-75), and, though it can provide information about commodities shipped to from the US to China, it is also particularly informative about shipboard life, providing a comparative base to determine whether consumer goods used by *Rapid*'s officers and crew were similar or different to that of other US – China trading ship crews. The other two archaeological assemblages that this thesis discusses were salvaged, which has made most of their collection inaccessible to this study; *Ontario* wrecked in 1799 while outbound from Canton loaded with a cargo of Chinese commodities (TORR 2003), while the Blue China Wreck was likely a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century American coastal schooner sailing interstate with a cargo of Chinese and English – produced ceramics (Odyssey Marine Explorations 2009). Both *Ontario* and the Blue China Wreck provide interesting comparisons between the nature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century US – China trade and the mid-nineteenth century US – China trade. By broadening the data base to include these other shipwrecks, it is possible to trace artifact trajectories, examining “artifacts through all stages of their life history from the sites of production through their subsequent trade, transport, selection, purchase, use and disposal or loss to their excavation from archaeological sites,” thus providing the context to incorporate shipwreck events into broader themes like capitalism and consumption (Staniforth 2003:5).

Background – The US – China Trade

The US – China trade started in 1784, when the first ship, *Empress of China*, commenced American trade at Canton (see Chapter 5), and while we still trade with China today, trade has changed drastically from what it was over two hundred years ago. Although American involvement in the Spice Trade did not start until after the American Revolution, this involvement is representative of the larger global processes of capitalism in that it encompasses the tail end of nearly five hundred years of what is often referred to as the “Old Spice Trade” (see Braudel 1982). According to Toussaint-Samat (1992:482), “Spice became the word for a particularly luxurious and fine substance used in food,” including cinnamon, pepper, ginger, turmeric, cardamom, cloves, nutmeg, mace, chillies, saffron and vanilla (Toussaint-Samat 1992:482). Although one of the main drivers of this trade during the fifteenth century was spices, over time a number of other commodities became just as if not more important than spices (see Chapter 5).

For instance, the Spice Trade was also associated with the arrival of Chinese tea to Europe in 1610 (Toussaint-Samat 1992:597, 763). Chinese tea was considered an “elixir of immortality,” and it quickly became the favourite social drink of all classes of people in the Netherlands and England, a tradition that was also passed on to American colonists (Toussaint-Samat 1992:596-597). Though at first tea drinking was restricted to the upper classes, tea gradually became more of a common commodity. By the late eighteenth century it was a social ritual throughout the middle and lower classes of American society (Beaudry 1984:13; Larkin 1988:174). Drinking tea at home with family and friends was an important social activity associated with domesticity and respectable family life (Wills 1994:142; Weatherill 1994:216).

Tea drinking was also accompanied by elaborate etiquette that required appropriate, and sometimes expensive, equipment (Beaudry 1984:13; Weatherill 1994:216). The introduction of Chinese export porcelain in Western consumer society coincided with the adoption of drinking tea (Beaudry 1984:13). During the late eighteenth century, at the onset of the American trade with China, Chinese porcelain was considered a luxury item and highly desired by the elite, and nearly all Western attempts at ceramic production attempted to emulate Chinese porcelain (Beaudry 1984:14; Martin 1994:173). From the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, the introduction of mass produced refined earthenwares (creamware, pearlware,

ironstone and bone china) in a variety of forms provided an alternative to the more expensive Chinese porcelain, making such goods affordable even to those on lower income levels (Brighton 2001:18). Unlike hand-painted Chinese porcelain, the decorative technique of transfer printing on refined earthenware meant that highly complex designs could be added to ceramics quickly, accurately and with a high rate of reproducibility (Lawrence 2006:367). Except for the highest quality services, English produced ceramics eventually replaced Chinese porcelain in popularity during the nineteenth century, particular during the latter half when it peaked in popularity (Lawrence 2006:367).

In order to obtain the quantity of goods required by the markets, however, the US – China trade required suitable commodities to exchange in return. One overriding theme plagued nearly all who attempted to trade at Canton: Western people had very few commodities that the Chinese desired. As such, many had to depart with valuable gold and silver specie in order to pay for a full cargo of Chinese commodities. This also resulted in the development of a number of ancillary trades, including the fur trade (Albion et al. 1994:57; Downs 1941a:92; Dulles 1938:11; Gough 1989:216; Youngman 1908:350), sandalwood trade (Shineberg 1967), and opium trade (Layton 1997, 2002). In this way, the Chinese markets provided a backdrop for many American voyages to the Pacific Ocean and its landmasses because many captains sailed on prospect searching for a commodity, such as seal and otter skins, sandalwood, and opium, to exchange for Chinese consumer goods.

According to Staniforth (2006:17), “One of the common claims by some historians is that trade has been well documented during recent centuries – that written records of shipping movements and detailed cargo lists are both available and comprehensive.” For instance, Samuel Eliot Morison (1979:71) lists commodities sold from the cargo of the US – China trading ship *Pearl* at Boston in 1810, as shown in Table 1. He believes that the return cargo of *Pearl* was “typical of that trade and period” (Morison 1979:71). Staniforth (2006:17) indicates, however, that “although the available documentary sources are sometimes extensive, they are frequently not comprehensive and they often lack the detail necessary in order to draw supportable conclusions about past societies.” In this way, for instance, we know that *Pearl*'s cargo consisted of 50 sets of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain dining sets, each consisting of 172 pieces each. However, *Pearl*'s manifest does not provide any information about the form or decorative types contained in these sets, which in turn tells us about their quality (see Chapter 5).

Table 1. Sales of Ship *Pearl's* Cargo at Boston, 1810 (Morison 1979:71).

| Amount | Cargo Type | Price |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 50 | blue and white dining sets, 172 pieces each | \$2 290.00 |
| 480 | tea sets, 49 pieces each | 2 704.80 |
| 30 | boxes enamelled cups and saucers, 50 dozen each | 1 360.00 |
| 100 | boxes Superior Souchong tea | 795.87 |
| 100 | chests Souchong | 3 834.66 |
| 235 | “ Hyson | 13 290.65 |
| 160 | “ Hyson skin | 5 577.40 |
| 400 | “ other teas | 13 668.44 |
| 200 | chests of Cassia of 2208 “matts each [”?”] | 8 585.52 |
| 170 000 | pieces ‘Nankins’ | 118 850.00 |
| 14 000 | “ (280 bales) blue do. | 24 195.00 |
| 5000 | “ (50 “) yellow do. | 6 800.00 |
| 2000 | “ (50 “) white do | 2 580.00 |
| 24 | bottles oil of Cassia | 466.65 |
| 92 | cases silks (black ‘sinchaws,’ black ‘sattins,’ white and blue striped do. Dark brown plains, bottle-green and black striped ‘sattins for Gentlemens ware’ | 56 344.61 |
| And sundries, bring the total to | | 261 343.18 |

Studies about the American trade with China have traditionally emphasised socio-political or economic standpoints, and although these studies do discuss commodities, such as tea, silks and porcelain (e.g. Downs 1941a, 1941b; Dudden 1992; Dunbabin 1950; Gibson 1999; Hao 1986a, 1986b; Hawes 1990; Latourette 1927; May and Fairbank 1986; Morison 1979:64-78; Paine 1912; Reinoehl 1959; Dyke 2005; Wace and Lovett 1973; Youngman 1908), they provide little detail about the type and quality of these and other goods that also formed part of this trade. Other studies about the US – China trade include material culture studies published by art historians, but these have their own inherent biases, tending to approach the past from a decorative arts perspective, focusing on unique, fancy or elite objects instead of the common and everyday (see Chapter 4) (Deetz and Scott 1995:117-118). The most common of these sorts of material culture studies concern Chinese export porcelain (e.g. Boulay 1963; Esten 1987; Feller 1982; Guy 1980; Howard and Ayers 1978; Little 1992; Mudge 1962, 1986; Palmer 1976; Petersen 1985; Phillips 1956; Rawson 1982; Schiffer et al. 1975; Vainker 1991). One of the few publications about Chinese export porcelain that has been based on archaeological data is *Chinese*

Export Porcelain from the Wreck of the Sydney Cove (1797) by Mark Staniforth and Mike Nash (1998). Other material culture studies, such as *The China Trade: Export Paintings, Furniture, Silver & Other Objects* (Crossman 1972) and *The China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (Crossman 1991), examine a variety of Chinese export items, including porcelain, furniture, lacquered ware, paintings, sculpture and textiles. Again, however, many of these studies are based on pieces in private collections and museums, incorporating little, if any, archaeological evidence, and as such they carrying their own inherent biases (see Chapter 4).

When the California Gold Rush got underway in 1848, American merchants in Canton were well situated to provide Gold Rush settlers with suitable consumer goods. San Francisco was a burgeoning port city, growing from a small rural outpost to become the American entrepôt of the Pacific coast within a few years (Beiber 1948:3; Delgado 2006). Because of its geographical location and frontier nature, California was almost entirely dependent on supplies from outside the region (Pastron 1990b:13; Delgado 1990:25). It was in this city that miners arrived in California and they procured supplies before trekking to the gold fields of the Sierra foothills (Delgado 1990:28). Rather than obtaining goods from the east coast of America around Cape Horn, American merchants could quickly ship consumer goods across the Pacific Ocean to the San Francisco markets (see Figure 1) (Mudge 1986:190-191). One such enterprise was Augustine Heard & Company, a Boston-based trading house established in Canton in 1840 and the owners of the ship *Frolic* (Layton 1997:29). The Heards decided to send *Frolic* loaded with a cargo of Chinese produced commodities suitable for the San Francisco markets. *Frolic* was wrecked on 26 July 1850 along the Mendocino Coast of California while inbound from Canton to San Francisco (Jones 1992; Layton 1997, 2002; Smith 2006).

The history surrounding *Frolic* and its owners, Augustine Heard & Company, has been well documented by Thomas Layton in *Voyage of the Frolic* (Layton 1997) and *Gifts from the Celestial Kingdom* (Layton 2002). In particular, Layton's research is mostly based on a large collection of records entrusted by Augustine Heard & Co. to the Baker Library at Harvard University. Another brief historical account of *Frolic* is presented in Patricia Hagan Jones' Masters thesis (1992) and Sheli Smith's *Frolic Archaeological Survey* (2006). Jones (1992) conducted a study of the blue-and-white Chinese export porcelain found on the shipwreck, while Smith (2006) focused on historical evidence specifically relating to *Frolic* during the six years prior to its

wrecking. She uses this information to piece together a picture of the ship at its time of wrecking and to compare this picture to what was discovered on the shipwreck.

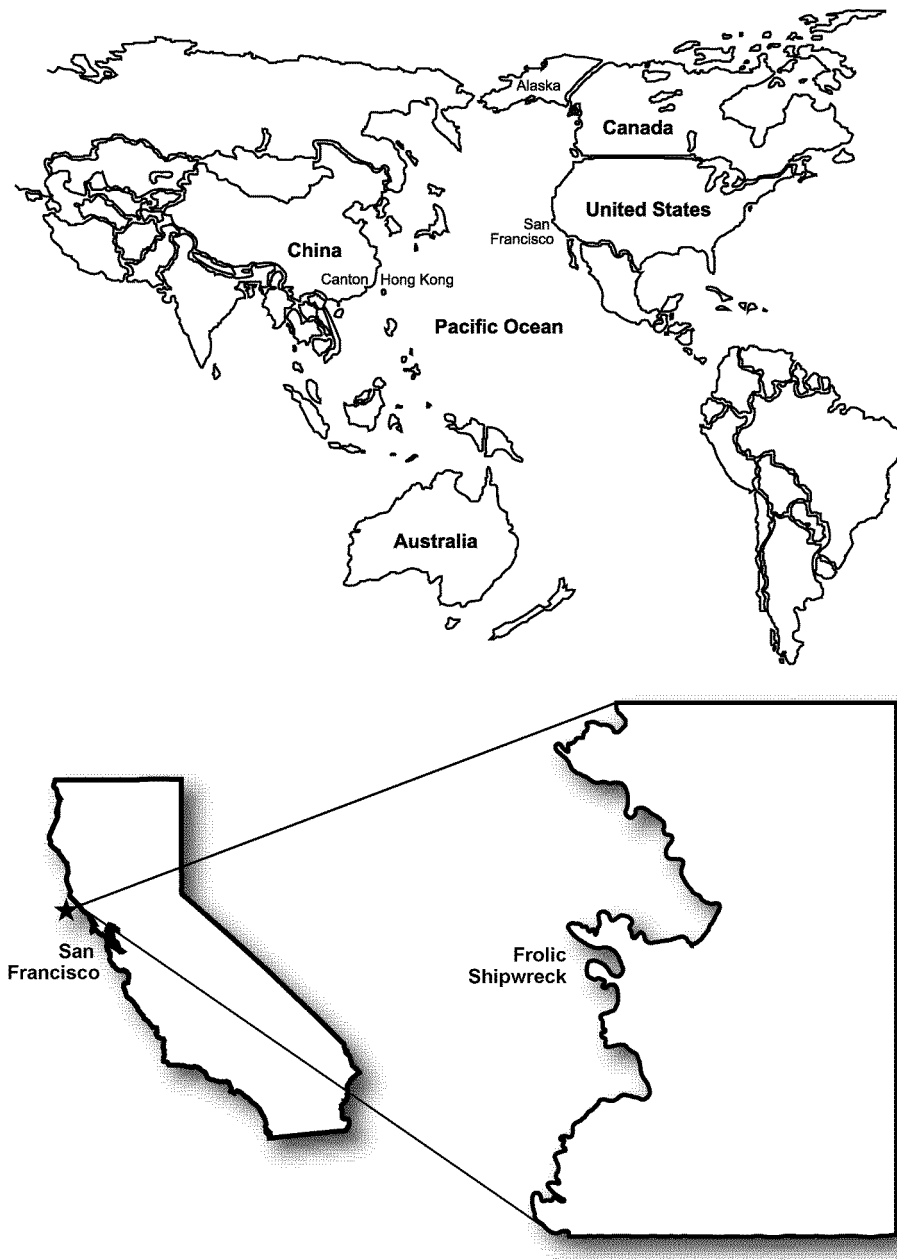


Figure 1. Map showing location of Canton, San Francisco and the location of the *Frolic* shipwreck (Illustrated by Carol Dappert 2008).

Thus, it is apparent that the historical context around the Heards and the *Frolic*, as an artifact *per se*, has been well documented, as has its cargo of blue-and-white porcelain. Because of the extensive prior research, only a brief recapitulation is

presented on these topics here. What has not been undertaken, however, is an analysis of the entire cargo, including salvaged and excavated items, and the material culture associated with day-to-day shipboard activities in terms of wider global processes like capitalism and consumption. This study attempts to narrow this gap by analysing material culture associated with the US – China trade and using the material culture from the shipwreck *Frolic* as a case study to discuss how these material goods are symptomatic of the increasing complexity of consumer markets capable of facilitating the establishment and maintenance of a wide array of consumer identities.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter 2 builds on definitions of historical and maritime archaeology and presents a few of their seminal theoretical developments over the past few decades. Then, it shows how shipwreck cargoes – as representative of material culture, one of the primary links between historical and maritime archaeology – can contribute to our knowledge of the recent past. Both historical archaeology and maritime archaeology deal with the modern world, and as such are particularly suited to address the four haunts of archaeology (global colonialism, Eurocentrism, capitalism, and modernity) in light of small-scale interpretations. It is material culture that links historical and maritime archaeology in that if shipwreck cargoes are considered as a single step along a wider trajectory of use, then maritime archaeology serves to fill a ‘missing link’ between the historical archaeological approaches to these artifacts at their point of production and at their point of consumption. Thus, artifacts recovered from shipwreck sites, when considered in conjunction with other shipwrecks and the insights provided through historical archaeology, are more easily situated within a context of longer time scales and larger global processes, which in turn make more apparent the fluidity of symbolic meaning in time and space

Next, Chapter 3 addresses how we can look at capitalism as a *longue durée* through the lens of the Spice Trade. It also discusses how capitalism is associated with an increasingly labour-oriented society with complex artifices of social stratification. It then discusses two broad strategies for considering capitalism as an ideological system: one in which ideology is seen as ‘legitimising,’ where upper class dominance was considered natural (Leone 1984), and another which colours one’s subjective view of reality, obfuscating existing inequalities of wealth, power and

exploitation (Leone 2005). Chapter 3 also discusses how consumption has increased dramatically with the increasing complexity of capitalism and how our attitudes about consumer goods have similarly changed over time. Consumption is part of how people define themselves and their identities from the clothes they wear to the furnishings in their homes (Meskell and Preucel 2007:14), and our incessant desire for new and novel things, in conjunction with the mass media, has only perpetuated and accelerated the consumption cycle (Campbell 1987, 1997; McKendrick 1982; Leone 2005).

Chapter 4 presents the methodology involved in conducting this research. It discusses the benefits of using a range of source material, including material culture (museum collections and artifact assemblages, images and documentary sources (courtesy literature and newspapers), as well as the biases, limitations and unavailability of each type. Though each type of source presents particular benefits to the study of the past, all three types also present their own biases and limitations. Chapter 4 also discusses the main data set drawn upon in this thesis – the *Frolic* artifact database – and some of the methodological approaches used in interpreting this collection. In drawing upon such a range of sources, and recognising their pros and cons, this study attempts to take a wider and more inclusive view of the America – China trade in a way that offers more insight than each resource would by itself.

Chapter 5 focuses on the development of global expansion, with Spain and Portugal at the forefront, followed by the Dutch and English, amongst others. Global expansion after the fifteenth century became possible only after the means, viable, ocean-going vessels, and the motive, acquisitiveness and religious zeal, developed. Portugal established the first oceanic trading route to the Far East during the fifteenth century, but by sixteenth century they could not compete with the financial savvy of Dutch *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) merchants. The Dutch, remained the hegemonic power in the Far East until the end of the seventeenth century, when English East India Company (EIC) rose to hegemonic power in the Far East, remaining the Far Eastern power until the nineteenth century. Prior to this, American traders had already initiated trade at Canton, though never on such a scale as any of the past hegemonic powers. This chapter takes an intimate look at the US – China trade and the many ancillary trades that developed around it from the time of the American Revolution until the American Civil War. After the Civil War, though, the dimensions of this trade changed, and thus the American – China, and by extension the Spice trade, was never the same as it had been during its formative years.

Chapter 6 discusses the unique event that was the California Gold Rush, as well as some of the archaeological work that has contributed to our understanding of the scope and breadth of the different types of commodities available in the San Francisco market. The social and economic turmoil of the time and place meant that material culture's role in establishing, maintaining and negotiating social identity was particularly essential to the people of San Francisco. The breadth and sophistication of San Franciscan society and its maritime trade are today well represented by the archaeological remains of the San Francisco waterfront, such as that found in Hoff's store (Pastron and Hattori 1990), as well as the archaeological assemblages of the storeships *General Harrison* and *Niantic*. (Delgado 2006, 2009). These deposits also reflect how American traders in Canton, including Augustine Heard & Company, seized upon the economic opportunities engendered by the growth of San Francisco and the need for suitable material goods. It was in this context that the Heard's sent *Frolic* and its crew to San Francisco with a 135-ton cargo of Chinese export goods intended for the consumer markets, a cargo that would instead be wrecked a mere sixty miles north of the city. Previous archaeological work on the shipwreck *Frolic* is also discussed in this chapter, establishing what has already been done, as well as elaborating on the gap that this study intends to fill. Through the diligence of Layton (1997, 2002), Jones (1992) and Smith (2006), the remains of the shipwreck have been archaeologically investigated, allowing this and future studies to benefit from its use in understanding the past.

Utilising Layton (1997, 2002), Jones (1992) and Smith (2006) as departure points, as well as historical evidence from *Frolic*'s sister ship *Eveline*, Chapter 7 addresses the type, quantity and quality of the cargo found on the *Frolic* shipwreck, as well as the type of packaging in which the cargo was contained. This chapter uses *Frolic*'s manifest as an organisational tool to shed further light upon how shipping records and invoices lack detail as to type, quantity and quality. The consumer goods *Frolic* carried were especially significant in that their range of type and quality was previously unseen in the US – China trade. The scope and breadth of *Frolic*'s cargo lays a foundation to discuss the material culture in light of the context of Gold Rush San Francisco in Chapter 9, as well as a further analysis of capitalism and consumerism in terms of the range of consumer goods available in the American consumer market at this time and how these goods facilitated the establishment and maintenance of distinct identities.

Chapter 8 presents the artifacts associated with the crew of the *Frolic*, organised according to functional categories: consumption of food and drink, clothing and

personal belongings, medicinal items and tools and instruments. This organisation provides a clearer picture of different types of shipboard activities, as well as of daily life. *Frolic*'s crew used a wide variety of consumer goods, both as part of daily shipboard life and for the successful operation of the ship. These artifacts are discussed in terms of consumer choice, illustrative of the availability of similar types of items to consumers in many places, and antagonistic relationships aboard a ship.

Chapter 9 discusses the material culture associated with the cargo and crew in light of the thesis statement and research questions. It explores how everyday social interaction undoubtedly played a role in influencing the tastes and consumer identity of their readers and the general public, and how the portrayals of taste in mass media played a corresponding and equally essential role. I argue that the media both influenced and mirrored tastes and consumer identity. It also informed the population as to 'proper' mechanisms through which to exercise and establish a particular consumer identity. In doing so, the media enabled and sustained ever-greater complexity in the market, along with enduring feelings of incompleteness and the desire for self-improvement in the individual. Chapter 9 also discusses how consumption is approximated through what individuals choose to consume, and through choosing what to consume people construct an identity. This is because consumer goods serve as mechanisms through which people practice different ways of seeing, walking, reading, talking, eating and behaving. It is these mechanisms that are observable archaeologically as material culture, and through which this study is able to explore the relationship between consumption and consumer identity, thereby relating the consumer market and the ever-broadening range of consumption practices to the development of capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century.