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Conclusion

This study has argued 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. These markets were 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 (see Chapter 1). It is only through studying changing patterns in consumption that we can study changes in capitalism, and vice versa. This study has also explored how consumption is approximated through consumer identity. People use consumer goods as mechanisms through practicing technologies of self, or different ways of seeing, walking, reading, talking, eating and behaving. These activities are closely linked to issues of status, class and respectability and are all components of an individual's identity. These particular ways of doing are influenced by everyday social interaction, as well as tastes and their portrayal in the mass media. As the media influences tastes, it also mirrors, mutually reinforcing a cycle that perpetuates particular consumer identities themselves. In doing so, the media enables and sustains ever-greater complexity in markets.

In making this argument, this study proposed that when considering consumption, historical and maritime archaeological evidence represent two sides of the same spectrum; shipwreck cargoes are evidence of trade and transport, while household sites provide an avenue to interpret how shipwreck cargoes were recontextualised in consumer society. By following this trajectory we can combine historical and maritime archaeological evidence, linking production and consumption through archaeological sites, thus providing a more inclusive view of the development of capitalism and consumption than either field can achieve alone. Again, 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 system 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 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 meanings.

By following artifact trajectories we can see how the meaning of material culture can change with time and space. Ship cargoes represent individual choices of merchants based on their perception of what was in demand or fashionable. Ship cargoes are not necessarily visible in consumer society because consumer goods become more dispersed in space as they progress along a trajectory from the point of production and initial acquisition to the point where they are consumed. However, it is only by following these goods along this trajectory that we can interpret how they were used in consumer society and their symbolic meanings. Thus, it is important to consider the society for which a ship is bound and, as such, to combine maritime and historical archaeological evidence to see how the meaning of small things at the local and regional level can provide new insights about larger processes like capitalism and consumerism at the global level.

This thesis has employed three broad types of historical sources: material culture (museum collections and artifact assemblages), images and documentary sources (etiquette books, newspapers and magazines) in order to study capitalism and consumption. Though each type of source presents particular benefits to the study of the past, all three types also present their own biases and limitations. Although museum displays are easily accessible to the general public, they present a bias towards elite worldviews and formal activity. Artifact assemblages, on the other hand, are representative of people of all walks of life. At the same time, however, material culture must be placed in a broader context, and images and documentary sources are often used to do this. By employing such a diversity of sources, this study has attempted to take an more inclusive view of the US - China trade in a way that offers more insight than each would on its own.

As a developing economic system, Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 discussed how capitalism can be studied through the Spice Trade. Global expansion after the fifteenth century became possible only after a merger between northern European and Mediterranean shipbuilding techniques, and was pursued by the Spanish and Portuguese with acquisitiveness and religious zeal. While Spain became preoccupied

with establishing an empire in the New World, Portugal focused its efforts on circumnavigating Africa, establishing a trading route to the Far East and setting up trading forts along the way. Eventually, the Portuguese thalassocracy could not compete with the financial expertise of Dutch merchants, who under the guise of the VOC, challenged the Portuguese for hegemony in the Far Eastern trade. The VOC, replete with the financial and agro-industrial superiority of the Dutch state and armed with a mercantilist mentality, remained the hegemonic power in the Far East until overseas trade's net cost in bullion drained the Dutch state of sufficient funds to counter the emergence of British sea power at the end of the seventeenth century. The British fiscal-military state, a public-private approach to partnership and trade, was embodied by the EIC, which constituted Britain's commercial presence in the Far East. The British Empire remained the hegemonic power in the Far East until the nineteenth century, when the British state let the EIC company charter expire with its adoption of free trade. Prior to this, traders from the newly founded United States had initiated trade at Canton, though never on such a scale as any of the past hegemonic powers. Similar to the Portuguese, Dutch and English traders, however, American traders at Canton were faced with the problem of having very few commodities that the Chinese desired, and instead had to part with valuable specie to pay for Chinese goods.

The Americans participated in many ancillary trades, including the country trade, fur trade, and sandalwood trade, amongst others, in an attempt to alleviate this problem, though none of these were fruitful enough to completely cover the costs of obtaining a full cargo of commodities for the home market. Despite this, American traders continued to trade at Canton alongside other Portuguese, Dutch and English traders. With the fall of the Canton system in the 1840s, they expanded this trade to include four other Chinese ports. After the mid-nineteenth century the dimensions of this trade changed again, as American investment focused inward and migrations of people moved westward across the United States, and thus the US – China, and by extension the Spice Trade, was never the same as it had been during its formative years.

As a case study, the shipwreck *Frolic* allows for an intimate look at the mid-nineteenth century US – China trade and American consumer society. With the discovery of gold and the subsequent growth of San Francisco as a centre of commerce and culture on the west coast of North America, life in San Francisco was revolutionized, as a wide variety and number of people and goods were shipped to and from the city's harbour and wharfs. The city quickly grew from a small rural

outpost to the major port of the Pacific coast. The social and economic turmoil of the time and place meant that material culture's role in establishing, maintaining and negotiating social identity was an essential part of daily life. The breadth and sophistication of such activities are today well represented by the archaeological remains of the San Francisco waterfront, such as that found in Hoff's store (Delgado 2006; Pastron and Hattori 1990).

Also reflected in the Hoff's store deposit, American traders in Canton like Augustine Heard & Co., grabbed upon the economic opportunities engendered by the growth of San Francisco and the need for suitable consumer goods. As such, *Frolic* set sail with a 135-ton cargo of Chinese produced consumer goods suitable for the San Franciscan consumer market, however, *Frolic* and its cargo were wrecked en route a mere sixty miles north of the city. Through the diligence of Layton (1997, 2002), Jones (1992) and Smith (2006), the remains of the shipwreck have been archaeologically investigated. This study has used this previous work as a foundation to ask further questions about the type, quantity and quality of the goods, as well as its packaging.

The consumer goods *Frolic* carried were especially significant in that their range of type and quality was previously unseen in the US – China trade. *Frolic* represented a symptom of much larger global processes, the likes of which would come to define both the west coast of the United States, as well as modern capitalism and consumption. As seen in the juxtaposition of low quality Chinese porcelain (Fu and Snail) with higher quality Chinese porcelain (Canton and enamelled wares), as well as in the juxtaposition of the low quality paktong cutlery with more valuable silver cutlery, these goods consisted of a range of different types and quality. These consumer goods were packaged in different ways, some in cases and some in packages. A discussion of the packaging revealed that smaller, more uniformly shaped fragile items were typically packaged in cases or boxes. Larger, more unwieldy items, on the other hand, were shipped in packages, likely bound together. Similarly, archaeological evidence suggests that some of *Frolic*'s items were disassembled and packaged with similar components for shipment.

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. Consumer goods associated with the consumption of food and drink aboard *Frolic*, reflect wider trends in American consumer society and changing fashions in ceramics. The refined earthenware in particular is an example of the appearance of a wide variety of ceramics that were both affordable and fashionable to consumer society. The ironstone and whiteware

decorated in the *Chinoiserie* pattern also reflect consumer choice, in that they are the remains of a nearly matching formal dinner service, illustrating the availability of similar patterns and forms to consumers in many places. Despite the breadth of consumer choice reflected in the archaeological record, the refined earthenware was not particularly unusual for the time. The pewter plates, on the other hand, were more unusual because pewter had begun to lose its appeal by the second half of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 4). It is likely that the pewter plates were associated with the crew, rather than the officers, and their use reflects a preference for their durability and corresponding usefulness on a working ship.

As for the personal belongings associated with *Frolic*'s crew, although it is difficult to identify any one item as belonging to a specific individual amongst the crew, a few can be identified as probably belonging to one of the officers. These included a silver button, the pocket watches and several stationary related items. Smith (2006) has also identified a leather shoes as belonging to one of the officers (see Chapter 7). Other personal belongings included several coins and a buckle fragment.

The medicinal items associated with *Frolic*'s crew were not unusual to find aboard a ship, as most ships normally carried medicine chests. While syphilis was a common ailment during the nineteenth century, especially amongst sailors, it is not uncommon to find a syphilis syringe on an historical site. What is unusual is the presence of more than one mercury container as well as a number of replacement dowels.

The tools and instruments, on the other hand, were objects that required training and knowledge of how to use them, and not everyone on the crew knew how to use them. Again, none of the tools and instruments were unusual to find on ships, and, as argued in Chapter 2 and Chapter 9, many of them were necessary for the successful operation of the ship, and by extension the successful delivery of consumer goods.

Maritime archaeology is distinctly well positioned for the study of capitalism and its development through various stages to the form it takes due to the centrality of long distance shipping to capitalism's development, such as that involving the Spice Trade, and the archaeological encapsulation of this development in shipwrecks. As Chapter 3 explored, one characteristic of capitalism was the shift from task-oriented labour to temporally segmented labour, producing a working class and regimenting daily life in a variety of ways. Chapter 9 argued that the use certain tools and scientific instruments are evidence of a naturalising ideology that legitimised social exclusion on board ships.

This study has also discussed how ideology is an essential component of the capitalist system. Through possessive individualism people exist free from the dependence on others, owning and benefiting from the skills and capacities they possess. They are responsible for their own learning and betterment, involving the use of material objects in activities like seeing, walking, reading, talking, eating and etiquette, and made visible archaeologically through artifacts (dishes, toothbrushes, combs, bottles). The ideology of possessive individualism, in conjunction with the compartmentalisation of individually owned skills, meant that people never saw their self-betterment as being complete, allowing maximum room for individuals to purchase, accumulate, and display material goods throughout their life. Through a variety of social rituals involving the consumption of objects, along with the observation of these rituals by others, people constantly negotiated a consumer identity through the things they owned. Archaeologically the *Frolic's* tools and instruments are evidence of this ideology because by using them the officers reinforced their control and power aboard the ship; they understood the natural law and the world through direct observation. The mastery of using navigation instruments reproduced the ideology of individualism, in that fixing and plotting was a way of measuring and segmenting the world into rationalised units. Mastering these created a segmented, pragmatic and routinised group of people capable of undertaking transoceanic voyages of trade.

Antagonistic social stratification, composed of a complex artifice of class structures, also characterised modern capitalism, along with new opportunities to establish and maintain individual and group identity through consumption. The boundaries between class structures were guarded, and as one class intruded upon another, the rules of particular ways of doing were changed in order to re-establish boundaries, perpetuating and speeding up the continuous cycle of consumption. With the middle class situated between the lower and upper classes, they were the ones most likely to use material culture as a method of establishing and maintaining boundaries. Archaeologically, the officers' ceramics could be interpreted as part of this maintenance. They were considered part of the middle class and were operating within the code of the market.

With the consumer revolution there emerged an increasing quantity and variety of goods, which in turn allowed for parallel increases in consumption, as well as changing attitudes towards the necessity of these items to daily life.

Archaeologically, we can see this through the consumption of ceramics in consumer society. As early as the American Revolution blue-and-white Chinese export

porcelain decorated distinctly in Western styles was being imported into Western markets, as seen in the Chinese export porcelain associated with the shipwrecks *Sydney Cove* (1797), *Ontario* (1799) and the Blue China Wreck. The Chinese export porcelain cargo of *Frolic* was distinctly different from Chinese export porcelain produced for the Western markets, instead consisting of Chinese porcelain generally associated with Chinese-American sites. This sort of Chinese porcelain was most likely considered a necessity to Chinese-Americans, rather than a luxury, showing not only the changing attitudes about Chinese porcelain, but also that the 1850s the American consumer market was complex enough to pander to different consumers in the market.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the American consumer market was sufficiently complex that disparate groups had access to the variety of commodities necessary to establish and maintain a constellation of consumer identities. Whether through ceramics, glassware, clothing, parasols, fans or furniture, material culture was used as a mechanism through which people established and maintained their consumer identities. Acquisition and use of this material culture was guided through mass media outlets like newspapers, etiquette books and magazines, as well as through daily social interaction. People define themselves and their social groups in contrast to others, a process made more complex by the pluralistic and polysemic nature of this identity. The mass media plays a vital role in this, driving the consumer choices of individuals, as well as mirroring and increasing popular tastes. Archaeologists can use material culture and the consumer identities it communicates, to examine the lifestyles, attitudes and worldview of people and social groups, as well as to see how particular groups followed, challenged or changed prevailing social practices. In the aggregate, this allows archaeology to present a clearer picture, and offers new insights into society as a whole. Chapter 9 discussed how many similar items to those found on the shipwreck *Frolic* were advertised in the *Daily Alta California*. The media influenced both tastes and consumer identity through informing the population as to 'proper' mechanisms through which to exercise and establish consumer identity. Additionally, while the media influenced popular culture, it also mirrored it, perpetuating particular consumer identities. In doing so, the media enabled and sustained ever greater complexity in the market.

That said, however, there is not necessarily such homogeneity between social groups. The examples of *Frolic*'s crew and of Chinese miners were just two examples of social groups that fell outside of the norms of etiquette and consumption patterns of mainstream consumer society. These disenfranchised groups too had to be supplied

with the material goods necessary for the establishment and practice of proper etiquette as defined in their particular social groups. However, many groups whose consumer identities were catered to by the market fell outside the dominant market forces that reinforced tastes and etiquette. The rejection of, or simple indifference to, certain modes of etiquette and ideology does not equate to a place within or outside of the consumer market. As *Frolic*'s cargo indicates, large amounts of low quality Chinese porcelain catered to labourers' tastes, and thus these labourers were very much within the market, yet remained removed from elite society and its attendant etiquette. In this way, Chinese labourers were not outside the market, *per se*, but instead they simply did not, or could not, embrace etiquette as a means of gaining access to increasingly restrictive social networks. Part of this was related to an indifference to the ideology that defined social advancement in terms of an elite cultural model. Another part was related to an indifference towards emulation of tastes and its portrayals in the mass media.

In short, the increasing complexity of capitalism and the correspondingly increasing range of consumer goods associated with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US – China trade is symptomatic of the increasing complexity of consumer markets in the West. Able to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a wide array of consumer identities necessary, these markets and the appearance of new and novel goods was only possible under the many new social, economic and ideological relationships constructed under capitalism. It is only through studying changing patterns in consumption practices that we can study changes in capitalism. Shipwrecks like *Frolic*, *Ontario* and the Blue China Wreck, as well as storeships like *General Harrison* and *Niantic*, reveal important insights about the cultural attitudes, lifestyles and worldviews at that are commonly taken for granted about our modern world. It is these insights that offer new and novel interpretations of the development and increasing complexity of modern capitalism and consumption at the global scale.