Chinese Art and British Art Journalism 1870–1920

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doi.org/10.23995/tht.148071

This article considers British engagement with Chinese art, particularly ceramics, through a survey of the art press between 1870 and 1920. Chinese art objects were prominently discussed across this period and propelled British art discourse in new directions. Analysis of the representation of Chinese art across these publications allows for investigation into the interlocking mechanisms of new art professions, new sites of publication and new sites of exhibition, including museums, private galleries and department stores. The rapid proliferation of available objects and the comparative sparseness of knowledge about them created a stimulating vacuum of expertise that drew in a range of cultural actors. This reveals the enmeshed relationships between the emerging professions of art writers, dealers, curators and scholars, as well as the evolving identities of the art lover, art collector and philanthropist. The close study of Chinese art in British publications gives us an opportunity to trace the hidden-in-plain-sight mechanisms of art history: the actors and networks of individuals, institutions, objects, images and texts that reveal British art history in the making and the formative role played in this process by Chinese art.

Keywords: *Chinese art, British art history, art writing, collecting, ceramics*

Introduction

This article considers British engagement with Chinese art, particularly ceramics, through a survey of the art press between 1870 and 1920. From the eighteenth century onwards, Chinese art objects became an increasingly ubiquitous feature of British collections and both middle-class and elite homes.[1] Understanding of these objects as "Art" (this capitalization was prevalent in nineteenth century discourse signifying the elevated status of the idea) arrived somewhat later. Printed texts and images had a key role to play in this process. Through the second half of the nineteenth century the expanding art press began to emerge to inform the literate public as to the nature of the objects in circulation around them. Analysis of the representation and discussion of Chinese art in British art publications allows me to investigate the interlocking mechanisms of new art professions, new sites of publication and new sites of exhibition, including museums, private galleries and department stores. Chinese art objects were prominently discussed across this period and propelled British art discourse in new directions.

The rapid proliferation of available objects and the comparative sparseness of knowledge about them created a stimulating vacuum of expertise that drew in a range of cultural actors. This revealed the enmeshed relationships between the emerging professions of art writers, dealers, curators and scholars, as well as the evolving identities of the art lover, art collector and philanthropist. My study so far is based on a survey of *The Art Journal* (1839–1912), *Burlington Magazine* (1903–), *The Art Magazine* (1878–1904) and *The Studio* (1893–1964) and books on Chinese art aimed at the readers of such journals. This period was marked by the avaricious collecting and rapid reappraisal of a wide range of Chinese objects as well as the shifting of boundaries between art, decoration, antiquities and curios.

I wish to begin to trace, not simply the presence of these objects, but, using actor-network theory, how they "acted" within the British art world.[2] What were these objects and images of them doing in the hands and minds of the critics who mediated culture and middleclass taste in Britain? My contention is that they did something largely as-yet unacknowledged to British understanding of what art was and could be. Specialist scholarship grew up around Chinese art, imposing newly-invented typologies and meanings based on European cultural hegemony. But, at the same time, the ways these objects did not fit Eurocentric art-historical narratives propelled shifts in the narrative, splits and counter-narratives. These deviations could be tolerated and tested with the context of the peripheral position of Chinese art to the European canon, but such deviations did not remain hermetically sealed. Instead, they bled out through the practices of a range of writers to facilitate alternative ways of thinking about art more generally.

As art historians, we have long been aware of the presence in Europe of objects of non-European manufacture, which reflected the collecting

1 In relation to the collecting of Chinese art, see in particular the work of Stacey Pierson, including *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560–1960* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010); Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Helen Glaister, *Chinese Art Objects, Collecting, and Interior Design in Twentieth-Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

2 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

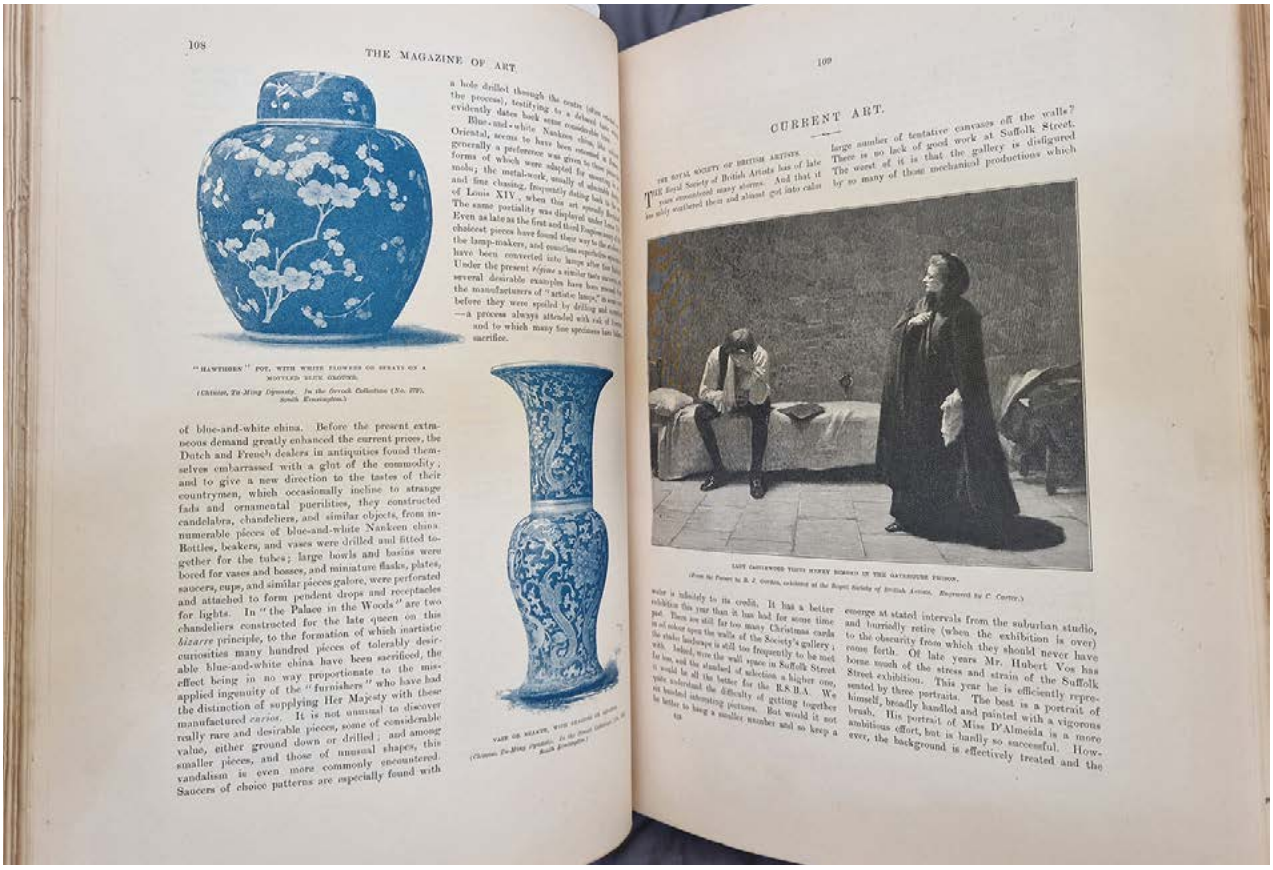


Image 1. Double-page spread showing end of an article entitled "Old Blue-and-White Nankeen China" and beginning of a review of the Society of British Artists annual exhibition in the *Magazine of Art*, Jan. 1889. Image source: *Magazine of Art.* Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.

mania of the Imperial archive.[3] Though a number of scholars have undertaken work on the practices and power dynamics behind the collecting of such objects, consideration of the impact these objects had on wider British art culture and practice has been more limited.[4] Some facets of this have received more attention than others, such as the way Japanese art was used by a range of actors in the late-nineteenth century as a route to challenging European canons of art.[5] It is my contention that there is more work to be done to understand the transformative impact of attempts to assimilate the volume of art objects acquired within the context of imperial and economic assaults on Asia in particular. This article will explore the role of the Chinese art, itself an evolving category of objects, within the British

3 See for example Lara Kriegel, "After the Exhibitionary Complex: Museum Histories and the Future of the Victorian Past," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2006): 681-704; Sarah Longair and John McAleer, eds. *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) and John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie, eds. *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

4 For example Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994).

5 Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 2013); Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Reflecting on Japonisme: The State of the Discipline in the Visual Arts," *Journal of Japonisme* 1.1 (2016): 3–16; Christopher Reed, *Bachelor Japanists: Japanese Aesthetics and Western Masculinities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Grace Elisabeth Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

art world, along with its entwined relationship to the emerging professions and institutions of British art history. The art press and its voracious demand for content put new fields of art historical scholarship before a wider audience, stimulating interest and broadening definitions of the category of "Art" it was built around.

Lastly, a word on my source material. Art journals are obviously self-conscious manifestations of art culture.[6] They have agendas of their own as well as distinct, though often overlapping audiences. The voices in them speak to and about the British art establishment as it began to develop its modern institutions, expectations and practices. Around the turn-of-the-century we can trace the emerging features of the professional art critic as they sought to profitably insert themselves between art and its audiences. Both the writers and the readers of these journals were participating in a process of laying claim to new fields of expertise and understanding of art.

Art journalism flourished as a profession in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[7] As the absolute authority of the Royal Academy declined, art journals stepped in to act as guides to the increasingly diverse realms in which art could be encountered. Their readerships were self-selecting and diverse in their motivations but extended well beyond those professionally involved in the art world to encompass a body of interested persons. Chinese art objects were consistently represented alongside the dominant subject matter: contemporary British art and old masters. This is part of the process of its integration within the development of British art history, until by the 1890s it was established as a branch of art knowledge and institutionalised as such in public museums.

Chinese Ceramics in Britain

To make this discussion manageable, I will focus this article primarily on Chinese ceramics, which received the broadest and most consistent coverage across the period. Alongside dedicated articles, Chinese ceramics were also referred to in a range of other contexts. They were often held up as a historical and technical model of excellence, aimed at and then surpassed in the modern era, by other porcelain manufacturers in Britain, Europe and Japan. They also appeared regularly as a ubiquitous decorative art object in descriptions of grand houses, both historic and contemporary, British and international, which was another recurring topic in British art journals. In the same manner, they regularly appeared in auction listings after paintings.

Though discussions of Chinese ceramics are frequently concluded with lamentations as to the sad state of decline into which modern Chinese manufacture was supposed to have fallen, the *idea* of Chinese ceramics was secured in its consistent identification as an attribute of the homes of the wealthy, cultured and artistic. It was also an object-type that manifested at various levels of the art market, making it relevant to diverse readers. Dedicated articles on Chinese ceramics often referred to the presumed desire of readers to successfully identify the pieces of china they had at home. Similarly, advice was geared towards building up one's own collection. In this way, Chinese ceramics functioned as a gateway to art collecting for the middle-classes.

6 Katherine Haskins, *The Art-Journal and Fine Art Publishing in Victorian England, 1850–1880* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Julie Codell, "Art Periodicals," in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, eds. Andrew King, et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 377–89

7 Meghan Clark, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880–1905* (London: Routledge, 2005), 11–44; Julie Codell, ''Marion Harry Spielmann and the Role of the Press in the Professionalization of Artists,'' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, no.1 (1989): 7–15; Julie Codell, ''The Aura of Mechanical Reproduction: Victorian Art and the Press,'' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 24, no.1 (Spring 1991): 4–10; Julie Codell "Introduction: Domesticity, Culture, and the Victorian Press," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51, no. 2, Summer (2018): 215–229.

Image 2. Photograph of the Chinese Bedroom of Claydon House by S. G. Payne & son, illustration for R. S. Clouston's article "Claydon House, Bucks, the Seat of Sir Edmund Verney, Bart. Part I" in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 5, no. 13, 1904. Image source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, all rights reserved.

In "Hints to Collectors" by Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Art Journal* 1881, for example, he encouraged the would-be collector:

> The beginning of the collection is generally a difficulty, but in the case of china the first step has usually been taken by the presence of more or less specimens in the house, if they are only cups and saucers; and it therefore has this merit — that most persons can begin to study at home.[8]

For much of this period, professional lines between dealers, writers, scholars and collectors remained blurred. Analysis of the representation of Chinese art in British journals can give us a glimpse of the nature of these underlying networks that formed the backbone of the British art world.

In Cosmo Monkhouse, we have an example of a writer who held down a day job at the Board of Trade throughout his career as an art journalist and a poet. He was a regular contributor to a number of art journals. Though he primarily wrote on painting and biographies of artists, later in life he developed a personal interest in Chinese ceramics which led to the building up of his own collection and new expertise.[9] This

8 Cosmo Monkhouse, "Hints to Collectors: China," *Art Journal* (1881): 197.

9 Dana Garvey, "Cosmo Monkhouse: A Conservative Reconsidered," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 14, no. 2 (2015): 69-84.

manifested in a series of articles ceramics and collecting. He wrote the introductions to the catalogues of the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibitions on *Blue and White Oriental Porcelain* in 1895 and *Coloured Chinese Porcelain* in 1896.[10] He was a club member and was on the exhibition committee as well as a contributor of objects to both exhibitions.

His monograph, *A History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, was published after his death in 1901.[11] The preface and final corrections were undertaken by his friend, one of the leading British experts on Chinese art, Stephen Bushell. He wrote:

> No pen has ever painted more vividly the charm of the changes which the Chinese ring with varied tones of cobalt blue pulsing from the depths of a pellucid glaze; the brilliant ruby-like depth of the *sang-de-bœuf* and the soft sheen of the *peau-de-pêche*, in which they have ennobled the copper silicates.[12]

Bushell thanks, on Monkhouse's behalf, the collector, George Salting, for making his collection available for study and the ceramicist, Louis Marc Solon, for reviewing the proofs from a technical perspective.[13] The prefaces and acknowledgements within publications on Chinese ceramics reveal the relationships between a network of individuals which can also be traced across the art journals, reviewing one another's publications and referencing one another's work. In this instance, Solon also wrote and published on British and French ceramics as well as working as a potter for Minton until 1904 and then privately. He was on the consultative committee of the *Burlington Magazine* as well as a regular contributor. Monkhouse wrote a monographic article on Solon as an art potter for *The Magazine of Art* in 1890.[14]

Bushell was a medical doctor stationed in China, where alongside his medical practice he developed his expertise in Chinese ceramics and bronzes.[15] His proficiency in Chinese and extensive personal network among local dealers and Chinese society put him in an unparalleled position. He was instrumental in collecting for Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, the curator who built up the British Museum collection of Chinese art, as well as for the Victoria and Albert Museum and private collectors in Britain and America, including Salting. He published a series of influential books, including translations of historical Chinese texts on ceramics. These books were all reviewed and frequently referenced in the art journals, establishing his authority. His two-volume handbook to the collections of Chinese art in the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Chinese Art* (1904–06) was the go-to reference work in English for Chinese art for many decades.[16]

As well as individuals, there were network relations running between texts. Liu Yu-jen has shown how portions of Bushell's handbook were

10 Burlington Fine Arts Club, Cosmo Monkhouse and Richard Mills, *Catalogue of Blue & White Oriental Porcelain Exhibited in 1895* (London: Printed for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1895); Burlington Fine Arts Club, Cosmo Monkhouse and Richard Mills, *Catalogue of Coloured Chinese Porcelain Exhibited in 1896* (London: Printed for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1896).

11 Cosmo Monkhouse, *History and Description of Chinese Porcelain* (London: Cassell and Co, 1901).

12 Monkhouse, *History and Description*, ix.

13 Sometimes Marc Louis. The order of the initials seem to vary even across his own authored publications.

14 Cosmo Monkhouse, "M. L. Solon," *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1890): 173–180.

15 Nick Pearce, "Collecting, Connoisseurship and Commerce: An Examination of the Life and Career of Stephen Wootton Bushell (1844–1908)," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 70 (2005): 17–25.

16 Stephen Wootton Bushell, *Chinese Art. Vol. 1* and *Vol 2*. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Board of Education, 1904 and 1906).

borrowed, almost wholesale, from the French book, *L'Art Chinois*, by Maurice Paléologue, published in 1887.[17] Liu has also, in the same article, traced the way Chinese translations of Bushell's book fed back into the development of Chinese art history in the early twentieth century.[18] This sort of recycling of texts was far from uncommon. Monkhouse's monograph was indebted to his reading of Bushell's work and Stanislas Julien's 1856 *Histoire et fabrication de la porcelaine chinoise,* which was foundational to the European study of Chinese ceramics.[19] In fact, various historical anecdotes and supposed quotes from Chinese sources are repeated with marked regularity across both scholarly and popular texts throughout this period. It is thus clear that, with sparse access to primary research or historical documents, English-language writing on Chinese art was substantially based on the regurgitation and reframing of pre-existing, primarily English or French, texts.

New Objects: Knowledge-creation and Networks

In the absence of new research, what was it then that drove the market for new publications? Chinese art objects had been traded in significant quantities into Europe since the sixteenth century. The Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860), the Taiping Civil War (1850–1864) and the anti-colonial Boxer Uprising (1899–1901) had a devastating effect on the Chinese economy and social stability. Extensive looting by European forces and Chinese collectors forced to dissolve their collections for funds released hitherto unavailable objects onto the world market.[20] New museums and new collectors were attracted to an area of art with such ready availability, compared to old European masters. The long association with European high culture meant that such objects had both novelty and credibility.

Substantially, it was the flood of Chinese objects onto the market that produced an arena in which a vacuum of knowledge created opportunities for European writers and dealers who could develop sufficient expertise to establish themselves to advantage. Alongside this, the needs of a growing European readership, anxious to better themselves and access new knowledge, could be met by publishers trying to tap into new markets. From expensive, beautifully bound and illustrated catalogues of private collections and academic papers given to learned societies to cheap, cloth-bound guidebooks, cobbled together out of hastily acquired second-hand knowledge by non-specialist writers, the market operated at a range of levels, all, though, promising readers valuable access to arcane knowledge.[21]

Art journals give glimpses onto the workings of these relationships. If we consider, for example, the previously mentioned George Salting, wealthy heir of an Australian shipping and wool merchant, we can trace a range of interactions across the journals. There are notices of his lodging of his growing collection of Chinese and Japanese ceramics with the South Kensington

17 Maurice Paléologue, *L'art Chinois* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1887).

18 Liu Yu-jen, "Stealing Words, Transplanting Images: Stephen Bushell and the Intercultural Articulation of 'Chinese Art' in the Early Twentieth Century," *Archives of Asian Art* 68, no.2 (2018): 191–214.

19 Stanislas Julien, *Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise* (Paris: Mallet-Bachelier, 1856); Garvey, "Cosmo Monkhouse," 69-84.

20 Greg M. Thomas, "The Looting of Yuanming and the Translation of Chinese Art in Europe," Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 7.2 (2008): 1–40.

21 For example, at one end of the market lies John Pierpont Morgan's, *Catalogue of the Morgan Collection of Chinese Porcelains*. [with an historical introduction by S.W. Bushell] 2 vols (New York: privately printed, 500 copies, 1904) and at the other end lie works like Mrs Willoughby Hodgson, *How to Identify Old China* (London: G. Bell, 1905); James F. Blacker, *Chats on Oriental China*, (London: Unwin, 1911), part of the 'Chats on' series.

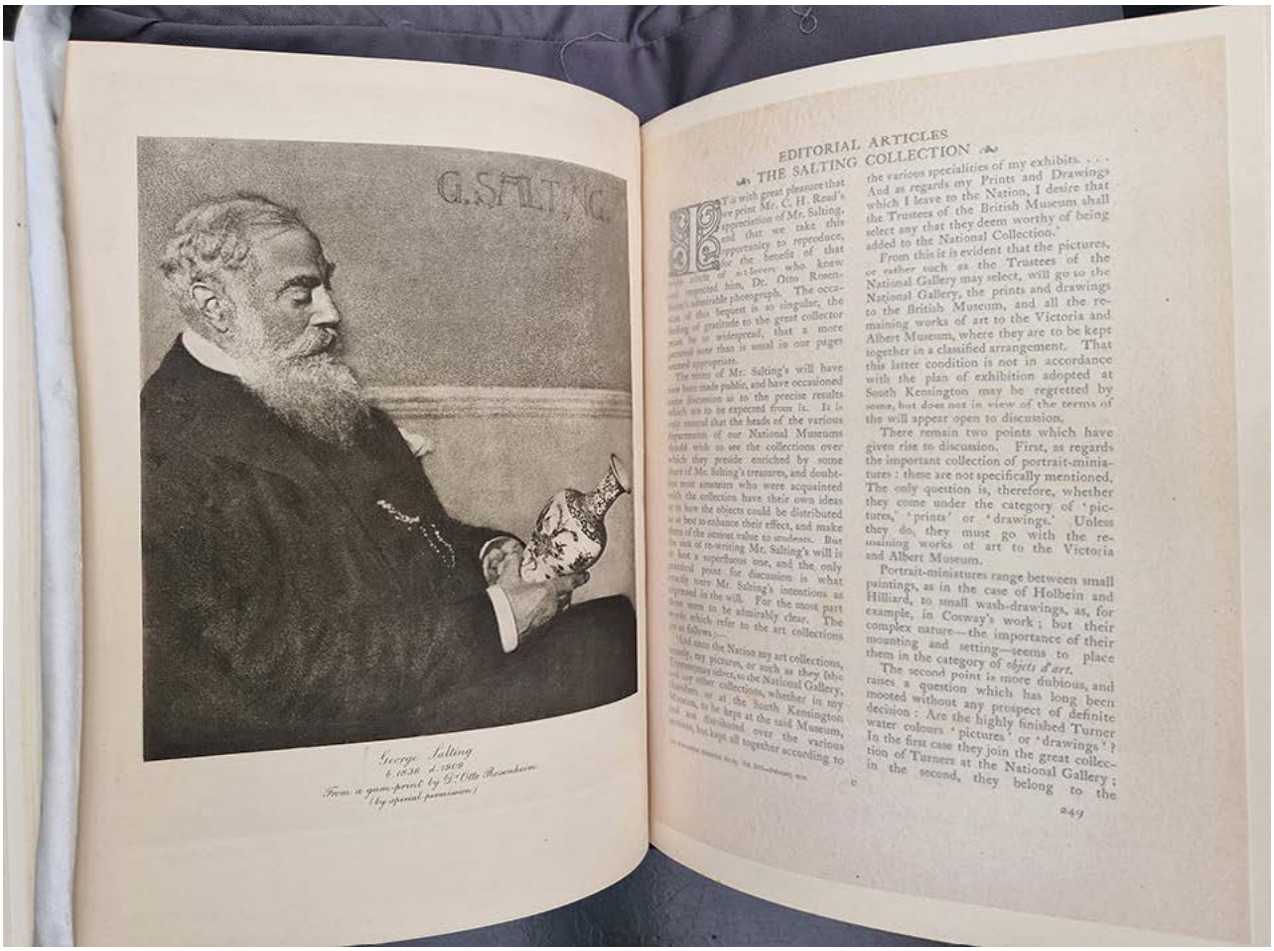


Image 3. Dr. Otto Rosenheim's gum-print George Salting, illustration for the article "The Salting Collection", in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 16, No. 83 (Feb., 1910). The article was published under the editorship of Roger Fry and Lionel Cust. Image source: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.

Museum from 1874. There was also the occasional appearance of his name in brackets after auction house sales, indicating his purchases. By the 1890s the 'Salting collection' becomes a benchmark against which other collections might be measured and begins to attract profile articles of its own.[22]

We have already seen him mentioned by Bushell in Monkhouse's book and he was similarly name-checked in William Gulland's, two-volume *Chinese Porcelain*, 1898–1902.[23] He, Monkhouse and many other important collectors and writers on Chinese art were all members of the Burlington Fine Arts Club.[24] The club excluded from membership women and those, like Bushell, who were commercially involved in the sale of art, but art writing was more

22 Lindo S. Myers, "The Salting Collection of Oriental Porcelain," *Magazine of Art*, (Jan 1891): 31–36; C. H. W., "Mr. George Salting's Chinese Porcelain Figures in the Victoria and Albert Museum," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 6, no. 24 (1905): 486–487; "The Salting Collection," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 16, no. 83 (Feb., 1910): 249–250; R. E. D. Sketchley, "English Art Collectors III," *Art Journal*, (Sep 1911): 313–317.

23 W. G. Gulland, *Chinese Porcelain* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), vii.

24 Stacey Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London: The Burlington Fine Arts* Club (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

accessible.[25] Knowledge of Chinese art could open doors and promoted social mobility, as was the case with Solon, a craftsman, and Arthur Morrison, the son of a London dockworker, who became a journalist and novelist and latterly an art collector and art writer, specialising in Chinese and Japanese art and who also sat on the consultative committee of the *Burlington Magazine*.[26]

Reflecting the growing availability of antique Chinese ceramics in British collections, from the 1880s onwards, there is also a noticeable trend within British ceramics for art pottery inspired by single-glaze Chinese wares. The term single-glaze signified that the work had been finished in a single firing, without the under-painting of blue-and-white, or the secondary firing required by enamels. Various more or less synonymous terms were in circulation, such as "flambé" and signified decorative effects achieved through the chemical action of the glaze in firing, rather than the painted details of chinoiserie. Just as British scholarship on Chinese ceramics depended substantially on French writings, the French potteries were key rivals in both commerce and the international exhibitions and French ceramicists, such as Clement Massier and Ernst Chaplet had been working to emulate Chinese single-glazes since the 1870s. Examples of their work were reviewed in the art journals and purchased by the V&A. Starting with the Linthorpe Pottery (est. 1879), by the end of the century a number of British art potters such as William Burton, who was also a writer on ceramics, William Howson Taylor and Bernand Moore all specialised in such glazes on

Image 4. William Howson Taylor, V*ase of white stoneware covered with streaked green and blue leadless glaze*, Ruskin Pottery, West Smethwick, ca. 1901, acquired 1902. Image: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, all rights reserved.

archetypal Chinese bowl, bottle and jar forms.[27] This makes Bernhard Leech far from the first British ceramicist to "discover" East Asian ceramics.

It is only possible here to give the briefest sketch of some of the individuals involved in the integration of Chinese art into the British art world. But what we have glimpsed here is the network of art writers, collectors, dealers and ceramicists. They were instrumental in the parallel formation of the collections of Chinese art in Britain at the V&A and British Museum. They were also instrumental in the diffusion of textual and illustrated knowledge of Chinese art out to a wider audience. The Burlington Club was significant,

25 Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums*, 19.

26 Simon Joyce, "Disconnecting and Reconnecting Morrison: Professional and Specialist Authorship," in *Critical Essays on Arthur Morrison and the East End*, edited by Diana Maltz (London: Routledge, 2022), 197–219; Noboru Koyama, "Arthur Morrison (1863–1945): Writer, Novelist and Connoisseur of Japanese Art," *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Vol. VII*, edited by Hugh Cortazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 540–552.

27 John A. Service, "British Pottery," *Art Journal* (May and Aug 1908): 129–137, 237–244.

but this network received solid form with the founding of the Oriental Ceramics Society in 1921. This was, an even more highly select group. Until 1933 membership was restricted to fifteen gentlemen, made up primarily of the next generation of eminent collectors like George Eumorfopoulos and Oscar Charles Raphael and museum professionals like Robert Lockhart Hobson, keeper of the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography at the British Museum and Bernard Rackham, Keeper of Ceramics at the V&A.[28]

Chinese Objects and British Art Criticism

Alongside the network of actors who shaped the reception of Chinese art, I wish also to give consideration to the ways in which these objects, translated into text and illustration, contributed to the mechanisms of British art history and criticism. Efforts to undertake original primary research into Chinese contexts of patronage, making and reception were limited to a small group of sinologists, such as Bushell. For most writers the objects themselves formed the main source of data.

Close looking was frequently presented as the only way of really understanding Chinese ceramics. Even Bushell's preface for Monkhouse's book states:

> A particular piece of porcelain must be examined as carefully as an old picture, the quality of the paste, texture of the glaze, and technique of colouring being severally considered, as well as the form and style of decoration. The Chinese say that to be a connoisseur "one must see with seeing eyes."[29]

Collectors like Salting and Monkhouse were particularly praised for "their eye".[30] In Monkhouse's case this extended, as evidenced in his advice to would-be collectors, to touch and even taste:

> Nor is it only the eye to be trained; there are subtle differences of surface that can only be detected by touch.[31]
>
> … He can test the texture, hardness, and porousness of the paste with eye, knife, and tongue…[32]

The presentation of both contemporary art and European art history in the art press placed an increasing emphasis on artist biographies.[33] It was beyond the reach of most European writers to treat Chinese art in this way. Attention was thus propelled onto the objects themselves, a challenge to which many writers rose with creative enthusiasm. Ekphrastic description played a key role in art writing, particularly as up to the 1890s illustrations were sparse and, even after the increased use of photomechanical reproductions, visual representation of objects was largely limited to black-and-white and often grainy reproductions.

In the absence of iconography to describe, descriptions of ceramics focused on the evocation

28 Frances Wood & Jean Martin, "Towards a New History of the Oriental Ceramic Society: Narrative and Chronology," *The Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 76 (2011–12): 95–116.

29 Monkhouse, *History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, xii.

30 Stephen Coppel, "Salting, George (1835–1909), Art Collector and Benefactor," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35920

31 Monkhouse, *A History and Description of Chinese Porcelain*, 12

32 Monkhouse, "Hints to Collectors: China," 197.

33 Pamela M. Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, "The Periodical and the Art Market: Investigating the Dealer-Critic System in Victorian England," *Victorian Periodicals Reviews*, 41, no.4, Winter 2008: 334.

of physical form and visual effects. This quote from a notice about "Mortuary Pottery of the Han Dynasty" in the *Burlington Magazine*:

> In all these examples the wear is of hard reddish body covered with a leaf-green glaze of fine crackled texture. The prolonged action upon this of the earth in which they were buried has produced a peculiar gold and silver iridescence. […] The dignity and classical austerity of contour and the virile workmanship of these jars show beyond contradiction to what a high level both the proficiency and taste Chinese potters had arrived at this remote epoche.[34]

Through photography and description, the writer tried to convey the nature of the response these objects should excite in the viewer/reader. The decidedly masculine qualities ascribed to the object (dignity, austerity, virility, proficiency and taste) were all human qualities to which the reader might aspire. These ceramics bodies conjured a strong affective response, which writers sought to give voice to through their prose.

Though Chinese ceramics featured prominently among those artworks selected for chromolithographic colour inserts, writers wanting to convey the lustrous subtleties of the objects they presented continued to supplement this with highly sensual description. Quoting from the series of articles on Song and Yuan dynasty ceramics by Hobson, in the *Burlington Magazine* from 1909–10:

> … the glazes are indescribably rich, and glow with every variety of hue which that Protean medium, copper oxide, is capable of infusing. Opaque grey-green, pale and dark lavender, turquoise, dove colour, bluish grey and purple crimson, they are laid on with a lavish hand; and, though thin enough on the upper edges of the vessel to be translucent, they acquired depth both of substance and colour as they flow thickly down the sides until, growing too sluggish for further movement, they stop in a billowy line often before the base is reached.[35]

Knowledge and knowing, appreciation and affect, all depend on the viewer's sensitive perception. This was fenced about with the reassurance of scientific knowledge, oxides and silicates, dynasties and reign marks, but ultimately depended at least as much on the conjuring of affect and visual pleasure, not to say desire.

An article on the Richard Bennett Collection on exhibition at the Gorer Gallery in Bond Street in the *Art Journal* in 1911 reflects the author's passion for single-glaze Chinese ceramics:

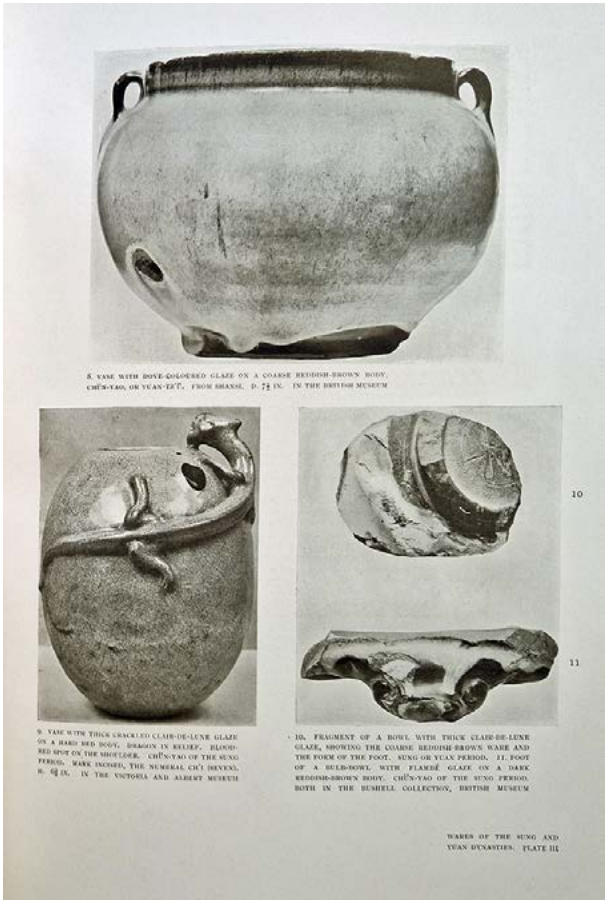
> For those whose taste inclines to single colours there is a case with choice examples of *clair de lune*, celadon, *sang de boeuf*, apple-green (a transparent green enamel over a grey crackle glaze) in various shades and a wonderful series of peach blooms in which the green of the young peach struggles with the ripening red. These are the sleek and highly finished productions of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; while on a lower shelf are a few fine examples of Song and Yuan wares. Those who, like the writer, have a special affection for these strong old wares whose thick uneven glazes and subtle gradations of colour contrast sharply with the finish and uniformity of the K'ang Hsi [Kāng xī] porcelains above them, may feel aggrieved at the obscure position to which their favourites have been relegated.[36]

It was the visual and material qualities which excite admiration and endow the objects with

34 "Mortuary Pottery of the Han Dynasty," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 17, no. 85 (1910): 46.

35 R. L. Hobson, "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 16, no. 80 (1909): 74.

36 Lu-Tzŭ, "The Richard Bennett Collection of Chinese Porcelain," *Art Journal* (Jul 1911): 220.



8. VASE WITH DOVE-COLOURED GLAZE ON A COARSE REDDISH-BROWN BODY, CHÜN-YAO, OR YUAN-TZU. FROM SHANSI. D. 7½ IN. IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

9. VASE WITH THICK CRACKLED CLAIR-DE-LUNE GLAZE ON A HARD RED BODY. DRAGON IN RELIEF. BLOOD-RED SPOT ON THE SHOULDER. CHÜN-YAO OF THE SUNG PERIOD. MARK INCISED, THE NUMERAL CH'I (SEVEN). H. 9¾ IN. IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

10. FRAGMENT OF A BOWL WITH THICK CLAIR-DE-LUNE GLAZE, SHOWING THE COARSE REDDISH-BROWN WARE AND THE FORM OF THE FOOT. SUNG OR YUAN PERIOD. 11. FOOT OF A BULB-BOWL WITH FLAMBÉ GLAZE ON A DARK REDDISH-BROWN BODY. CHÜN-YAO OF THE SUNG PERIOD. BOTH IN THE BUSHELL COLLECTION, BRITISH MUSEUM

WARES OF THE SUNG AND YUAN DYNASTIES. PLATE III

Image 5. Illustration for R. L. Hobson's article "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 16, No. 80 (Nov., 1909). Image source: T*he Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. Photo: C. Ashby, all rights reserved.]

Image 6. *Jun glazed stoneware jar*, Yuan dynasty. Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, 1909. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.**

value and meaning, divorced from narrative or context.

This attention form was in part a necessary corrective to the troubling unknowablity of Chinese ceramics in European hands. The collecting of Chinese ceramics was fraught throughout this period, as it still is, by problems of identification. This was visible all over the discourse. As late as 1898, Gulland in *Chinese Porcelain* stated: "We are very much in the dark as yet on many points, and cannot determine with certainty the age of much of the china we possess."[37] The perceived impossibility of conclusively understanding Chinese ceramics was a recurrent theme, as indicated by this review of Gulland's book in *The Studio*:

> A reliable history of Chinese porcelain, in which the technical qualities of each class and period of work is fully discussed, never has been, and probably never will be, written. The difficulty of obtaining precise information upon the conditions of manufacture is so great, and such information that may be in obtained in China itself so unreliable, that the enquirer is continually baffled in his search for exact data.[38]

Gulland's book was arranged instead by means of the descriptive taxonomy established by Julien in 1856, *sang-de-boeuf*, *peachblow* and *famille-verte* etc., which depended upon the visual characteristics of the objects in the manner of the biological sciences. These

37 Gulland, *Chinese Porcelain*, vii.

38 "Reviews of Recent Publications: *Chinese Porcelain* by W. G. Gulland," *The Studio*, 16, no. 72 (March 1899): 141.

descriptive classifications persisted, as we see, up into the twentieth century, with European scholars having had no expectation of reliably organising wares by date or region. This was despite the competing Chinese taxonomy based on reign dates being made available by Bushell's partial translation in 1886 of the 1774 *Tao Shou* by Zhu Yan.[39]

Mechanics of Expertise: Forgeries and Taste

In addition to these difficulties were the problems associated with the copy or imitation ware. Chinese antiquarian interest in their own heritage had made the manufacture of historic reproductions of ceramics in earlier styles a common practice for many centuries. Added to this were commercial forgeries made in China, Japan and by manufacturers across Europe to meet growing market demands. Fakes and mis-identifications were also frequently alluded to by writers:

Image 7. Photograph with the caption "Belgian imitation of a Chinese porcelain plate, made about 1899", illustration for M. H. Spielmanns article "Art Forgeries and Counterfeits: A General Survey" in the *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1903). Image source: *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1903), all rights reserved.

In a series of articles on art forgeries in *The Art Magazine* in 1903, the editor M. H. Spielmann discussed and illustrated the following example (image 7):

> One the most remarkable imitations I have come across is reproduced (see page 447). It is a Belgian achievement, made about the year 1899. It is of the beautiful egg-shell porcelain, in all respects like the genuine object and material, with the little accidents of surface, especially at the back; the material is "right," the borders, colours, the elaborate geometric decorations, the subjects, the drawing, in face and draperies, in line and expression — all is perfect. There are very few who would not be deceived, and those who detect the cheat would do so rather from the indescribable conviction that something is wrong — in this case, probably, the sentiment of an over decorated piece — than from any actual defect in either material or decoration.[40]

This sort of thing created anxiety among potential collectors. The regular repetition of the ease of making an expensive mistake served to drive up the value of the expert advice and the publications which might save you from error.

At the same time, the text also underlines that it was only through close-looking and understanding of the material nature of the objects that you could hope to distinguish between them. The

39 Stephen W. Bushell and Peking Oriental Society, *Chinese Porcelain Before the Present Dynasty* (Peking [Beijing]: Pei-T'ang Press, 1886).

40 M. H. Spielmann, "Art Forgeries and Counterfeits: A General Survey," *Magazine of Art*, 1 (Jan 1903): 444.

expert eye and innate knowledge that comes from long familiarity was alluded to. Art journalism frequently offered tips and insights to help the reader gain such understanding. For example, in his discussion of the difficulties of telling historic reproduction apart from original Song dynasty Yixing ware, Hobson noted that newer pieces were often made of the same Yixing clay and so the body colour was not a reliable guide. (Image 8.) Instead, he pointed out what to look for.

> But the texture of the ware will assist in many cases, and the non-resistance to wear and tear at once recalls such excellent copies as No. 14, which has a red body and pale crackled lavender glaze, with a tendency to scale off and leave bear patches on the rim and prominent parts. The glaze on these pieces is opaque and drier than on the originals, and it does not float away from the mouth or allow the brown paste to shine through.

He concludes his discussion of reproductions with the following comment:

> It is a formidable array of obstacles, but the collector, if he fails to surmount them, can console himself that good examples of these imitative wares are well worth securing for their own sake.[41]

These few examples reveal the way in which the simultaneous attractions and difficulties of Chinese ceramics fed into the art historical mechanism of art journals, books and collections. Provenance from one of the famous European or Chinese collections conferred more confidence in the authenticity of the object. Stacey Pierson has noted how inclusion of objects in the Burlington exhibitions, for example, was prominently noted in the subsequent sale of these objects and thus how such exhibitions and

Image 8. *Jun glazed, crackled stoneware vase*, Yuan dynasty. Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, 1891. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**.

catalogues "came to be part of the art historical infrastructure of the art market, a notable seal of approval for the works sold."[42]

Chinese ceramics were elusive to understand but desirable, and, depending on antiquity, comparatively available. Art writers secured their professional positions by means of newly acquired expertise which the unwary collector could not well do without. They also gave guides on the material newly appearing in public collections in Britain and a privileged insight into important private collections, a number of which went on to feed into public collections. There were also notices regarding collections in France and elsewhere in Europe and America,

41 Hobson, "Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-V," 84.

42 Pierson, *Collectors, Collections*, 55.

reflecting the transnational nature of the art market and art scholarship. In a newly emerging art historical field, the general public could, via these relatively cheap publications, unlock the latest understanding.

Just as design history has explored the way women's magazines constructed new norms of femininity and consumption, the art magazines played a role in constructing the new identity of an art lover, collector or connoisseur, to which the reader might aspire.[43] Texts assured readers that those who knew a good thing, knew a good thing, and one could vicariously laugh at mistakes made by the ignorant and uncultured. This, in turn, played into the market mechanism of the art magazines because if you did not subscribe you would no longer be in the know.

The rich American art collector was frequently alluded to from the 1870s onwards as having a particular appreciation for Chinese ceramics, but also with a note of caution regarding the triumph of purchasing-power over taste. Leonore Metrick-Chen has explored the significance of the abundance of Chinese things in the formation of public art museums in America and American definitions of art.[44] Though there are some differences in the American context, there are also parallels in the way in which the formal qualities and antiquity of Chinese objects drove a shift in public perceptions of art from the mid- to the late-nineteenth century.

The rapaciousness of American collecting runs as a thread of anxiety within the British art discourse. In *The Burlington Magazine* in 1903, in an article on the Veitch Collection of Chinese Porcelain that was currently on exhibition, the American collector and the "average collector" were both set up as antagonists:

> It [the collection] does not pretend in any way to rival in size or quality those collections which are bought *en bloc* by means of unlimited banking accounts and the Atlantic cable, and, no doubt, much of the collection is not of the fashionable decorative type now in vogue. Mr. Veitch's is essentially a "collectors collection," which has been formed out of regard for the decorative quality or intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves. In this country and in America the average collector who revels in brilliant blue and white ginger jars, famille rose, and famille verte, might not consider the loan exhibition at Birmingham supremely attractive; but those whose eyes are captivated by wealth of colour and superlatively fine glazes will find, as the greatest and best of native Chinese collectors have found, a series of objects which in many respects are unrivalled.[45]

This quote also serves to illustrate a number of the points I have made above. The *Burlington Magazine*, in particular, sought to distinguish itself from more middle-class competitors and establish itself as a magazine for the serious connoisseur and against the bad taste and crass commercialism of the "tyrant Bourgeoisie".[46] We can see here the way the text constructs an "us-versus-them" complicity of superior taste between the magazine and the reader. If the reader experienced a flash of anxiety as to whether they really knew "intrinsic beauty" from mere brilliance, then they have only to continue to follow the guidance of the magazine.

43 Christopher Breward, "Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 71–89.

44 Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects/Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and American Visual Culture, 1830–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 73–120.

45 W. [C. H. Wylde], "Notes on the Veitch Collection of Chinese Porcelain in the Birmingham Art Gallery," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 4, no. 12 (1904), 232–233.

46 "Editorial Article," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 1, no. 1 (1903): 3–5.

Chinese collectors are set up, in contrast to American collectors, as a cultural authority. This reveals the cachet associated with access to original Chinese sources of knowledge and to art from Chinese collections, in contrast to export ceramics fabricated for the European market. Over the course of the period surveyed, there was a gradual but steady shift in preference towards older and older ceramics. The profusion of guides to collecting china suggest a "trickle down" of consumption patterns from the top of the social hierarchy.[47] This increased accessibility, in turn, drove those at the top to turn to rarer objects in search of social distinction.[48]

European knowledge of Chinese art was in a state of rapid expansion and development over this period, making it all the more important to keep up-to-date. More direct understanding of Chinese scholarship was gradually becoming available in translation. In addition, indirect knowledge via Japanese art historians and critics was also increasingly available, particularly after the publication of the Japanese art magazine, *Kokka*, published from 1889 onwards, with summaries in English and, from 1905, an English-language edition.[49] This state of affairs was indicated in this *Studio* review of Lawrence Binyon's book *Painting in the Far East* (1908):

> It is true that numerous examples bearing the names of great artists find their way into the hands of the Western collector, but these are too commonly either absolutely spurious, or, at best, but inferior specimens of the painter's brushwork. The European writer is therefore severely handicapped in dealing with this subject and is frequently driven to wrong conclusions in his criticisms. On the other hand, the important illustrated works which have in recent years been published in Japan concerning its art and that of China — and we mention in this respect our excellent contemporary "The Kokka" —are of great service in enabling their readers to obtain a glimpse, even if only through the medium of a photograph, of the notable examples existing in private collections in the Far East.[50]

As ever, the guidance of experts was rendered indispensable through the allusion to the prevalence of fakes and inferior examples. The still-hidden wealth of Chinese collections also continued to exercise its allure.

Conclusion

In the context of late-nineteenth-century Britain, "Art" was an unstable category and the art journals were key sites in testing new meanings. Moving into the twentieth century, a number of scholars have sought to unpick how slightly later encounters with African and Oceanic art have been framed as catalytic in the development of modernism.[51] A few writers have also suggested that the longer history of engagement with Asian art was in some way seminal in this process, particularly in relation to the writings of Roger

47 Thorsten Veblen, "The Theory of the Leisure Class," in *The Collected Works of Thorstein Veblen*. Vol. 1. 1899. Re-print. (London: Routledge, 1994).

48 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

49 Takematsu Haruyama, "Seventy Years of 'Kokka'," *Japan Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1959): 234; William S. Rodner, *Edwardian London through Japanese Eyes: The Art and Writings of Yoshio Markino, 1897–1915* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23–4; Michelle Ying Ling Huang, "The Influence of Japanese Expertise on the British Reception of Chinese Painting," in *Beyond Boundaries: East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, edited by Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 88–111.

50 "Painting in the Far East. By Laurence Binyon," *The Studio* 46, no.191 (1909): 83.

51 Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919–1935* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004); Colin Rhodes, "Burlington Primitive: Non-European Art in the Burlington Magazine before 1930," *The Burlington Magazine* 146 no.1211 (2004): 98–104; Ruth B. Phillips, "Aesthetic Primitivism Revisited: The Global Diaspora of 'Primitive Art' and the Rise of Indigenous Modernisms," *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015): 1–25.

Fry.[52] Ralph Parfect has drawn attention to the intersection of parallel discourses on Chinese art within the *Burlington Magazine*, which segued between scientific, aesthetic and commercial concerns, and to the use of Chinese art to set out the parameters for a formalist appreciation of the expressive qualities of modern art.[53] In parallel to this, Sam Rose has discussed the impact of Indian art on Fry's theories of modernism and Sarah Victoria Turner has similarly illuminated some of the paths of connection between collectors and critics of Indian art and the development of the New Sculpture movement in Britain in the 1910s.[54] But the earlier, foundational importance of Chinese art in the nineteenth century in the long history of framing artistic modernism has not yet been analysed.

Chinese art objects in a European context were resistant to biographical or iconographic analysis in the face of limited grasp of the relevant Chinese literature, particularly in terms of presentations to the wider public. In the context of European art writing, the qualities of the objects themselves inspired and acclimated their critics and readers to a new form of criticism based on close looking and sensual description. Chinese objects were engaged with in a way that minimized the requirement to appeal to external, contextual factors. Instead, the critic confidently asserted that what they saw (in eye and hand and heart) was to some extent sufficient unto itself, the ultimate authority for understanding this elusive category of art.[55] This position, reasserted across multiple issues of all the leading art journals and dedicated books, accustomed the art world to the validity of this approach.

By the 1910s, certain critics were increasingly presenting this approach as the correct way to think about art more generally. Building on appreciation of ceramics, Chinese painting was held up as embodying qualities of value that would allow art to resist the degrading effects of industrial modernity and break the stranglehold of classical mimesis. What repeats was an emphasis on art, not as specific and representational, but as universal, expressive and transportative. In this review of newly acquired Chinese paintings in the British Museum from 1910 we can read:

> It is not possible to translate into money-terms the value of, say, the picture of the two geese, by an unknown painter of the eleventh century. This is less an example of Oriental art than of an art informed by a fathoming universality. Hardly could the image of a god be more hieratic than the lovely image of these two birds, whose grandly simplified contours, embracing suggestions so rich and mobile, reconcile in one pervading rhythm the seemingly opposed demands of verisimilitude and expression, of analysis and synthesis.[56]

What proponents of modern art in the twentieth century wanted was this sort of expression of immediacy and universality, with which they

52 Christopher Green, *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art* (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999), 119–132; Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220–231; Ira Nadel, "Oriental Bloomsbury," *Modernist Cultures* 13, no.1 (2018): 14–32.

53 Ralph Parfect, "Roger Fry, Chinese Art and The Burlington Magazine," in *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*, ed. Anne Witchard (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015): 53–71.

54 Sam Rose, *Art and Form: From Roger Fry to Global Modernism* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2019), 129–139; Sarah Victoria Turner, "The 'Essential Quality of Things': E. B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian Art and Sculpture in Britain, c. 1910–14," *Visual Culture in Britain* 11 no.2 (2010): 239–264.

55 Sam Rose, "Close Looking and Conviction," *Art History* 40, no.1 (2017): 156–177.

56 "Oriental Paintings at the British Museum," *Art Journal* (Sep 1910): 286–288.

Image 9. *Hanging scroll, two geese, ink and colours on silk.* Qing dynasty. Purchased from Olga Julia Wegener 1910. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, license **CC BY-NC-SA 4.0**.

hoped to revitalise modern European art.[57] They saw it in Chinese art because they had, over preceding decades, been empowered through the existing body of criticism to privilege what they saw or felt in relation to these otherwise unknowable objects.

The ignorance surrounding original context rendered these objects resistant to European classification systems, but this vacuum created new possibilities and licence to grope for values beyond the rational. The pure sensation of form and finish can be seen as a gateway to the universal and numinous and was embraced as such by British art theorists. Its role in the evolution of the "significant form" of Roger Fry and Clive Bell remain to be fully established. But, with further work, it will be possible to uncover the important role Chinese art played in the development of a language of modern art criticism in Britain. The close study of Chinese art in British art publications gives us an opportunity to trace the hidden-in-plain-sight mechanisms of art history: the actors and networks of individuals, institutions, objects, images and texts that reveal British art history in the making. Chinese art objects were powerful actors in British art discourse because of the way they were able to act as floating signifiers: as beautiful and desirable objects from distant lands and the distant past; markers of aristocratic taste; markers of imperial modernity; of cosmopolitan sophistication; of spiritual depth and of the growing body of scholarship surrounding them. They were bearers of a thousand years of history, but as this history and its culture remained largely opaque to British audiences, they were thrust back onto the objects themselves, reframed as examples of timeless, universal beauty.

57 Michelle Ying-Ling Huang, "Binyon and Nash: British Modernists' Conception of Chinese Landscape Painting," in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. Michelle Ying-Ling Huang (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 88–114.

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