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Connected Material Histories: A response

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In giving the very first lecture that first-year History of Art undergraduates at Oxford will hear, I usually employ the practice of giving them a sheet of paper with nothing on it but the outlines of the land masses of the globe, and ask them to draw a line round 'the West'. The idea was inspired by a reading of Lewis and Wigen's 1997 book *The Myth of Continents* ('justly celebrated', as Sanjay Subrahmanyam says), and remains a useful pedagogic act, up to a point, for the reasons so clearly laid out in that book;[1] also, it breaks the ice, it gets a buzz of conversation going in the room, it certainly foregrounds the topic, central now to art historical enquiry, of the way in which 'representations are social facts'.[2] But the reason I do not ask them to draw a map round 'the East' is that I suspect it would be too easy, or at least done too quickly, and indeed the boundaries of both 'East' and 'Orient', as 'Europe's Other', can be shown to have fluctuated much less than have the boundaries of what, for most Oxford students, is still, if somewhat tenuously, 'us' or 'here'. Wherever 'the East' is, it all lies (as Subrahmanyam points out in his lecture) in that assuredly -etic part of the world called Asia. I might, in the privacy of my own hard drive, choose to categorize those European images which I need for teaching as 'Non-Eastern' (to balance the 'Non-Western' rubric on which my specialist options appear in the syllabus). But that is not a category widely used, or at least not in my own discipline of art history.

[1] Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), especially pp. 49–53.

[2] Paul Rabinow, 'Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 234–61.

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The ground is, however, not really that much firmer when as a historian one comes to deal with 'China'. The term *Zhongguo* 中國, although it certainly existed, is not in my experience widely seen in the texts of the Ming period (1368–1644), although it must have circulated, since its standard literal translation as 'Middle Kingdom' was first used in English in 1662 (the Latin term *medium regnum* was in learned European usage somewhat earlier in the mid-seventeenth century at the latest). In the extensive textual accounts of the early fifteenth-century voyages led by the eunuch admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371–1433), it is the dynastic term 'Great Ming' (*Da Ming* 大明), or else some variant of the terms *Hua* 華 or *Xia* 夏, which is used to differentiate the Chinese 'us' from a whole range of possible 'thems', usually described as a number of 'kingdoms' (*guo* 國).[3] This onomastic question today takes on a much more heated aspect when talking about the use of the term *Zhongguo* in the succeeding Qing dynasty (1644–1911), where it has become tied up in the ongoing and increasingly intemperate controversy over the 'New Qing History'. This historiographical trend is seen by its Chinese nationalist opponents as an attempt to delegitimize the inclusion, under the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China, of territories first incorporated by the Qing dynasty (a claim equally vehemently denied by the historians targeted for attack). When and how the Qing rulers used *Zhongguo*, or its Manchu calque *Dulimbai gurun*, is a matter of considerable polemical intensity.[4]

This should remind us, as we discuss the issue of singular or multiple Asias, and the 'many, shifting systems' which Subrahmanyam discusses in his lecture in this volume, that the component parts of those systems ('India', 'China', Southeast Asia') are themselves shifting, in definition and in perception as much as in outline. The many shifting *scholarly* systems in which the study of these areas is carried on also needs to be accounted for. It seems to me that those of

[3] Craig Clunas and Jessica Harrison-Hall (eds), *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China* (London: British Museum Press, 2015).

[4] For one view, see Gang Zhao, 'Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century', *Modern China*, 32.1 (2006), pp. 3–30. A sense of the intensity of the debate can be gained from the blog post 'Putting Things in Context; a contribution to the NQH debate by Professor Mark C. Elliott', posted on 21 May 2015 on the blog 'History, Ethics and Faith in China'; http://history-in-china.net/2015/05/21/putting-things-in-context-a-contribution-to-the-nqh-debate-by-professor-mark-c-elliott/, [accessed 29 September 2015].

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us in the field of Chinese studies have until recently lagged some way behind our South Asianist colleagues in an address to 'integrative' or 'connected' histories. It is not so much that we have refused to accept their existence, but that in coming late to this topic we have perhaps been enthralled by the possibilities they offer for escape from a too strictly bounded Chinese exceptionalism. It is even possibly the case that we have leaned too far in the other direction, to the point where the many crucial but utterly *un*connected manifestations of the past come to seem dangerously 'sinological' and inward-looking, and correspondingly neither fashionable nor easy to fund. Certainly connectedness has been the master-theme of much recent work. An exhibition held at the British Museum from 2014–2015 (for which I served as co-curator), entitled *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*, had as one of its central aims the bringing before a wide public the recent revolution in scholarly perception of the early Ming. This sees it not as some nativist reaction to the Mongol conquest, pulling down the shutters on the outside world—a 'turning away from the outside world [which] was accompanied by a growing introspection within Chinese life'—but rather as, to a significant degree, another Chinggisid successor state, captured by the cosmopolitan glamour of Mongol hegemony.[5] It is to avoid any hint of the introspective that Chinese studies as a discipline has perhaps become rather over-excited about connectivity, but this may well be a necessary corrective phase—corrective to both the Hegelian and Cold War discourses of China's indifference to the wider world.

If in fact there is not one system but many shifting systems in the history of Asia, it remains the case that some are remembered after the shifts which decentralize them, and some are less well remembered, or not remembered at all. In fact, there seems to me to be an important distinction between remembered (or even imagined) and unremembered connections, that is between those connections which still have a discursive presence in the imagination, even if that is backed up by little in the way of substantive fact. There is no necessity for the participants in what are in fact connected systems to have any conscious awareness of each other. Thus the huge spike in the price

[5] The quote is from John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 178. For an expression of more recent understanding, see David M. Robinson, 'The Ming Court and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols', in David M. Robinson (ed.), *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 365–421.

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of pepper on European markets between 1410 and 1414 (which, for instance, saw the price of pepper in England increase eightfold from 1410 to 1411), has been attributed by economic historians to the huge amounts of the spice purchased (or extorted) by the fleets of Admiral Zheng He at precisely this time. It has been argued that 'Thus, any impact of Zheng He in deflecting pepper and other spices away from the Levant and Europe would have taken place mainly between 1411 and 1422. It is only a correlation, of course, but this exogenous Asian supply-side shock seems to offer the most likely explanations for the European pepper price spike in the early fifteenth century.'[6] The steward in an English medieval aristocratic household fretting about the rise in the price of pepper will have been totally unaware of its ultimate causes in Ming imperial policy, in much the same way as thieves today targeting the copper wire of the contemporary British railway system, or the lead on church roofs, will not necessarily be *au courant* with the role of China's economic growth in setting global commodity prices.

An instructive case in this regard might that of sixteenth-century Chinese and Japanese connections with the Latin American world. The flow of silver from the mines of Mexico and Peru to China has long been identified as one of the key drivers of late-Ming economic growth; more recently, scholars have turned their attention to the flow of Chinese goods into the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru.[7] Measurably large communities of Chinese artisans were to be found in Lima and in Mexico City by the early 1600s, and one of the very few loan-words from Japanese into a European language before the late nineteenth century is the Spanish *biombo*, from the Japanese *byōbu* 屏風, for the folding screens which became an important artistic medium in colonial New Spain.[8] Yet there is almost no evidence in the textual records of Chinese awareness of Spain's New World possessions, to match the concern felt for its conquest of the Philippines, which did very much reside within Chinese elite consciousness (and doubtless more firmly

[6] Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, 'Did Vasco da Gama Matter for European Markets?', *Economic History Review*, 62.3 (2009), pp. 655–84 (p. 633); T'ien Ju-kang, 'Chêng Ho's Voyages and the Distribution of Pepper in China', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1981), pp. 186–97.

[7] Dana Leibsohn, 'Made in Mexico, Made in China', in Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (eds), *At the Crossroads: The Arts of Spanish America and Early Global Trade, 1492–1850*. Papers from the 2010 Mayer Symposium (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2012), pp. 11–40.

[8] Sofía Sanabrais, 'From *Byōbu* to *Biombo*: The Transformation of the Japanese Folding Screen in Colonial Mexico', *Art History*, 38.4 (2015), pp. 778–91.

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in Chinese merchant consciousness, though we have less evidence for that).[9] Does the visual culture of the period point to types of awareness of connectivity which the written record occludes? A painting from around 1600 which shows the urban scene of the Ming secondary capital of Nanjing pictures the numerous shop signs of its bustling streets, one of which advertises very clearly, 'All the Goods of Both the Eastern and Western Oceans'.[10] The existence of specialist shops for imported exotica from far away, to match those of the 'Chinamen' of eighteenth-century London, suggests perhaps that some sort of awareness of connectedness through oceanic trade existed in the minds of those on the streets of the Ming capital. These might be elite figures, like the diarist Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635), who records purchases of Japanese lacquer and metalwork (Japanese screens and swords were also popular among the tastemakers of Ming China), as well as what may well have been vessels of Islamic or even Venetian glass ('brought by barbarian ships from the south seas, things transformed by fire in a barbarian country'), and even on one occasion an ostrich egg from distant Africa, which must have involved Portuguese intermediaries at some point.[11] Thus Li's awareness of oceanic geopolitics, especially of the conflict between Dutch and Portuguese over the profits of trade with the Ming, was matched by an exposure to its actual material products. It was not just things but also technology transfers that provided the locus through which systems of connectivity made and remade themselves. This remaking could be a very rapid process. A recent essay by Tonio Andrade makes the convincing case that it was the extreme speed with which Chinese military forces adopted the firearms technology of their Portuguese adversaries that turned an advantage for the latter in an initial 1521 armed clash into a much more level playing field by as early as the following year, when Chinese forces prevailed against their European enemies.[12] The 'Frankish'

[9] Ryan Dominic Crewe, 'Pacific Purgatory: Spanish Dominicans, Chinese Sangleys and the Entanglement of Mission and Commerce in Manila, 1580–1620', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19.4 (2015), pp. 337–65. For an enigmatic reference to a painter who deserves to have a reputation in *Yamolijia* (America), see Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), pp. 177–78.

[10] Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p. 90.

[11] Craig Clunas, 'The Art Market in 17th Century China: The Evidence of the Li Rihua Diary', *Meishushi yu guannianshi*, 1 (2003), pp. 201–23 (pp. 216–17).

[12] Tonio Andrade, 'Cannibals with Cannons: The Sino-Portuguese Clashes of 1521–22 and the Early Chinese Adoption of Western Guns', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19.4 (2015), pp. 311–36.

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guns (*folangji* 佛郎機) which so rapidly became part of the Chinese arsenal were being proposed for deployment on the fortifications of the North against the Mongols as early as 1529, and they rapidly became a standard part of Chinese armaments, their name (like 'China' itself for porcelain in the West) the only reminder of a moment of violent connectedness when systems clashed. Later on in the century, the adoption of New World food crops, most particularly of maize but also of chillies or tomatoes, was an event of equally if not more substantial moment in China's recent history (imagine 'Chinese food' without chillies). But in this instance the names for the things retained no trace of their foreign origins, as they were adopted and naturalized in both new cultural and horticultural contexts.

Material and visual culture may on occasion stand as evidence for the persistence in memory of connections that were no longer active but certainly not forgotten. One striking example in this case might be found in the world of Iranian courtly collecting, in an album of paintings held in the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, in what was once the collection of the Ottoman sultans. The album (Topkapı Palace Museum H. 2154) is known as the 'Bahram Mirza Album', after its first owner Bahram Mirza (1517–1549), brother of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576) of Iran, for whom it was assembled in the years 1554–1555 by the court artist Dust Muhammad (fl. 1531–1564). This album has a good claim to be better known as the first 'world history of art', since in addition to a quantity of works from different regions and different periods of the Islamicate world, it includes one European piece (described as *farangī* or 'Frankish'), and a rather larger number of pictures from China. Prominent among these are two fragments of an early fifteenth-century work showing a mighty steed and its two attendant grooms, painted on silk by an anonymous master of the early Ming imperial court. The picture may have formed part of a diplomatic gift exchange between the Ming emperors of China and the other Eurasian superpower of the day, the Timurid rulers of what are now Iran and Afghanistan. There is a possibility that it is a picture of the very animal given as a gift to the Ming emperor in 1412 by the Timurid aristocrat Sayyed-Ahmad Tarhan, which was then brought back to China by a returning Ming embassy, with a painting of the horse then travelling in its turn to Herat in 1417.[13] An inscription in Persian

[13] This is the surmise in W. M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painter*, Studies and Sources in Islamic Art and Architecture

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above the heads of the grooms, which presumably dates from the picture's mid-sixteenth-century remounting reads, 'These paintings are from the collection of good works by the Chinese masters'.[14] Using the Persian word for 'Chinese'—*khaṭā'ī* (cognate with 'Cathay' in the European languages)—the inscription identifies these as literally the first Chinese paintings, or rather the first paintings to be called 'Chinese'.[15] By the time the Bahram Mirza Album was assembled in the mid-sixteenth century, the regular diplomatic intercourse between Ming and Timurid courts, which had lasted from 1387 to 1504, had come to an end and private trade had slumped accordingly.[16] The Ming and the Iranian Safavids (never mind the Indian Mughals) were undoubtedly much less connected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the album is evidence for a *memory* of connection, at least in Safavid courtly circles, the sense that there was a China, and the products of its skilled painters were real things which might be collected and appraised in the present.

The Ming state's abandonment of the Zheng He voyages, whether on the grounds of unsustainable cost or because the issues of shaky legitimacy that they were designed to address had been successfully overcome, provide one of the great 'What ifs' for contrafactual histories and fictions alike.[17] But it can be demonstrated that Zheng He was never forgotten in China. This was true in the realm of popular culture, where the miraculous exploits of the 'Three Jewel' Eunuch were at the heart of late-Ming novelistic rewritings of recent history.[18] It was also true in the case of that quantity of geographical knowledge (surely once much more than the surviving sparse evidence) which survived the deliberate destruction of official records of the voyages at the hands of the Ming state. Thus both the 'Laud Rutter' and

(Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 53. See too Ralph Kauz, 'Gift Exchange Between Iran, Central Asia, and China Under the Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644', in Linda Komaroff and Sheila Blair (eds), *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011), pp. 115–21.

[14] David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven, Connecticut, and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 295–304.

[15] Craig Clunas, *Chinese Painting and its Audiences* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

[16] Zhang Wende, *Ming yu Tiemuer wangchao guanxishi yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), pp. 266–74.

[17] One engaging fictional example of 'alternative history' is Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Years of Rice and Salt* (New York: Bantam Books, 2002).

[18] Scott W. Gregory, 'Daydreaming Dynasty: *The Eunuch Sanbao's Journeys in the Western Seas* and "Present-Day" Fiction of the Ming', *Ming Studies*, 70 (2014), pp. 10–28.

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the 'Selden Map', unique items coincidentally preserved in Oxford's Bodleian Library, contain evidence for commercially based memories of what Zheng He had done and where he had gone, long after Chinese sea captains themselves had given up sailing further west than Melaka, a point beyond which, after the 1430s, 'private Chinese traders rarely went'.[19] The Selden Map, studied in detail by Timothy Brook who places its creation around 1608 in the Javanese port of Bantam, is unique in that it shows actual sailing routes, stretching from more than one port in China, to the southeast as far as the Moluccas and west to the northern end of the Melaka Strait.[20] The very left edge of the map does identify one port, however, as *Guli* 古里, Calicut or the modern Kozhikode, the crucial nodal point where eastern and western Indian Ocean networks intersected. It had been one of the key destinations of the Zheng He voyages, its rulers (whether willingly or not) entering into the network of courtly gift exchange with the Ming emperors though the exchange of precious objects. In the 'Overall Survey of the Ocean Shores' (*Ying ya sheng lan* 瀛涯勝覽) by Ma Huan 馬歡 (born *circa* 1380), we learn how the king of Calicut: 'wished to send tribute; [so] he took fifty *liang* of fine red gold and ordered the foreign craftsmen to draw it out into gold threads as fine as a hair; these were strung together to form a ribbon, which was made into a jewelled girdle with incrustations of all kinds of precious stones and large pearls ...'[21] By 1608, when the Selden Map was drawn, no Chinese ships of any kind, and certainly not the imposing fleets of the early Ming, ever put in at this still-important point of contact. However, as Brook has shown, a colophon on the map indicates that an awareness of its importance, and its role as a jumping-off point for voyages to destinations much further west, survived at least two

[19] Matthew W. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 48.

[20] Timothy Brook, 'How to Sail from Calicut to Hormuz: Traces of the Zheng He Voyages in Late-Ming Navigational Materials', in Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Yu-ping Luk (eds), *Ming China: Courts and Contacts 1400–1450* (London: British Museum Press, forthcoming). On the Selden map, see http://seldenmap.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/, [accessed 29 September 2015], and Timothy Brook, *Mr Selden's Map of China: Decoding the Secrets of a Vanished Cartographer* (New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

[21] Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores [1433]*, translated and edited by J. V. G. Mills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 146, cited in Craig Clunas, 'Precious Stones and Ming Culture, 1400–1450', in Clunas et al. (eds), *Ming China*.

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centuries after the peak of Ming imperial intervention in the region. The Selden Map colophon gives sailing directions for three regions: for Aden, on the south coast of the Arabian Peninsula; for Dhofar, in modern Oman; and for the port of Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf.[22] Thus a memory of the connection between China and the Persian Gulf does persist in this unique manuscript source, but who is to say that it does not represent what was once a widely distributed body of knowledge, which the enormous Chinese textual record, so heavy in the concerns of certain elites and so deficient in those of others, particularly mercantile ones, simply did not care to preserve and transmit? Given the lack of direct contact between them after the early fifteenth century, were the Indian Ocean and the Sinosphere then totally separate? Or does this persistence of the former in the memory of the latter (and probably vice-versa as well) mean that a connection remains?[23] It seems to come down to the degree to which an awareness can be thought to equate to a significance. No Japanese visitor set foot in China for centuries after the early seventeenth-century Tokugawa state's policy of *sakoku* 鎖国 ('closing the nation'), but surely no-one would argue that this meant that China had ceased to matter in Japan, for it surely did so, not only to Japanese intellectuals who eagerly consumed its imported products, but to a much wider and more diverse audience of urban and aristocratic consumers as well.

The Qing period (1644–1911), and particularly its apogee in the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors from 1662 to 1795, has long been seen as one marked by a courtly cosmopolitanism in which the visual and material cultures of the wider world attested to imagined if not actual connections at the very apex of the imperium. As work proceeds in this area, we get a stronger and stronger sense of the ways in which the old orientalist trope of a China uninterested in the outside world is simply not sustainable. To give just one example of the kind of careful work which is uncovering previously unsuspected connectivities, Lai Yu-chih has demonstrated that recent European innovations in natural history, the fruits of the 'voyages of discovery', were being consumed in China in the century or so after their publication. Subrahmanyam is able to point

[22] For a full translation and discussion, see Brook, 'How to Sail from Calicut to Hormuz'.

[23] The idea of 'Sinosphere' depends on Joshua Vogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere: Sino-Japanese Relations in Space and Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

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to 'extensive borrowing from European knowledge' in the Ottoman context, but this knowledge had in addition a much wider circulation. The cassowary, an impressively large flightless bird found in New Guinea, was first introduced to European audiences when a specimen was brought to the Netherlands in 1597. Another specimen was given to Louis XIV in 1671; the bird died after four years, but was then dissected by the French savant and anatomist Claude Perrault (1613–1688), who published his *Mémoires Pour Servir à l'Histoire Naturelle des Animaux* between 1671 and 1676. It can be demonstrated that this text then provides the immediate source for the 'Imperial Inscription for the Picture of Emo Birds' of 1774, by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1795). In an annotation to one of the poems which the Qing emperor wrote on these natural marvels it states, 'Westerners have an illustrated book which describes this bird's appearance and anatomy in great detail. The King of *Folangji* ordered the creation and circulation of the book . . . ', making it clear (as indeed does the correspondence of the texts themselves) that Perrault's volume was in circulation at the Beijing court.[24] As Lai makes clear, while the Qing imperial court, and in particular its visual culture, 'was beyond doubt a constituent part of the early modern world', this is not to say that this early modern world was one, rather it is the case here that 'we see how information from the globalized world, manifested in the form of the cassowary, was rewritten into a Chinese political narrative; or to look at it from another perspective, how Qianlong viewed the globalized world from within the perspective of the Chinese political rhetoric'.[25]

The incorporative aesthetics (not to speak of the incorporative political ideology) of the Qing imperial formation leads to some extremely eloquent images and objects, which are becoming increasingly central to our understanding of the period and which go way beyond the older formulations of 'China and the West'. The courtly interest in fixed point perspective, mediated by Jesuit members of the imperial court workshops, has long been a topic of art historical study, but more recent scholarship takes it in a very different direction from merely seeing it as a 'Chinese response' to a set of pictorial conventions often assumed (if in an unspoken way) to be in some sense more advanced in the pursuit of mimesis, the ultimate aim of

[24] Lai Yu-chih, 'Images, Knowledge and Empire: Depicting Cassowaries in the Qing Court', *Transcultural Studies*, 1 (2013), pp. 7–100 (p. 24).
[25] Lai, 'Images, Knowledge and Empire', p. 83.

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all picturing in the influential overview of Ernst Gombrich.[26] The sack by British and French troops in 1864 of the Qing 'Summer Palace' destroyed or dispersed a great deal of the imported exotica that were housed there, but there do still survive telling artefacts like the bow case of the Qianlong emperor, this supreme talisman in the construction of 'Manchu' identity being covered in a French silk textile.[27] And there are tantalizing hints that this taste for wrapping objects of great symbolic importance in imported textiles may not have been restricted to the imperial court. A surviving volume of the 'Chunhua Era Rubbings', a treasure of Chinese calligraphy (the most prestigious of all visual cultural practices) which does not have a provenance in the imperial collections, is nevertheless also wrapped in a French eighteenth-century silk.[28] How are we to understand this practice of covering things we might see as essentially 'Manchu' or 'Chinese' in imported fabrics? How widespread was it (the survival rate of textiles is in inverse proportion to their importance in the early modern world in all sorts of contexts)? And finally, do such material presences speak of any sort of 'connection', or are they more properly to be understood as a way of keeping connections at bay? The work of David Porter would certainly see appropriations, in carefully controlled circumstances, of a Chinese aesthetic as being central to constructions of cultural, national, and gender identities in eighteenth-century England.[29] Would we not be justified in seeing the many Chinese appropriations of foreign things and images, for example clocks and mirrors, as being equally constructive? [30]

In terms of the study of China's past, the advantage of Subrahmanyam's injunction to see Asia not as one but as many, while at the same time paying attention to the material and visual traces of

[26] See, most recently, Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003); Kristina Renée Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015); Craig Clunas, *Chinese Painting and its Audiences* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, sixth edition (London: Phaidon, 2002).

[27] Jessica Rawson (ed.), *China: The Three Emperors 1662–1795* (London: The Royal Academy, 2005), p. 167.

[28] *An Siyuan zang shanben beitie xuan* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), p. 40.

[29] David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[30] Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence and European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China* (Anne Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

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connected histories (the plural here is particularly important), is that it directs our attention to those moments of connection which link the Ming and Qing empires to parts of the world other than simply Europe. Subrahmanyam's identification of the thirteenth century as 'a moment when India and China turned their backs on each other', following the failure of the Mongol attempts on the territories of the Delhi sultanate, may be true in the larger sense, but we still need to factor into the account the eighteenth-century Qing understanding of *Hendusitan* 痕都斯坦 as materialized in the 'Hindustan jades' so valued at court and celebrated in the poetry of the Qianlong emperor, who wrote no fewer than 74 poems on this topic from 1768 onwards.[31] As Matthew Mosca has meticulously demonstrated, the Qing emperor's *Hendusitan* was not the same as 'India', and at the conceptual level the degree of confusion was considerable. But at the level of the objects themselves, a story is told of a whole range of poorly documented (or rather totally undocumented) connections with a whole range of areas beyond the Qing frontiers, since the category 'Hindustan jades' can be shown to include objects that were made not only in workshops in the Mughal realms but also in Central Asia and even in the Ottoman empire.[32]

Very recently, a special issue of the journal *Art History* has been given over to the theme of 'Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World', its 13 articles giving a snapshot of some of the innovative scholarship now looking at the ways in which the 'social lives' or 'cultural biographies' of objects and images track a range of different connectivities of the period 1500 to 1800.[33] In one of these articles, Sandy Prita Meier re-examines the taste for Chinese porcelain on the part of the Swahili patricians of coastal east Africa, who from at least the thirteenth century were incorporating these ceramic wares into houses, mosques, and tombs. She cites Robert Finlay's argument

[31] Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy*, p. 92; National Palace Museum, *Catalogue of a Special Exhibition of Hindustan Jade in the National Palace Museum* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1983).

[32] Teng Shu-p'ing, 'On the Eastward Transmission of Islamic-Style Jades During the Ch'ien-lung and Chia-ch'ing Reigns', *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, 37.2 (2004), pp. 25–138.

[33] The explicitly identified methodological roots of much of this work lie in the classic 1986 volume, Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), with its important formulation that, 'even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context' (p. 5).

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that 'the globalization of material culture initially came to pass under Chinese auspices', so pervasive was 'China' on the early modern world market.[34] It is tempting to see the prominence of ceramics as again materializing the memory of direct connections between China and East Africa which had once existed with a brief intensity. But rather than point in the direction of China (in either sense) ushering in a global or even an Asian-centred or an Indian Ocean-centred realm of uniformity, her work draws attention to the specific contingent history of Chinese porcelain in East Africa, and to the removal in the colonial period of the great majority of old specimens of ceramics to European collections, where the African stage in their biography became totally effaced and forgotten through the operations of the museum and the art market. She points to the ways in which ceramics acted not just as markers of an elite status, of the ability to deploy goods from far away in space and time which is such a common feature of wealth and power in so many societies, but also how the accumulation of great quantities of the material 'acted as a tangible presence of mercantile power in Swahili spaces of daily life', manifesting 'mercantile materiality in its "pure" form as a commodity'.[35] This and its companion articles constitute work that goes much further than a simple interest in 'encounters' between relatively undifferentiated entities called 'Asia', 'Africa', and 'the West'. It stands as a materially grounded counterpart to other kinds of integrative history such as the work of Johan Elverskog (cited by Subrahmanyam), which acts as a continuation of the ideas of Joseph Fletcher, and indeed goes even further than Fletcher in its willingness to deconstruct religions as bounded entities.[36]

But this work may not be welcomed everywhere, as those with an investment in the conceptual integrity of 'Islam', 'Buddhism', 'the West', 'China' are certainly willing to loudly proclaim. Subrahmanyam rightly draws our attention to 'the limits of [these] networks and circuits', and reminds us that, 'Not everything was connected and not all the time.' This is undoubtedly true, and salutary, and worth remembering, especially in the present age when historical

[34] Sandy Prita Meier, 'Chinese Porcelain and Muslim Port Cities: Mercantile Materiality in Coastal East Africa', *Art History*, 38.4 (2015), pp. 702–17 (pp. 706–07), citing Robert Finlay, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[35] Meier, Chinese Porcelain and Muslim Port Cities', p. 715.

[36] Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

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connections are deployed very specifically in pursuit of contemporary aims, as with the modern Chinese party-state's deployment of an eirenic, trade-centred picture of the actually rather bellicose Zheng He voyages. In a more nuanced picture, the fact of material persistence, and the study of the way in which an object or image that resulted from a past connection can continue to exist in the physical space as well as in the speech and imagination of those who encounter it, should, if we do it right, be able to play a helpful role.

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