

UNIT 3: GLOBAL EXCHANGE
LESSON 3

Artistic Influence

Learn about the history of porcelain trade along the Silk Road and explore how other cultures appropriated Chinese materials and designs



Arts of China
TEACHING TOOLKIT

Brooklyn Museum

Lesson Overview

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn about the history of Chinese porcelain designed and made for export
- Explore two works of art that show how other cultures tried to copy Chinese blue-and-white porcelain
- Define appropriation and discuss why other cultures might appropriate elements of Chinese art

VOCABULARY

<u>Import</u>	To arrange for materials or goods to travel into a country from another location
<u>Export</u>	To arrange for materials or goods to travel out of a country to another location
<u>Trade</u>	The exchange of materials or goods for other items or for money
<u>Silk Road</u>	A network of mostly land- and some sea-trading routes that stretched across the Asian continent from Japan in the East, westward across Central Asia and the Middle East, finally reaching Italy in the West
<u>Appropriation</u>	Taking something for or adapting it to one's own purposes, usually without right or permission
<u>Porcelain</u>	A hard, fine-grained ceramic, fired at a high temperature in a kiln, that is prized for its durability and translucence

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Pencils
- Paper

INCLUDED RESOURCES

- Silk Road map
- Touch objects (for physical toolkit): porcelain sample, earthenware sample

For the Teacher

Background Information

Chinese ceramics, particularly porcelain, were highly desired and widely traded along the Silk Road. China began actively exporting ceramics by the ninth century, and early examples have been found in locations as far away from it as North Africa. Porcelain, a closely guarded Chinese technical innovation, was especially sought after: it was thinner and lighter than other ceramics, with a bright-white surface that allowed for clearer, more intricate patterns. Exported ceramics generally traveled by sea—they were too heavy and too fragile to be easily transported over land. Chinese ceramics made for other countries were also quite different in style and shape from those made for use in China. Chinese manufacturers produced porcelain geared toward specific markets, and sometimes even for specific clients abroad, imitating forms and incorporating motifs likely to appeal to them.

Porcelain was in high demand, but it was also expensive for countries outside China to import. This prompted artisans in numerous regions to make their own non-porcelain ceramics in the style of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain; such imitations were more affordable but were generally also heavier and less-intricately decorated than Chinese porcelains. However, there was great demand in Europe and America for locally made and relatively inexpensive imitations of this kind. Imported Chinese porcelain pieces remained popular luxury goods in different regions around the globe until the eighteenth century, when Europeans figured out how to make their own porcelain.

Artwork Description

CHINESE PORCELAIN PLATE, 1368–1644

This large, circular plate is approximately 16 inches in diameter and 2 inches high. The bright-white porcelain surface is decorated with a deep-blue pattern: fruit and flowers, including crab apples, peaches, pomegranates, and ginkgo alternate on the outer rim of the plate, while a large stem of peonies scrolls around its center.

CORNELIS DE KEIZER, *CHARGER*, CIRCA 1668, AND *DISH DEPICTING A COILED DRAGON*, LATE 17TH CENTURY

Both Cornelis de Keizer's *Charger* and the Iranian *Dish Depicting a Coiled Dragon* are similar in size to the Chinese porcelain plate, and both are decorated in blue and white. De Keizer's charger is richly ornamented in deep blue with a large jonquil flower at the center, and floral and cross-hatched geometric designs extending outward in two concentric circles. The Iranian dish, painted with cobalt in a lighter, vibrant blue, features at its center a coiled dragon on a floral ground, with additional floral and arabesque motifs around the perimeter.



China. *Plate*, 1368–1644. Porcelain with underglaze, 2¾ × 15½ in. (7 × 39.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Samuel P. Avery, by exchange, 51.85. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)



Cornelis de Keizer. *Charger*, circa 1668. Glazed earthenware, diameter: 14¼ in. (36.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Brooklyn Museum Collection, X258. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

About the Artwork

CHINESE PORCELAIN PLATE, 1368–1644

This plate is a luxury object, produced during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in the imperial porcelain kilns at Jingdezhen, using expensive cobalt imported from Iran. It is decorated with flowers and fruit that have specific meanings in Chinese culture—peaches, for example, symbolize longevity, while peonies represent good fortune. However, it is larger than the plates typically used within China during this period, indicating that this object was made for export to either Southeast Asia or the Middle East. Porcelain made for export often exhibited such hybrid influences, drawing on a combination of forms, imagery, and materials from both China and abroad.



Iran. *Dish Depicting a Coiled Dragon*, late 17th century. Ceramic; stone paste, painted in cobalt blue under a transparent colorless glaze, diameter: 16⅞ in. (41.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Museum Collection Fund, 11.55. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

CORNELIS DE KEIZER, *CHARGER*, CIRCA 1668, AND *DISH DEPICTING A COILED DRAGON*, LATE 17TH CENTURY

Dutch artist Cornelis de Keizer's *Charger* and the Iranian *Dish Depicting a Coiled Dragon* show how artists outside of China appropriated the blue-and-white porcelain style made famous there. Most other regions did not have access to porcelain technology, and imitations, such as these plates, were made from other kinds of ceramic that lacked the bright-white surface and translucence of true porcelain. Instead, the artisans applied a white slip—or a white paint made from clay—all over the surface, then painted blue designs on top of that, before glazing and firing the ceramic. Painting on top of slip made the designs less clear and detailed than those found on Chinese porcelains, and this can be seen in the blurring and dripping of the patterns on each of these dishes.

The motifs on Cornelis de Keizer's charger and the Iranian dish are influenced by Chinese styles as well as their own local tastes. The charger incorporates a jonquil, for example, a type of daffodil popular in parts of Europe in both decorative designs and in perfume. The Iranian plate shows repeated scrolling floral forms around its perimeter in the local style and a central dragon in the Chinese manner. Blue-and-white ceramics by Dutch artists like Cornelis de Keizer were extremely popular in the Netherlands and came to be known as “Delftware.”

Lesson

STEP 1: 5 MINUTES

Introduction

Explain to students that you will be talking about how products and ideas were exchanged between different parts of the world along the Silk Road.

Tell students that you are going to play a game of telephone, and explain the rules. Students should sit in a circle or line, and one person will whisper a phrase into the ear of the person next to them. That person will then whisper the phrase to the person next to them, and so on, until the phrase goes all the way down the line.

As a class, compare the phrase the final person heard to the original phrase. Ask: How did the phrase change? Why do you think it changed?

Explain that ideas can adapt over time as they travel between people and places. When art travels, its meaning can change, and it can also inspire people to create something new.

STEP 2: 15 MINUTES

Artwork Discussion

Show students an image of the Chinese porcelain *plate*, explaining that in real life it is 16 inches—more than a foot—wide, then ask:

- What details do you notice?
- What colors, shapes, and patterns do you see?
- How long do you think this took to make and why?
- Who do you think might have owned this and why?

Explain that this plate is an example of blue-and-white porcelain, a type of ceramic, and that it was made in China for export, or sale, to another country, hundreds of years ago.

Show students the map of the Silk Road, and explain that this plate was made in China to be sold in Southeast Asia or the Middle East. Point out those locations on the map, and ask:

- How do you think they got porcelain like this from China to other parts of the world?
- How long do you think it took?
- What challenges do you think they might have faced while transporting it?



China. *Plate*, 1568–1644. Porcelain with underglaze, 2¾ × 15½ in. (7 × 39.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Samuel P. Avery, by exchange, 51.85. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

Tell students that transporting porcelain was expensive and time-consuming. Ceramics are fragile and heavy. They were shipped on boats, using sea routes, because carrying them on land would be too hard. Since it took a long time to travel by boat, large quantities of porcelain were usually shipped at once.

Explain that porcelain like this was in high demand: it was bright white and lightweight, unlike other kinds of ceramics, and for many centuries only the Chinese knew how to make it.

STEP 3: 25 MINUTES

Activity: Compare/Contrast

Explain to students that you are going to look at examples of artworks from other parts of the world that were inspired by Chinese porcelain. Break them into small groups, and give each group a printout of either Cornelis de Keizer's *Charger* or the Iranian *Dish Depicting a Coiled Dragon*.

Ask one member of the group to take notes while they look at their artwork and discuss:

- How is this artwork similar to the plate we looked at before?
- How is this artwork different from the plate we looked at before?
- What shapes, patterns, and designs do you notice?

Bring the class back together to discuss the two artworks. Start with the Iranian dish and ask students who discussed that work of art to share some of their thoughts with the rest of the class, then do the same with Cornelis de Keizer's charger.

Tell students that artists all over the world copied the style of Chinese porcelains. They used colors and designs similar to those they saw in Chinese art, like the dragon on the Iranian plate. They also included local imagery: point out the scrolling floral designs on the Iranian plate and/or the jonquil on the Dutch charger as examples.

Explain that artists outside of China did not know how to make porcelain until the eighteenth century, so their imitations were usually heavier, less bright, and were decorated with less-detailed designs. If time allows, pass out the porcelain and earthenware samples, and ask students to describe how the materials look different.



Cornelis de Keizer. *Charger*, circa 1668. Glazed earthenware, diameter: 14¼ in. (36.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Brooklyn Museum Collection, X238. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)



Iran. *Dish Depicting a Coiled Dragon*, late 17th century. Ceramic; stone paste, painted in cobalt blue under a transparent colorless glaze, diameter: 16⅞ in. (41.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Museum Collection Fund, 11.53. Creative Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

Ask: Why do you think artists in other parts of the world imitated Chinese porcelain?

Tell students that Chinese porcelain was very expensive, partly because of the time and effort it took to ship it across the ocean. For this reason, artists in other parts of the world *appropriated*, or copied, Chinese styles, to meet local demand at a cheaper price.

If time allows, ask students to think about the advantages and disadvantages of the appropriation of the style of Chinese porcelain by artists in other parts of the world. How might this have affected Chinese artists and merchants, or artists and merchants in other places?

Lesson Extensions

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION—IMPORTS MAP

Ask students to choose three to five things, such as foods they eat, an article of clothing they own, or something in their homes, and ask them to try to find out where those things come from. They can look at a product's label or tags, go on a website, or ask family members for help in trying to figure it out. Once they have found out where their items were imported from, ask them to mark the locations on a map of the world, and hang students' maps in your classroom. See if they notice any things in common between each other's maps!

ARTS CONNECTION—ARTISTIC INFLUENCE

Ask students to brainstorm: What are some things about your family, neighborhood, or community that are special and important to you? Then ask them to design plates of their own, influenced by different parts of their own culture or identity. Students can draw directly onto paper plates, or use a plate-shaped outline on copy paper.

Cover:
China. *Plate*, 1368–1644. Porcelain with underglaze,
2¾ × 15½ in. (7 × 39.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum;
Gift of Samuel P. Avery, by exchange, 51.85. Creative
Commons-BY. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Support for the Arts of China Teaching Toolkit was made possible by the Freeman Foundation.

This resource was written by Michael Reback, Teacher Services Coordinator, with assistance from Joan Cummins, Lisa and Bernard Selz Senior Curator, Asian Art, and the staff and students from P.S. 029 Bardwell, P.S. 321 William Penn, P.S. 015 Patrick F. Daly, and P.S. 032 Samuel Mills Sprole.

The Arts of China Teaching Toolkit initiative is coordinated by Michael Reback, Teacher Services Coordinator, with assistance from Keonna Hendrick, School Programs Manager, and Adjoa Jones de Almeida, Director of Education.