Designed across media and space: The trajectories of the ivory folding fan between Canton and London (1700s-1810s)

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Cover image

Brisé fan made in Canton for the European market, 1700-1720, painted and lacquered ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, silk. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 1976.392. Accessible at: https://collections.mfa.org/objects/125094/brise-fan?ctx=be25a2e2-6a56-4723-857f-bc4498c1bcef&idx=87.

Contents

Introduction

This research project focuses on the fans produced in China for the European markets between 1700-1810s.[1] In particular, it studies ivory folding fans produced in the 1700-1730 (fig.1) and 1770-1810s periods and exported from Canton (today Guangzhou, Southern China) to London, mainly through private trading networks, by the British East India Company's (EIC) officers.

This project aims to frame these fans as 'transcultural objects'[2] and as the site of 'intermedia crossings.'[3] It aims to do so, first, by placing them in the context of a broader network of exchanges from both a local perspective—thus highlighting the collaborative practices between artisans, respectively, in Canton and London—and a global one—thus emphasizing the impact of different trading networks between China, South and Southeast Asia, Europe, and to a minor extent America; second, by contextualizing the making and consumption of fans with those of other commodities produced in Asia and Europe and equally appreciated by the women in 18th century Europe and, from the 1790s, America.

This research argues that Chinese porcelain-wares, Indian chintzes, Italian souvenirs, and Belgian laces, all contributed to shaping the aesthetics of these fans. Emphasizing the mutuality of these artistic exchanges between Asia and Europe remains the larger contribution aimed by this work. This project applies an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of the folding fan, while maintaining a particular attention to its materiality. For this reason, it uses ivory—which was uniquely crafted for the production of the fans and their individual components throughout the 18th century—as an analytical tool to challenge the definition of geographic and media boundaries in the making of early modern material culture, and in particular of fans.

The very history of the folding fan, and of fans more generally, is one revealing multiple layers of exchange between Asia and Europe. Unfortunately, a comprehensive and historically sound version of this story remains to be written. Most scholars argue that the folding fan was first developed in Japan, whence they were then introduced to China during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE).[4] Only in the 15th century the production of folding fans in China reached the level of that of Japan.[5] There is scholarly consensus that folding fans were first introduced to Europe from East Asia through commercial routes established by the Portuguese in the 16th century.[6] The first pictorial evidence of a European noble woman holding a folding fan, possibly made in Japan, dates to 1550. It is a portrait of Caterina de Medici by Jean Clouet.[7] By the end of the 16th century, foldable fans were already produced in Europe, yet it was only during the 17th century

[1] I employ here the plural form to acknowledge that it is impossible conceptualize the 18th century European market as a cohesive and coherent system. However, despite the localized patterns of consumption, it is possible to trace some broadly shared aesthetic trends across different areas, such as England, France, and Italy. Therefore, while this research focuses on the commercial and artistic exchanges between Canton and London, it aims to place these two commercial hubs in context with other equally relevant at the time, both in Asia and Europe.

[2] Grasskamp and Juneja, *EurAsian Matters*.

[3] Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 122.

[4] For a comprehensive analysis on the introduction of the folding fan in early modern China from the perspective of the intra-Asia exchanges see Finnane, 'Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors'. See also Alexander, *Fans*, 2002, 7; Ellerton, 'The Lure of the Fan'; Li, 'Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics'.

[5] Li, 'Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics', 28.

[6] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 20; Blum, 'Fans from the Collection', 3; Alexander, *Fans*, 2002, 9; Ellerton, 'The Lure of the Fan', 327; Huang, 'Craft Fan: The Witness of Cultural Exchanges between China and Western Countries', 57.

[7] The painting is currently preserved at the museum of Genova's Palazzo Reale, in Italy. See at: http://palazzorealegenova.beniculturali.it/opera/ritratto-di-caterina-de-medici-duchessa-dorleans-poi-regina-di-francia/. According to Armstrong (1974, 23) and Alexander (2002, 9) it was Caterina de Medici who brought feather and folding fans from Italy to France, thus popularizing fans as integral part of the courtly fashion across Europe. However, they do not provide any visual nor written source in support of their argument.

that fan production improved thanks to the consolidation of the trade routes between Asia, Africa, and Europe—which facilitated the sharing of the skills and materials for the production of fans.[8] Up until this point, the history of the import of folding fans from Asia to Europe remains obscure, and its investigation is beyond the scope of this project.

By the end of the 17th century, France, England, Italy, and the Netherlands had well-developed fan-making industries, although folding fans were still being imported from East Asia.[9] However, it was only with the establishment of a stable commercial network between England and China—the system that will be defined as 'Canton trade'—that a whole new market arose.[10] Folding fans started being produced in Canton specifically to cater to the European taste. Along with finished fans, the British EIC's servants traded plain fans to be later painted in Europe and ivory carved sticks and guards[11]—likely to counter-balance the increasing discontent of British fan-makers with foreign competition.[12] Although the literature on fans generically refers to the EIC's fan trade, it does not provide any detailed information (such as quantities, modalities, preferences, and prices). Illingworth[13] mentions only two pieces of historical evidence from the archives of the British EIC dating from 1614 and 1699. These sources have been then referenced in later specialist works on fans, without any further elaboration.

Furthermore, the specialist literature has generally overlooked the fact that already from the beginning of the 18th century, the EIC did not officially trade fans. Rather, folding fans were purchased through networks of private traders and often as objects of gift. Depending on their rank, the EIC's commanders and officers were entitled to the 'private trade privilege'—defined as 'concession trade'—as an integration to their salary.[14] Detailed lists were therefore compiled with specifications on the types and quantities of commodities that could be exchanged. Once acquired, fans were then shipped—often in bulk—mainly by the Company's supercargoes, especially in the first phase, to London and there sold, via the India House and private merchants, to shop-keepers.[15] Both the 'exotica' dealers and fan-makers sold fans through retail and wholesale channels, as it can be evinced by the trade cards of the period.[16]

By looking at portraits, vignettes, engravings, and advertisings from the 17th and 18th century we know that folding fans were considered extremely fashionable accessories for western women, but it remains difficult to understand how these specific fans imported from Canton were consumed. Indeed, if we exclude the satirical, and exclusively male, perspectives on the 18th century women fashion practices, there is no written nor pictorial evidence which directly refers to them. How can we then retrieve the social and private meanings attached to these fans, or, borrowing from Berger Hochstrasser, how can we investigate 'the "feeling value" of these objects within the […] *mentalité* of the time?'[17] This research project aims to explore the trajectories, or 'social lives', of the folding fan between Canton and London through the concept of 'intermedia crossings' with the support of material, visual, and textual sources. Through the interdisciplinary approach of global design history, this project investigates how the shapes, decorative motifs, colour

[8] Blum, 'Fans from the Collection', 3; Ellerton, 'The Lure of the Fan', 327–28.
[9] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 20; Blum, 'Fans from the Collection', 3–4; Alexander, *Fans*, 2002, 14.
[10] For a detailed historical analysis of the Canton trade system, see, for instance: Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*; Van Dyke, *Canton Trade, The*; Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*; Van Dyke and Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822*; Kessler, Lee, and Menning, *The European Canton Trade 1723*.
[11] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 29. See more on this in Chapter III.
[12] On the British fan-makers' discontent towards the fans imported from China, see Illingworth, 47; Huang, 'Craft Fan: The Witness of Cultural Exchanges between China and Western Countries', 58.
[13] *Fans from the East*, 47.
[14] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 108–10; Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)'; Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century'.
[15] In the past twenty years the theme of consumption has been extensively studied. For literature focusing on the 18th century, see, for instance, Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*; Dyer, 'Shopping and the Senses'; Coquery, 'Selling India and China in Eighteenth-Century Paris'; Riello, *Back in Fashion*, 69–79. Studies on luxury have been equally relevant in contextualizing the consumption of goods imported from Asia in Europe. See, among others, Berg, 'In Pursuit of Luxury'; McNeil and Riello, *Luxury*. A particularly interesting work contextualizing the use of imported goods from the EIC within the domestic space is Finn and Smith, *The East India Company at Home 1757-1857*.
[16] On the development of the trade cards in the 18th century, see Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century'; Hubbard, 'Trade Cards in 18th-Century Consumer Culture'; Riello, *Back in Fashion*, 69–79.
[17] *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, 7.

palettes, and sensory and visual feelings of these folding fans resulted from a broader system of intermedia interactions, which shaped the multi-sensory material reality of 18th century women in the West.

Research question(s)

This research project aims to address the following research question.

How can we broaden our understating of the transcultural exchanges of aesthetics and materials of folding fans, especially those made of ivory, between and within Asia (with a focus on Canton) and Europe (with a focus on London)?

To unpack this overarching research question, my inquiries into the transculturality and 'intermedia crossings' embodied by the ivory folding fan revolve around the following issues throughout the core chapters.

1. Challenging media and geographical boundaries:
   - To what extent was the innovative interpretation of foreign patterns of taste on the part of the Cantonese fan-makers impacted by other mediums—such as porcelain wares, textiles (in particular Indian chintzes), ivory carved objects (such as toilet boxes)—mediated by the representatives of the British EIC through private networks of trade?
   - To what extent this creative process was driven by the consumers' demand for specific materials and commodities associated with luxury—connected to unique sensory feelings and considered desirable in 18th century Europe (such as Italian Grand Tour souvenirs and Belgian laces)?
   - How did this process result from the collaborative practices between artisans in, respectively, Canton and London, and, from a transcultural perspective, between Canton and Europe?
2. Highlighting the multiple functions and patterns of appreciation:
   - How did the channel of acquisition of these fans shaped their meanings throughout their trajectories between Canton and London, and, later, in Europe?
   - How did the 'intermedial crossings' enhance their role as things in-between the female body and the furnished interior space?
   - To what extent the appreciation of these ivory fans was interwoven with the commercial and political ambitions of Britain throughout the 18th century?

Fans in the literature

From the very moment I started my research on fans, I realized that fans consumed in Europe, until recently, have rarely been considered in academic writing as an independent subject. For this reason, the work of specialists, such as curators and collectors, constitutes an extremely relevant resource for the development of this project. Since the majority of these texts—which are often exhibition catalogues and guides for collectors—dates back to the end of the 1970s and the 1980s, some of their perspectives are inevitably outdated today.[18] While these experts have greatly promoted the advancement of technical knowledge on fans, they have rarely framed their research within a solid sociohistorical and theoretical context. And yet, despite some limitations, in the studying of material culture, and in particular luxury and semi-luxury commodities, it is still useful to combine academic approaches with specialist literature. The latter, despite its frequent historical 'oversights', often contributes to sharing technical knowledge on categories of objects too often neglected by academic researchers.

Recent scholarship, mostly informed by a broader trend of applying sociological and anthropological perspectives to the study of material culture, has contributed to expanding the narrative around fans produced for both the Euro-American and East Asian markets. Fans have therefore been discussed as

[18] An important exception is the recent catalogue of the exhibition organized by the Guangdong Museum in 2018 Guangdong Museum, *Elegant & Vogue: Chinese Export Fans in the 18th-20th Centuries*.

embodiments of gendered social relations,[19] travel cultures,[20] personal and gestural language,[21] tributary gift-giving practices,[22] and more. Yet, few attempts have been done to study the fan through an inter-disciplinary methodology. The multi-essays volume edited by Bucher and Volmert[23] remains the only extensive academic work entirely dedicated to the study of fans that brings in approaches from different fields, thus opening the path to a possible inter-media approach to the study of the fan—as proved by the essays of Fleischmann-Heck[24] and Lam.[25]

Challenging the geographical boundaries and hierarchies

The works by Finnane,[26] Bucher and Volmert,[27] and Li[28] have greatly contributed to broaden our understanding of the fan as a social product. However, despite the fan's travels from East to West in the early modern period, quite paradoxically, a distinction between fans depending on their site of production has been largely maintained. The work by Li[29] remains the only one to focus on the transculturality of the fan, although only within East Asia. As it is often the case, together with the establishment of geographic categories in the study of fans, a hierarchy has been established.

Fans produced in Asia for domestic consumption are considered as a proper genre of the 'fine arts', and therefore of higher artistic value. For instance, within academic research folding and fixed-screen fans produced and consumed in China have been studied along with other portable mediums—such as hanging scrolls and folding screens.[30] Within specialist literature the fans produced in Japan for the domestic market have been more extensively explored than those made in China, Korea, South and Southeast Asia. In sharp contrast, fans produced and consumed in Europe from the 16th century onwards have been simply perceived as fashion accessories. Among those produced in the West, the French, Italian, and British fans have been granted a privileged position, as these regions were the major centres of production of fans. Quite surprisingly, the Portuguese and Spanish fan-making tradition has been largely overlooked in the literature, with the relevant exception of the research by Pedroso,[31] who has highlighted the interactions between Macau and Lisbon in the production of the fans.

This sort of hierarchical organization of fans dates to the very beginning of research on fans in the West. One of the earliest western studies on the subject is *History of the Fan* by Rhead[32]—a sort of encyclopaedic account on the fans produced by the different 'cultures.' Rather interestingly, the format of this work has been maintained in almost all the following monographs on the topic.[33] The so-called 'Western fans'—the interest of which remain limited to the costume and fashion historians—are, at best, mostly associated with gendered communicative practices and travel cultures, or simply to femininity and vanity. And yet, *precisely*

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[19] Finnane, 'Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors'.
[20] Lindeman, 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans'; Kitson, 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf'; Volmert, 'Ruins to Take Away'.
[21] Biger, 'Vrais et Faux Langages de l'éventail'. Quite surprisingly, an interesting perspective comes from Media studies. In his study, Davies draws from Huhtamo's idea according to which hand fans 'form a continuity of, if not the technologies, then the ways that people have thought about and used and reacted to personal devices'. By defining the hand-fan as 'haptic and optic' object, Davies explores how the fan has been a communicative and memory device across cultures in the early modern period. Both in Asia and Europe the hand-fan itself is thus understood as 'a gestural language' on one hand through the display of images, texts, and materials, on the other by reproducing the 'complexity of the hand'. See Davies, 'Fanology'.
[22] Li, 'Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics'.
[23] *European Fans in the 17th and 18th Centuries*.
[24] 'Fächer Des 18. Jahrhunderts Mit Spitzendekor: Modische Accessoires Und Transferobjekte'.
[25] 'From Ephemeral to Eternal: Unfolding Early Modern "Fashion" for Asia'.
[26] 'Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors'.
[27] *European Fans in the 17th and 18th Centuries*.
[28] 'Useless Tribute, Desirable Exotics'.
[29] [NO_PRINTED_FORM]
[30] See, for instance Tsang and Museum, *More Than Keeping Cool*; Finnane, 'Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors'; Clunas, *Elegant Debts*..
[31] *Brisas de leques, Book about antique fans*; Pedroso, 'Portugal, Bragança e Leques'; 'Portugal, Bragança e Leques Parte II'.
[32] *History of the Fan*.
[33] See Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*; Hart and Taylor, *Fans*; Alexander, *Fans*, 2002.

because European fans have been only understood as fashion accessories, it has to be pointed out that specialist literature on the topic has greatly contributed to highlighting the connections between fans and the other so-called 'decorative arts'—such as silk, lace, and porcelain. This research project argues that these cross-media interactions defined the folding fans as desirable objects and were not always confined to defined geographical boundaries.

Within this framework, the place of the fans produced for the export market remains even more ambiguous. A group of scholars that has been less worried with the 'purity' of style, and artistic value, is that of those interested in 'export art'. Especially those focusing on the 18th century and on the trade between China and the West, have rarely omitted fans from their analysis.[34] These works tend to contextualize the production of fans with that of commodities in general, although often without exhaustingly exploring the different phases of the fan-production itself.

Although this project does not aim to challenge the assumption of a distinct social appreciation of fans in Asia and Europe in the early modern period, as, in broad terms, fans have been indeed understood markedly differently from the mid-16th century onwards (and yet, local distinctions should also be acknowledged, in order to prevent the risk of essentialising cultures), I would argue that this categorization tends to overshadow: 1) the areas of overlapping between the two regions of production (thus overlooking the fans produced in Asia specifically for the export markets; the fact that fan sticks were often produced in China and then mounted in Europe, and the work of independent fan painters and western artists who combined different pictorial traditions[35]); 2) the shared patterns of consumption of fans during some specific time periods (such as the use of fans within ritual contexts both in Asia and Europe). Finally, while the folding fan, more specifically, has been mostly associated with men in East Asia and women in the West, often its actual use was more fluid.[36] Indeed, if in China folding fans were at times used by women in specific contexts, there is equally visual evidence that 17th century Jesuits were represented with Chinese folding fans[37] (fig. 2), and 18th century tradesmen and courtesans may use them (see Chapter I). While investigating the transcultural history of the fan at large is beyond the scope of this project, it aims, however, to start a new conversation on the folding fan in the long 18th century, by framing ivory as analytical tool to explore the exchanges between Asia and Europe on multiple levels.

Research methodology: Fans as portable and foldable objects

This research looks at the folding fan as a *thing*. In line with the research in material culture studies, it therefore maintains a sociological and gender perspective to the reading of objects. While this research is heavily indebted to the research at the foundation of the field of material culture studies, such as the work of Appadurai,[38] Brown,[39] and Latour,[40] it aims to further explore new possible theoretical frameworks by combining these approaches with those of global design history. By employing an interdisciplinary methodology, this project aims to highlight the multiple layers of meaning embodied in the folding fan as a *portable and foldable object*. Both these features of the folding fan (the portability and the foldability) contributed in making it an ambiguous object, shifting between different identities and categories. Indeed,

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[34] See, for instance, Jourdain, *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century*; Museum and Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design*; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*. In particular, the work by Museum and Clunas remains relevant as it distinguishes different economic-political phases of the relationship between China and the European market throughout the 18th century and their respective impact on the production of commodities destined to be exported. Although it focuses mainly on porcelainware, it remains valid for many aspects of the fan trade of that period. In particular, it distinguishes the official and private channels of trade, thus highlighting the relevance of the latter in shaping the demand for specific design elements.

[35] See, for instance, a fan painted by the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/51770?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&when=A.D.+1600-1800&where=China&ft=fan&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=2.

[36] On the fluidity of gender patterns in the long 18th century see Germann and Strobel, *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe*.

[37] Alexander even argues that folding fans were introduced in Italy by the Christian church, as it was the Pope who had easy accessibility to the goods that the missionaries collected. See: Alexander, *Fans*, 9.

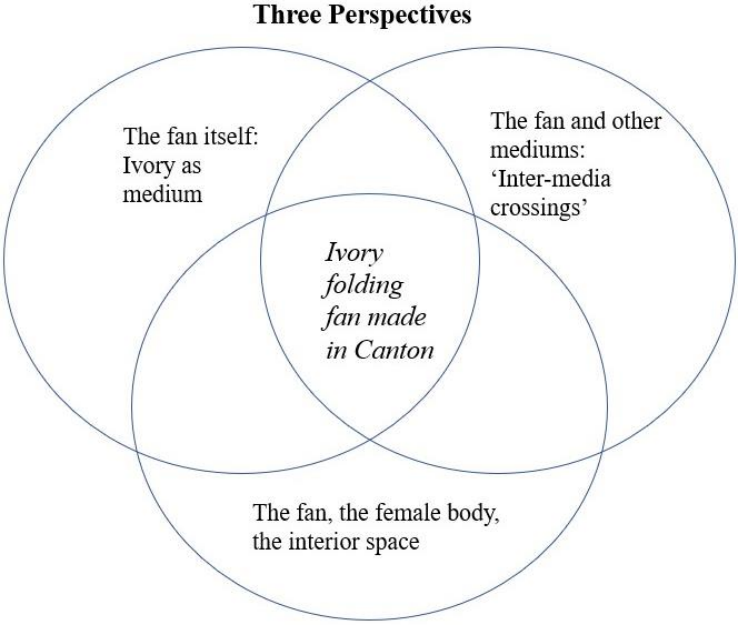
[38] *The Social Life of Things*.

[39] 'Thing Theory'.

[40] *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*.

not only these folding fans remain *things in-between* geographical entities (neither 'Chinese' neither 'European'), but also functions, being partly ivory objects and souvenirs of China and partly fashion accessories and communicative devices as extensions of the hand.

To investigate how the ambiguous identity of these folding fans shaped their very desirability, the collected fans will be studied from three main perspectives (graph 1). The first aims to conceptualize the fan as an object constituted by ivory sticks, guards (together forming the 'mount'), and leaves (fig. 3) drawing from Wu's[41] 'screen-theory'. It therefore investigates how ivory shifted between different identities as medium—namely as painting surface, as framing mount, and finally as carved, three-dimensional object. The second perspective highlights how the craftsmanship and design of ivory of these folding fans participated to a broader system of exchanges of aesthetics, textures, and colour palettes across different mediums. I will define these exchanges as 'intermedia crossings'—a concept borrowed and further expanded from Ko.[42] Finally, the third perspective, investigates how the folding fan interconnected the female dressed body to the decorated interior space. The folding fan mediated between the body and the domestic space both as a site of these 'intermedia crossings', which interwoven the folding fan in the material world of the fashion and furnishing practices of the period, and as portable and foldable objects, at times hold in hand as accessory to the dress, at times displayed into cabinets together with other 'exotica'.



Graph 1: The three perspectives for the study of the ivory folding fan

[41] *The Double Screen*, 9–28.
[42] *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 122.

	Ivory as medium	Intermedia crossings	The fan, the body, the space
1.	Painted ivory	Chintzes, porcelain	Dress, room decoration
2.	Ivory as mount	Watercolour, Souvenirs	Display, decoration
3.	Carved ivory	Lace	Ruffs, collars, room decoration

Table 1: Each perspective will highlight how ivory functioned as different medium (painting surface, mount, and carved object), how the craftmanship and functionality of ivory was interwoven with the consumption of and the sensory feelings attached to other luxury commodities (textiles, souvenirs, laces), and finally how at a consumption level transformed the fan into an object in-between body and space.

The fan itself: Ivory sticks, guards, and mounts

This project looks at the folding fan a three-dimensional object and it aims to highlight how its *materiality*, here consisting of ivory, shifts between multiple 'ambiguous identities' [43]. The first perspective of this research conceptualizes ivory—which defines the very structure of the fan as a material thing—as painting surface, as mount with a framing function, and as carved object itself, with a three-dimensional sculptural texture (table 1).

Studying ivory entails the acknowledgment of its problematic sourcing—a particularly sensitive issue within the contemporary context of environmental degradation. Therefore, I believe it could be productive to contextualize ivory through my secondary sources, on one hand, by highlighting its global trade and the Chinese and European carving processes, while on the other, by fostering a broader reflection on the manipulation of organic, animal-derived materials at large, such as mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell, and their attached meanings in Europe in the period.[44] I would argue that not only ivory used in the making of folding fans shaped, through different functions, the meanings attached to the fans themselves, but also was crafted in response to the sensory and intimate feelings associated to specific textures in the 18th century.

In *The Double Screen*, Wu[45] argues that a painting should be understood as 'an image-bearing object *and* as a pictorial image'. The object at the centre of his analysis is the screen, which he explores from different angles – namely the screen as 'an object, a painting medium, a pictorial representation, or all three'. In its first two qualifications, the screen 'occupies a three-dimensional space and divides space' and 'provides an

[43] Wu, *The Double Screen*, 9.

[44] Ivory as material, and its trade, has been quite overlooked in the scholarship of material culture studies. Some sources investigate the use of ivory in the Medieval period Seaver, 'Desirable Teeth'., others the manipulation of ivory in the Chinese context Shih, 'Unknown Transcultural Objects: Turned Ivory Works by the European Rose Enigne Lathe in the Eighteenth-Century Qing Court'.. However, a broader analysis of the ivory trade and its problematics in the early modern period is still missing—if we exclude the overview by Chaiklin, 'Ivory in World History - Early Modern Trade in Context'. Investigating the ivory trade is beyond the scope of this project, however, it remains important to highlight its connection with the power relations embedded in the sourcing of animal-derived materials at large. Among others, a major source of inspiration is Mullins, Machado, and Christensen, *Pearls, People, and Power*. At the same time, an interesting analysis of the appreciation of animal-derived materials from a fashion perspective, can be found, for instance, in Bendall, 'Bodies of Whalebone, Wood, Metal and Cloth'; Bendall, *Shaping Femininity*. Finally, contemporary approaches developed by some museums and cultural programmes linking ethnographic practices with human-nature interactions could offer new perspectives on the subject, such as the workshop of Research Centre for Material Culture *Earth Matters in the Museum* (2017) and the ongoing *Taking Care Project* promoted by the European Commission.

[45] *The Double Screen*, 9.

ideal surface.'[46] The fan itself, as pointed by Wu,[47] is a portable screen for the face, and therefore corresponds to the three dimensions above listed.[48] In this project, however, I will not investigate its function as image, rather I will consider fans only in light of their materiality. Yet, if we consider the ivory components of the fan, I would argue that it could be meaningful to focus on the tensions between its multiple functions, from painting surface, to framing mount, and to object itself, once carved.

The first group of fans studied in this research project has been made between the 1700s and 1730s. In these brisé fans, ivory functions as painting surface. Their polished ivory sticks have been painted with auspicious symbols from the Chinese artistic repertoire and European-inspired subjects. The ivory surface is skilfully smoothened to become the background for the painted subjects. Although some parts are carved in open-work, ornament and colours are the elements that make these fans desirable and 'pleasurable.'[49]

In the second group of folding fans, which have been produced from the 1760s until 1810s, ivory transitions to its framing function. These folding fans are made of painted paper leaves and ivory mounts. As argued by Mathilde Semal,[50] the mounts defined whether a fan was a luxury object in Europe. Folding fans could function as status markers only through the use of extremely precious and rare materials. Even more interestingly, Semal[51] establishes a relation between the subjects painted on the leaves and the materials selected for the mounts. According to her, the painted scenes associated with the highest status, such as those related to mythological, pastoral, and romantic themes, were often mounted with mother-of-pearl or ivory, as these materials were associated with luxury and exoticism. By contrast, wood mounts were almost exclusively used for the making of fans with leaves with political references.[52] Mounts and leaves together conveyed the social meaning of the fan. Ivory, in this transitional phase, does not function as painting medium, rather it is carved and structured to emphasize and resonates the meanings expressed by the painted subjects on the leaf. By conceptualizing ivory as 'frame' I aim to bridge fans produced respectively in Canton and in Italy as devices to preserve private and collective memory. More in detail, in this category I will study fans attached to travel and trade cultures, emphasizing the function of the fan as souvenir, drawing from the work of Stewart[53] on the 'language of longing and nostalgia'.

Finally, the last group of fans *brisé* fans from the late 18th century entirely made of carved ivory sticks. Ivory itself is here the focus of skills and design. Ivory becomes sculptural, plastic. The fan becomes ivory object as much as ivory becomes the three-dimensional object itself. The technical skills employed to the craft of ivory define the interactions between the female face and the fan. As argued by Wu[54] the 'screen has a 'face' and back' and 'qualifies these two areas. […] the screen transforms *space* into *places* that are definable, manageable, and obtainable.' Similarly, the techniques employed for carving ivory as impalpable and lace-like, 'qualify' how the woman's face was ambiguously concealed behind these ivory sticks.

The fan & other mediums: 'Intermedia crossings'

The first theme theorizes the ivory's shifts between its function as surface, frame, and object. This second, interlaced layer of analysis, aims to address the following question: how did other luxury commodities

[46] Wu, 9.
[47] *The Double Screen*.
[48] However, he only studies the round (fixed) fan.
[49] On the relevance of studying material culture in light of the sensory pleasure that we, as humans, derive from it, see Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*.
[50] 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)', 247.
[51] 247.
[52] See, for instance, a folding fan mounted on wood celebrating the British victory in the Battle of Culloden, today part of the Victoria and Albert's collection (accession number T.205-1959). For an in-depth analysis on political fans, see: Chalus, 'Fanning the Flames'.
[53] *On Longing*.
[54] *The Double Screen*, 10–11.

circulating between China and Europe in the 18th century have been source of creativity for the crafting and the consumption of the ivory fans?

According to Hay,[55] the 'surfacescapes' of luxury objects generate an interaction between us and the space by letting us derive an experience of pleasure. Although Hay[56] formulated this theory to discuss uniquely Ming and Qing objects destined to the domestic, high-status market, I would argue that the experience of pleasure through luxury (and semi luxury) objects remains a fundamental analytical tool for the studying of early modern material culture at large. This is particularly true in the 18th century European context, when the craving for new commodities involving a multi-sensory experience of body and space reached an unprecedented peak.[57] Drawing from Hay,[58] who argues that this pleasure was derived by the interconnections between the surfaces of the displayed objects, this project aims to highlight how fans participated to and in some cases were shaped by the aesthetic, sensory world created by the textiles, porcelainwares, toilet boxes, and souvenirs displayed by wealthy women connected to the China trade through family relations in the 18th century. This display was equally enacted by bodily and space decoration practices.

This project does not only argue that patterns travelled between different commodities. Many studies have already rightfully and widely illustrated how the taste for exotic in early modern Europe create new imaginaries of the 'Orient'.[59] In particular, research on Chinoiserie have highlighted how Chinese motifs were re-packaged in Europe along with others from India, Southeast Asia, and Africa and introduced across all media to create a sense of 'exoticism and fantasy'.[60]

This study will reflect on themes of exoticism and Chinoiserie mainly from two perspectives of embedded power relations: 1) 'the invention of exoticism' as 'generic sameness' on one side and as a process of definition of an 'European audience' as theorized by Schmidt[61] in particular with regard to the study of space and geography as represented on the fans; 2) Chinoiserie as gendered and subversive exercise of taste in the 18th century.[62] However, the reflection on gender will not only look at systems of taste and appreciation in the period, but also actual gendered differentiation in production, exchange, and consumption of fans, thought the analysis of 18th century visual sources and advertising evidence, such as trade cards and shop bills and inventories.[63] At the same time, I will look at literary sources and satirical prints referring to fans and chinoiserie, yet without maintaining this male perspective as central.[64] Looking at satirical, dismissive, denigrating sources on the import of Asian goods in Europe remains a valid tool of analysis in highlighting the power relations embedded in objects, but, I would argue, tends to overshadow, once again, the voiceless women's perspectives and appreciation of these objects.

While this study largely benefits from research in Chinoiserie and post-coloniality, it also aims to take a different direction and to consider more broadly how texture, colours combination, and sensory feelings of

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[55] *Sensuous Surfaces*, 67–68.
[56] *Sensuous Surfaces*.
[57] Riello, *Back in Fashion*, 65, 69–70.
[58] *Sensuous Surfaces*, 67–68.
[59] Discussing art objects produced in the early modern period in Asia for the western market entails an engagement with scholarship in postcolonial studies and notions of exoticism, while also acknowledging the peculiar position of China in the postcolonial dual system of colonizer/colonized. See, for instance, Yang, *Performing China*; Markley, 'China and the English Enlightenment'; Powers, 'Introduction'.
[60] There is extensive scholarship on Chinoiserie and, more broadly, the imagination of China in 18th century England. See, for instance, Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*; Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*; Jenkins, *A Taste for China*; Markley, 'China and the English Enlightenment'.
[61] *Inventing Exoticism*.
[62] Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty'; Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*; Cheang, 'Fashion, Chinoiserie and Modernism', 2015.
[63] The British Museum has digitalized part of its collection of 18th century trade cards. From these cards, it is evinced that British fan makers often sold their own creations together with fans imported from China. See more in Chapter I.
[64] Markley, 'China and the English Enlightenment', 520–21.

a particular luxury object were mimicked, re-adapted, and re-imagined to design the folding fans and its ivory components. It also aims to move beyond the concept of Chinoiserie, by placing in a mutual relation of exchange objects imported from Asia and made for the European markets, with those produced for the local consumption in China and Europe, thus challenging the perception of a unilateral artistic exchange. For instance, fans designed for the local markets were at times exported, as well as those made for export were in some contexts incorporated into local fashion practices. Often, between these two categories of fans there were shared technical skills and design solutions. From a broader perspective, this research aims to look at how the folding fans were crafted in 18th century Canton and then appreciated through the lenses of contemporary design thinking. In particular, it argues that the idea of cross-media fertilization is now as in the past a fundamental element of the creative process for the production and consumption of material culture.

The concept of 'intermedia crossings' is particularly fitting here.Ko[65] formulates it to study a Suzhou inkstone from the Tianjin Museum with a 'paired swallows' motif and to highlight how the artist possibly was 'informed by an embroiderer's sensitivities' in the rendering of the feathers. According to her, by using 'texture and tactility' to replace the embroiderer's use of colour, the carver transferred the embroidery's feeling into the stone, thus creating what she defines as an 'intermedia crossing.'[66] Not only the swallow's motif was transferred, but the very tactile and visual experience of the embroidery was reproduced. This practice is also studied by Hay,[67] who argues that 'surfaces may also think with us by evoking decorative surfaces in different materials. In Ming–Qing China the most literal way of accomplishing this kind of internal complexity was by straightforwardly representing another surface […]. The connections could also be made allusively through resonances.' If we get back to the above mentioned functions of ivory, namely as painting surface, mount, and object, it is interesting to note how in each group the fan's surface has been permeated by 'resonances' with other objects of luxury and desire in the period, such as Indian chintzes, Chinese versions of *imari*-wares, Italian Grand Tour fans, and Belgian laces. By establishing material and aesthetic connections between these objects, I aim to frame the folding fan as a product of cross-cultural and inter-media interactions.

Studying the fan as the site of 'intermedia crossings' entails the acknowledgement of both the aesthetic reality where fans were consumed and the creative dimension that produced them. The fans crafted in Canton and Europe were similarly the result of 'collaborative practices' on both local and transcultural levels. Folding fans made in Canton for the European markets benefitted from a larger network of connections between artisans, such as ivory carvers and watercolourists. This was particularly true in Canton, which was a crucial harbour of international trade and site of production. Similarly, fans made in Europe always resulted from the collaboration of musical instrument makers and fan-makers. Even more importantly, fans' components were often made in Canton and then shipped to Europe, where they were at times painted, or mounted. These practices led to a cross-fertilization between different artistic mediums, which cannot simply be dismissed as copying or imitative practices.

These aesthetic connections between different mediums, both within the context of creation and that of consumption, can be framed through the increasingly growing area of 'global design history'. This theory aims to challenge the relation between design and modernism, by expanding the concept of design thinking to the creation of objects of material culture across cultures and communities.[68] This new direction aims to include in design history local and indigenous practices of object-making, beyond those emerged within European, and especially British, modernism. This project aims to participate in this conversation on a new definition of design thinking, therefore advocating for the recognition of 'multiple modernities', by exploring how the folding fans made in Canton were indeed shaped and contributed in the making of other commodities on a comprehensive aesthetic level—therefore including not only the migration of

[65] Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 120.
[66] Ko, 121–22.
[67] *Sensuous Surfaces*, 80.
[68] Adamson, Riello, and Teasley, *Global Design History*; Huppatz, 'Globalizing Design History and Global Design History'; Margolin, *World History of Design*.

iconographies, but more broadly sensibilities and pleasurable experiences derived from objects. Design thinking entails foremost crossing material boundaries in the creative process and the collaboration between different sets of skills and technologies. Drawing from Adamson, Riello, and Teasley,[69] I aim to use 'global design history as methodology' to establish 'connections' and 'entanglements.'

The folding fan, the female body, and the interior space

The final perspective functions as an analytical tool to connect the appreciation of these early modern objects—fans, textiles, porcelain-ware—with the women who consumed them and the space where they experienced them. Ivory fans, through visual and tactile resonances to other precious objects from Asia and Europe—equally imagined for dressing the body and decorating the space—interweaved the women with their material possessions. Studying the folding fans in light of the 'inter-media crossings' that they embodied entails the establishment of sensory connections between them and the commodities used to dress the body and to decorate the interior space, in a historical context when both the body and the domestic environment became increasingly gendered. I would argue that to fully conceptualize the folding fan as desirable object in the 18th century, it is essential to contextualize it in the broader trend of the 18th century taste, that was often transgressing the boundaries of bodily and space practices of decoration. Here paintings from the period that show how fans were held and in which contexts become an essential source for the unfolding of the project. Fans were often objects *in-between*.

First, as explored through the first perspective, the ways in which ivory was crafted for the making of the fan established references with commodities designed for the body (textiles for dress, laces for the sleeves) and for the interior space (textiles for curtains, watercolour paintings, souvenirs, toilet boxes). Second, because they were appreciated as fashion accessories and body ornaments, but also as souvenirs and Chinese ivory objects. They were therefore shifting between multiple identities. They could be screen for the face, but also objects of interior decoration, when laid over a tea table, displayed in a cabinet, or framed and hung over the wall—especially by the end of the century. Precisely because moving across space and body they were material devices establishing aesthetic connections between the female body and the space.

Finally, the folding fan visually and materially connected the female body to the social and gendered experience of the interior space because it was a portable 'screen.'[70] Movement and temporality played a crucial role in shaping the gendered communicative practices attached to fans. The tension between the act of revealing and hiding the image that the fan represented was defined by the temporality and mechanics proper of the fan which can be folded. Unlike the round fan, which could only cover and uncover the face through defined moments, the folding fan, precisely because foldable, qualified the sequence of moments between the act of revealing and concealing a woman's face as ambiguous, thus becoming a means to express intimacy, eroticism, and modesty.

Methods of data gathering

As primary sources I look at ivory folding fans (mainly *brisé*) and other commodities produced between 1700s and 1810s as well as visual and, to a minor extent, textual sources from the same period. I selected this temporal framework because by including folding fans from the 1810s would contribute to render a more comprehensive picture of the Cantonese ivory fan-making production for the European market. Although at first I aimed to include in my research also lacquered *brisé* fans and silver and golden paper folding fans made in Canton for the export markets, I realized that it was necessarily to limit my scope, both because the subject would have been too broad for a project of this size, and because ivory objects are, more generally, a neglected topic in material culture scholarship. However, ivory folding fans were extensively purchased, gifted, and exchanged in the 18th century and I believe they deserved to be investigated as independent subject.

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[69] *Global Design History*.
[70] Wu, *The Double Screen*, 9.

At the beginning of this project, in September 2020, I hoped to have the opportunity to study some fans' collections in person, and to directly engage with their materiality. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak this has been almost impossible. I therefore looked at the digital collections of several museums in Europe and the US, which has provided me with extensive sources to work with.[71] However, I had the opportunity to carry on some 'hands-on' research at the Volkenkunde Museum (Leiden, The Netherlands), and to see some ivory folding fans made in Canton for the European market and dating from the late 18th century. This experience was particularly relevant when writing Chapter IV, as only by touching the fans' surface and looking at how light filtered through the carving, I could really explore the connections between lace and fans.

I mainly focus on ivory fans made in China for export, but I also consider fans made in Europe to situate them within the broader context of European fan-consumption. In order to discuss the transfer of patterns and colour associations between these fans and other mediums designed for the European market in Asia, I look at contemporary porcelain wares, textiles (Indian chintzes and Belgian laces), and ivory objects, from different digital collections.[72] To investigate how these folding fans were appreciated, and which social meanings were attributed to these, I looked at different visual sources from the period, such as portraits of the European elites, engravings, and advertising images. All the digitalized visual and material sources have been organized with Tropy (fig. 4), a data visualization program suggested for the management of research images by Harvard University.[73]

While it was my ambition to extensively integrate my material and visual sources with textual evidence from the British EIC's inventories—now part of the India Office Records and part of the digitized collection of the British Library—I had to face the difficulty of working with a text recognition with an extremely low accuracy, thus making the archival research particularly challenging. For this reason, and due to the limited time and resources available for this research project, the textual sources from the archives are only a partial integration to the material and visual evidence, leaving the investigation of the fan-trade between Canton and London a challenging and fascinating topic for future research. Nonetheless, the inclusion of 'concession trade' lists, together with trade cards of the British fan-makers, greatly contributed to retrieving the 'social lives' of these ivory fans.

Structure of the thesis

My research of the ivory folding fan is divided into four core chapters.

Chapter I places the fans in the context of the commercial exchanges between China and England in the 18th century. It investigates the trajectories of these folding fans, from Canton to London, while also integrating this analysis with the impact of other commercial centres on the production and consumption of fans. This chapter is organized into three main sections. The first looks at the 'lives' of the fans in Canton. It briefly sketches the historical background of the 'Canton trade', with a particular focus on the different forms of private trade that took place within this system. It argues that these different channels played a role in the production and the export of the fans. The second section highlights the fans' trajectories once arrived in Europe. It explores in which contexts and how they were advertised. The final section focuses on the analysis of the visual sources to speculate the social meanings attached to the fans. While there is no

[71] In particular, I will look at the digital fan collections of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York); Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, Massachusetts); LACMA; Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Victoria and Albert Museum (London); The British Museum (London); The Royal Collection Trust (London); The Fan Museum (London); Geneve's Musées d'Art et d'Histoire (Switzerland); the Museo Nacional des Artes Decorativas (Madrid), Museo del Prado (Madrid); Rijksmuseum (Amesterdam); and Volkenkunde Museum (Leiden). In addition to these collections, I looked at the fan catalogue Guangdong Museum, *Elegant & Vogue: Chinese Export Fans in the 18th-20th Centuries*. The curator of the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales (Lorient) has kindly submitted me the list of folding fans made in Canton for the French market part of their collection—which has been an important source for the unfolding of this research.

[72] See note 72.

[73] More information available at: https://guides.library.harvard.edu/c.php?g=833532&p=5990005.

visual evidence directly representing the fans imported from China, paintings and engravings can still illustrate how folding fans functioned as communicative devices in the West throughout the 18th century.

In the three following chapters I conduct an in-depth analysis of the collected fans.

Chapter II focuses on the folding fans produced between 1700 and 1730 and depicting European scenes combined with Chinese traditional designs. By highlighting the function of ivory as painting surface, this chapter interlaces the fans' iconographic and colour scheme with those of the Indian Chintzes and Chinese versions of *imari*-ware (for an overview, see fig. 4).

Chapter III focuses on fans from the second half of the 18th century. In particular, it looks at fans depicting the 'harbour scene' and interconnects this peculiar trope with that of the 'veduta' depicted on the Italian Grand Tour's fans. It discusses the use of ivory mounts as framing device for the topographical representations of the leaf and it aims, by doing so, to bridge the fans produced in Italy with those made in Canton—as both were functioning as 'souvenirs'.

Finally, Chapter IV studies fans made of carved ivory and produced between 1780s and 1810s. It explores how ivory's three-dimensionality becomes the focus of the display of skills as well as the driving factor fostering the appreciation of these fans. It interlaces the production and consumption of these fans with the sensibility for lace as luxury material in the second half of the 18th century.

Chapter I
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The trajectories of the folding fan in the 18th century: A broader perspective

Throughout the 18th century a large amount of folding fans and fans components (sticks and guards) have been imported, both as objects of trade and gifts, from Canton to Britain, France, Portugal, The Netherlands, and later in the century to America.[74] The fan trade took place in this context of increasingly intensified commercial relations between Europe and China, which lead, in turn, to the development of what has been defined as a 'taste for China', and of the aesthetic trend of Chinoiserie (especially from the second half of the century). Both fascination and anxieties towards 'China' as imaginative and geographical entity, as well as Chinese objects were strongly impacted by the political agenda of the European powers, and in particular, of Britain.[75]

The production of commodities in China destined to the western export markets evolved throughout the unfolding of the century. [76] By looking at fans it can be noted that already from the 1700s-1720s Chinese artisans produced objects expressly directed to the European consumers, and this reached the highest degree of on-demand by the end of the 18th century, also interacting with the production of Chinoiserie objects in Europe itself. Within this picture, the mediating role of the EIC officers should not be underestimated. To a certain extent, the imperial ambitions of Britain over India played a role in the production of these ivory fans, and it would be misleading to overlook the commercial system that sustained the ivory craftmanship industry in Canton itself. Indeed, the interactions between India, China, and Europe were far from being linear and one-directional.

At the same time, the appreciation of these folding fans happened in conjunction with the rising consumerism and development of fashion practices, closer to what we identify today as such.[77] Looking at the local forms of production, channels of sale, and consumption patterns remain a crucial methodological approach within the field of global history. Folding fans were objects produced through collaborative practices between ateliers in Canton as in London, and sold through multiple channels, which greatly contributed to shaping the appreciation of these fans, as well as the meanings attached to them. At the same time, looking at the consumption practices in London shows that folding fans were important markers of status and fashion knowledge, in a context that saw in customization the major expression of taste and self-fashioning.[78]

1.1 The multiple channels of the 'Canton Trade': Ivory and fans across Asia

The commercial system defined as 'Canton trade' was a highly complex combination of trading networks interconnecting different hubs in Asia and Europe. Multiple actors from across the globe contributed to

[74] As it will be discussed in Chapter III, the earliest representation of the Empress of China that survives today is depicted on the leaf of a fan made in Canton (fig. 3.1) and dates to 1784—the date of the first voyage of the ship. However, it should be noted here that although formal trade between America and China started at that time, goods were smuggled to North America throughout the whole century. At the same time, it would be interesting to further investigate the trajectories of the fans made in Canton towards New Spain (1535-1821)—as the portraits of the elites show that folding fans were indeed objects of desire, always part of the fashion attire of the colonists in the 18th century. See, for instance these two portraits at: https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/pinxit-mexici; https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/2827.

[75] On this topic more broadly, see: Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600-1730*; Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*; Cheang, 'Fashion, Chinoiserie and Modernism', 2015.

[76] Museum and Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design*.

[77] Riello, *Back in Fashion*, 65.

[78] Riello, 84–86. See more on the process of customization in the 18th century in Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*.

this system, both as individuals and as trading companies. The commodities that circulated between Asia and Europe varied throughout the time in quantities and values. For instance, by looking at the shifting flows in the fan-trade it can be highlighted how new customers, needs, and patterns of trade developed throughout the 18th century.[79] Even more importantly, focusing on the fan-trade between Canton and London, in particular, shows how this system was often far from being a linear, A-to-B exchange. Instead, this system entailed the participation of artisans and traders engaging with a broader and more complex exchange between Asia and the West.[80] Within this system, the British political and colonial agenda played a crucial role in re-defining the trading balances throughout the whole 18th century through the role of the EIC.

Fans from Canton were exported in large quantities already from the late 17th century. For instance, there is historical record that in 1699 the British EIC has ordered 20,000 lacquered fans.[81] However, only during the earliest phase of the Canton trade, before the beginning of the 18th century, fans were among the commodities officially exported by the EIC. Already from the beginning of the 18th century fans were purchased (although still in bulk) by private traders who would ship them to England through the Company's ships.[82] Between the 1700s and 1720s fans along with 'woven silks, raw silk, tea, chinaware, lacquered ware of all types, […] musk, and quicksilver'[83] were among the most important commodities exported through private networks, only for becoming less relevant in quantities throughout the second half of the century.

Two forms of private trade existed, the first being the 'permission trade,' and the second the 'country trade.' 'Permission trade' consisted in an allowance granted by the Company to its supercargoes, captains, and officers as an integration to their salary. The goods that could have been exported through the permission trade were highly regulated through a series of lists, stating the value and the quantities of items that each trader could export depending on his rank. Fans were included in such lists, often grouped with 'Chinese pictures' and 'lacquered screens'.[84] For instance, a list from 1788 regulates that 20 tons of 'China ware, cabinets, China Fans and pictures, China images, Japan ware, lacquered ware and screens'—could be imported on ships traveling from China to London, proportionally distributed depending on the rank of the officer.[85] Unfortunately, from these lists it is impossible to identify which type of fans were imported, as they are all grouped under the generic voice of 'fans'.

The private trade of fans, as all other goods, was far from being stable, depending on the restrictions imposed by the Company each year.[86] The 1700-1701's inventory of the private trade of the Wentworth ship shows that William Johnson and John Hillar, those with the highest rank, exported together to London 16,876 fans, while the surgeon, Peter Hambly, exported 984.[87] Already in 1714-1715, the Hester's register of private trade shows that the first supercargo, Philip Middleton, exported only 5,950 fans, and the second supercargo, James Naish, 465.[88] However in 1789, the total amount of exported fans reached 146,000 pieces,

[79] Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)'.
[80] Hanser, 'British Private Traders between India and China'.
[81] A record from the East India Company Letter Book states that '20,000 fans of the finest and richest lacquered sticks.' Original reference India Office Archives, East India Company Letter Book X f 207 ff. From Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 47.
[82] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 108.
[83] Pritchard, 222.
[84] Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century', 158.
[85] East India Company, *An Abstract of the Orders and Regulations of the Honourable Court of Directors of the East-India Company, and of Other Documents ... By Charles Cartwright, ... To Which Is Added, as an Appendix, Copies of the Papers Usually given by the Company to the Commanders and Officers*, lxviii. To see the differences in quantities of fans allowed to be exported depending on the officer's rank, see Appendix IX and X in Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)', 247–48.
[86] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 225.
[87] See Appendix IV in Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)', 239–41.
[88] See Appendix V in Pritchard, 240–41.

while already in 1792 they are not in the inventories anymore.[89] This does not mean that fans completely stopped to arrive in Europe and America, rather they likely have been purchased in Canton in much smaller quantities and as objects of gift.

By contrast, the 'country trade' system operated in parallel but at times also clashed with the EIC official regulations—while it was supported by Qing regulations.[90] In a nutshell, it consisted in a triangular system involving wealthy British traders based in India—mostly high-rank EIC officers—who invested their wealth in China either through the investment of money, either by financing the trade in goods from South and Southeast Asia towards Canton. In both cases, these transactions were mediated by British intermediates (bankers and brokers).[91] When money were invested, the interest profit would have been returned to the investors in South Asia, while the profit from the cargoes of goods from South and Southeast Asia would have been secured in the Canton Treasure of the EIC to support, for instance, the tea trade. After one year the investors, once back in London, could get the money invested back as remittances. The 'country trade' increasingly grew from the 1750s and reached its peak in the 1760s and 1770s.[92]

This remains an over-simplified schema of the whole system, as in reality it required an extensive network of traders and artisans, therefore involving, for instance, Chinese Hongs, South and Southeast Asian merchants providing the goods to the British merchants, and a great amount of intermediaries providing raw materials inland.[93] One of the major commercial hubs in South Asia was Bombay, as it was strategically interconnected with the Malabar Coast, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea.[94] The goods imported to China from South and Southeast Asia were a combination of finished products (e.g. palampores and Indian cottons), but especially raw materials, such as pearl, tortoiseshell, and ivory.[95] The fans produced in Canton, made of 'tortoiseshell, sandalwood, mother-of-pearl, gold and silver filigree, and lacquerware'[96] mostly benefitted from these wider commercial routes. For instance, tortoiseshell was imported from Southeast Asia, mother-of-pearl from the Persian Gulf and the Indian archipelago, and sandalwood from Malabar Coast and Timor.[97] By contrast, most of the goods exported from China to Europe by the private traders were finished goods such as the fans, while the official EIC trade mostly consisted in the export of goods in bulk such as silk and tea.[98]

Ivory fans produced in Canton resulted from 'multiple, overlapping spheres of economic interactions'[99] that interconnected goods and people across South and Southeast Asia, China, and Europe. It appears that the very industry of ivory carvings in Canton was fostered already from 1600 when the Portuguese started to import there ivory from Goa—a market later controlled by the Dutch and the British traders.[100] The country trade allowed the import of ivory of the highest quality in Canton. The most valuable type of ivory for instance, would be imported from South and Southeast Asia[101], rather than Africa, and was often used

[89] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 224.
[90] Hanser, 'British Private Traders between India and China', 10.
[91] Hanser, 7.
[92] Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century', 158.
[93] Although British and Americans have been considered a majority of private traders due to the flags, which may be misleading. see van dyke, ambiguous faces
[94] Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century', 161.
[95] Hanser, 'British Private Traders between India and China', 10–11. Original ref. from the archives BL: IOR G/12/67, 1779.11.30
[96] Bai, 'Cantonese Export Brisé Fans in the Qing Dynasty', 26.
[97] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 303.
[98] Museum and Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design*, 22.
[99] Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks and Metropolitan Connections in the Eighteenth Century', 164.
[100] Museum and Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design*, 95–96; Huang, 'Craft Fan: The Witness of Cultural Exchanges between China and Western Countries', 57.
[101] It seems that the ivory from Burma and Thailand was the one exported in larger quantities, especially in the beginning of the 19th century. From Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 155; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 303.

for, among others, the making of fans in Canton.[102] Once that the raw materials arrived in Guangzhou through different channels, they were sold to the Chinese Hongs, who would then had them delivered to the workshops.[103] Finished fans would be then exported to Europe in bulk mainly as part of the officers' allowance (permission trade) and as individual gifts for the traders' families—especially from the 1780s onwards, when private commissions started to increase as can be seen by the fans with the incised monograms (see more on this in Chapter IV). This period coincided with the historical data highlighting the decline in the fan-trade through private traders.[104]

These 'bespoke' fans would be of the highest quality. Although very little is known about the shopping experiences of the western traders in Canton in the early 18th century, we have later sources that show that fan workshops and shops were clustered in few roads and the production of a single folding fan was often divided across specialised workshops owned by the same family (taking care, respectively, of the fan frames production; fan ribs carving; cattle bones cleaning and processing; mounting and assembling).[105] However, carved ivory *brisé* fans as those studied in Chapter IV would likely be made in one workshop specialised in carvings in general of multiple materials. At the beginning of the 19th century the quality and the price of ivory *brisé* fans could largely vary from 5 to 20 piastres.[106] At the early 18th century exchange rate between piastres and British currency, 1 piastre was equivalent to 4 shillings and 4 pence (i.e. a quarter of a pound).[107] The most expensive fan, costing 20 piastres (equivalent to 5 pounds today), would be worth today 301, 35 pounds—roughly corresponding at that time to more then one month of wages for a skilled tradesman.[108] This shows that the most expensive quality of fans were objects of luxury, only accessible to a small circle of elites.

1.2 Selling and shopping fans in London and beyond

Although shifting in quantities and values, fans of different shapes and material were extensively imported into Europe, and especially in London, and from there exported again to the major commercial centres across Europe. The fans imported as part of the 'permission trade' system were first stored in the EIC's warehouse and sold through the Company's public auctions.[109] From 1784 fans were directly shipped to America as well, where a similar auction system applied. A list from 1832 from an auction in New York shows the great variety of fans imported into North America, including '600 cut and painted bone fans [?ivory]; […] 144 palm leaf Fans, ivory handles and tassels; […] 114 ivory mounted Rice fans, in silk boxes.'[110] However, it seems that private traders succeeded in selling objects also directly to the shopkeepers in London, thus bypassing the official system arranged for commodities shipped in bulk.[111]

The fans of the highest quality, which were often custom-made, were mostly acquired as gifts for the family members and functioned as special souvenirs of the 'Cantonese experience'. By contrast, the majority of fans that were sold directly to the shopkeepers in London were more affordable. Even ivory fans could at

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[102] Semal, 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)', 241.
[103] Mok, 'Trading with Traders: The Wonders of Cantonese Shopkeepers', 65.
[104] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 222.
[105] Bai, 'Cantonese Export Brisé Fans in the Qing Dynasty', 29.
[106] Mok, 'Trading with Traders: The Wonders of Cantonese Shopkeepers', 75. Mok quotes as reference Sainte-Croix, *Voyage commercial et politique aux Indes Orientales, aux Iles Philippines, a la Chine, avec des notions sur la Cochinchine et le Tonquin, pendant les années 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 et 1807, contenant* ..., 191.
[107] I calculated these equivalences based on the following calculator, based on 1709 data: http://www.pierre-marteau.com/currency/converter/eng-spa.html. There is an interval of about a century between the data on which the calculator is based and the period I am interested in. It is therefore possible that my estimates are biased downward.
[108] These estimates are based on the Bank of England's long-term historical inflation calculator which is available at: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator. The equivalences to wage data are from The National Archives currency converter, available at: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result.
[109] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 126.
[110] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 323.
[111] Museum and Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design*, 22.

times be increasingly cheaper and accessible to a broader sector of consumers.[112] Folding fans of different types and imported from Canton were equally sold by exotica dealers (fig. 1.1) together with other 'oriental objects and curiosities' and by fan-makers as 'India and China fans.'[113]

The British trade cards from the mid-18th century show how fans imported from Canton were often sold together with those produced domestically and that fan-makers were an interesting example of women entrepreneurship (fig. 1.2).[114] In particular, the example of the Esther Sleepe and her sister Martha is worth mentioning here. Daughters of Charles Burney, member of the Musicians' Company in London, and a fan-maker, they sold 'all sorts of India and English fans' as we can evince from their trade card (fig. 1.2), both at wholesale and retail level.[115] 'India fans' were indeed fans imported from China by the EIC's traders. The shop of the Sleepe sisters was located in one of the most fashionable streets in London,[116] which suggests that around the mid-18th century, high-quality fans imported from China were still considered highly desirable and in vogue.

The relationship between European fan-makers and the import of fans from China was not always positive. As it happened with the import of other commodities (especially cottons chintzes from South Asia), the fear of foreign competition leaded to the rise of anxieties towards the 'China and India fans.' The British fan-makers' discontent reached its peak in 1752, when the fan-makers from Bristol who voiced their concerns towards the competition of Chinese fans through a petition.[117] Although this discontent did not result in a formal regulation of the fan-trade, it fostered the increase in import of the fan-components (sticks and guards) that could be later be assembled in the European workshops (see Chapter III). In the trade card of the exotica dealer 'Charles Vere At The Indian King' (fig. 1.1 left) clearly mentions the 'fan mounts' among the items sold at both wholesale and retail level.

Already in 1678, Louis IV enhanced a protectionist act towards the French fan makers. He organised the fan-making industry into two *corps de metiers,* namely that of the *matitres eventaillistes* (fan-makers) and that of the *tabletier* (small objects makers) or the *lutier* (music instrument makers).[118] The latter would be in charge of the finishing of the raw materials such as ivory, mother-of-pearl, and tortoiseshell (sourced across the Indian Ocean), while the first would be in charge of painting the fan leaves and assembling the final product. The entire European fan-making production was similarly arranged. However, especially in carving techniques, the European *tabletiers* and *lutiers* could not match the quality of the Chinese carvings, which contributed too on the import of carved ivory components from China.

Anxieties towards the Asian goods and the general trend of Chinoiserie were shared across different sectors of the 18th century British society. Associated with the feminine, the superficial and frivolous fans were object of satire and male discontent. In 1725, Daniel Defoe, in *A New Voyage Round the World*, argued against the import of 'China ware, Coffee, Tea, Japan Works, Pictures, Fan, [and] Skreens' as they were 'injurious towards our own [British] Manufacturers.'[119] This discontent, as argued by Markley[120] was 'a moralistic condemnation both of the East India Company's trade and the cultural aesthetic that […] were refashioning

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[112] See Smith, 'Production, Purchase, Dispossession, Recirculation: Anglo- Indian Ivory Furniture in the British Country House', 69. Smith brings as evidence of the fact that a broader section of society had access to small ivory commodities, such as fans and snuffboxes, their appearance in the lost property notices from the *Post Boy*, 8–10 April 1712; *Daily Courant* (London) 18 February 1713; *Daily Courant* (London), 1 April 1713.

[113] Coquery, 'Selling India and China in Eighteenth-Century Paris', 234. Further research should be done to investigate whether those sold through the first channel would be more expensive and precious.

[114] On the fan-making industry as form of female entrepreneurship, see: Hassard, 'Martha Gamble, Sarah Ashton and Their Contemporaries'.

[115] Erickson, 'Esther Sleepe, Fan-Maker, and Her Family', 16–17.

[116] Erickson, 20.

[117] Huang, 'Craft Fan: The Witness of Cultural Exchanges between China and Western Countries', 58.

[118] Semal, 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)', 240–41.

[119] Markley, 'China and the English Enlightenment', 521. Original quote from Defoe, *A New Voyage Round the World*, 130–31.

[120] Markley, 'China and the English Enlightenment', 521.

English taste and social identity.' This new taste, expressed through the desire for Chinese objects and translated into a new imaginary of China in the form of the Chinoiserie aesthetic movement, was articulated by women as an increasingly empowered social group.[121]

Object of anxieties were not only women and the new taste for Chinoiserie, but also the social spaces through which they formulated their new identities. Shopping and the consumerism of clothes now was not limited anymore to a very small circle of elites. It was in the 18th century that emerged western fashion as we define it today, and it was soon satirised as form of 'female materialism.'[122] In reality, shopping created new spaces for societal participation of women and interaction between women, as well as between women and new objects. Through senses, that were fostered by the act of browsing, women could gain new types of knowledge.[123] The knowledge that the customers acquired through the consumption and selection of fans was shaped by the context where these where bought. Through visual sources and the trade cards, it can be evinced that folding fans were to be found in different shopping's contexts and in a wide variety of displays—which became increasingly rich and sophisticated throughout the 18th century. In a print by Abraham Bosse dated c. 1637 (fig. 1.4) that represented la Galerie du Palais (Paris), fans were displayed with collars and gloves; in a painted fan leaf later transformed into a painting[124] (fig. 1.5) fans were among the exotic goods (together with porcelainware and lacquered cabinets) that were object of desire in 18th century Europe; while in a porcelain piece (fig. 1.6) dated 1765 and representing a shop of the Venetian Fair, fans were sold together with textiles and hats. Folding fans at large could be found across a great variety of stores and ateliers, and, consequently, multiple and overlapping meanings were attached to them.

1.3 Folding fans and gestural language

As it has been already pointed out, Chinoiserie at large has been extensively underestimate as aesthetic movement *because* strongly connected to the women's taste.[125] The increasing crave for Chinese goods has been targeted as superfluous, licentious, and vicious. It remains therefore extremely difficult to retrieve the private and collective meanings that 18th century European women attributed to the fans more specifically. However, we know that folding fans were objects of 'performance,'[126] communicative devices to display family's networks linked to the China trade and to express, more broadly, high-status. Especially the custom-made fans, which were mostly gifts, embodied and reconstructed (often revised, and idealised) memories of China. Visual representations of the 18th century may help us shed some light on the possible communication patterns transmitted when folding fans were displayed in specific contexts and manners. Because folding fans were *portable and foldable objects*, the meanings attached to them can partly be revealed by looking at their relation with the body, and their implement of gestural languages.

When looking at visual sources, it appears evident that the folding fan was to be hold in every important portrait already from the early 16th century onwards. Throughout the 18thcentury, royal and high-aristocratic female figures would always hold a fan in their hand. In most cases, the fan would be the only object—the only marker of distinction in addition to dress and jewels—to be displayed. Rarely a book or a glove, would be hold in the other free hand.[127] If in the 16th century fans were at times represented unfolded,[128] in the

[121] Cheang, 'Fashion, Chinoiserie and Modernism', 2015; Sloboda, 'Surface Contact'.
[122] Dyer, 'Shopping and the Senses', 697–98.
[123] Dyer, 698.
[124] For an extensive analysis of this fan leaf, later transformed into painting, see Lam, 'From Ephemeral to Eternal: Unfolding Early Modern "Fashion" for Asia'.
[125] Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty'; Sloboda, *Chinoiserie*; Cheang, 'Fashion, Chinoiserie and Modernism', 2015.
[126] Rado, 'The Lady's Fan', 196.
[127] See, for instance, the fan and the glove at: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-817; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bacciarelli_Marie_Christine_1766.jpg . See also this painting by Arthur Devis, where the glove and the fan are associated: https://art.famsf.org/arthur-devis/alicia-maria-carpenter-countess-egremont-194010. For the fan with the book, see a portrait of Louise-Marie de France by Drouais in 1763.
[128] See, for instance, Agatha Bas portrait by Rembrant (1641) https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/53/collection/405352/agatha-bas-1611-1658; Velasquez's Lady with fan from the Wallace Collection (London); Peter Danckerts de Rij (1642)

18th century the folding fan was often held completely or partially closed; and in royal portrait was often held vertically (fig. 1.7) to express authority and rigor.[129] Within this context, the folding fan does not appear as a 'frivolous' or 'vanity' object, rather an luxury item to display power. In official portraits fans were almost never depicted unfolded or close to the face. By contrast, fans appear always unfolded and close to the face when held by a man (fig. 1.8), or by a woman depicted in satirical prints (fig.1.3) or in portraits that aim to emphasize the seductive attitude of the painted subject (1.9).

Folding fans appear in a wide group of different scenes and setting of 18th century life, which points out to their transversal appeal and use. Surprisingly missing in every visual representation of the dressing-room and the tea-drinking scenes, they were often fully unfolded in the theatrical and musical contexts (fig. 1.10), the romantic (1.11) and shopping (fig.1.12) scenes, and ambiguous spaces such as the Venice Ridotto (fig. 1.13). By contrast, in official family portraits (fig. 1.14) the fans would be folded and held discretely, which may confirm that fans were represented close to the face or fully unfolded as an explicit expression of femininity or theatricality.

While very few ivory fans can be identified in the visual representations,[130] these paintings are relevant sources in highlighting how the folding fans were more broadly used in different social contexts by western women as communicative devices. Their foldability was a crucial component in the fan's potentiality to articulate one's gestural languages. The lack of representation of fans imported from China, and those made of ivory in particular, however, should not be taken as proof of their decrease in consumption—as historical records shows that they were still imported in great quantities throughout the 18th century. While in 16th and 17th century portraits folding fans imported from East Asia were new objects, worth of being represented as status objects,[131] by the 18th century they were not a rarity anymore, and although at times they were of very high quality, it would have been unnecessary to represent them in detail in the portraits. Folding fans, as the examples show, became generically depicted, leaving the skills expression for the representation of new, fashionable items, such as lace and metal-thread embroideries.

1.4 Things in-between

Historical record shows that folding fans from Canton resulted from a broad network of exchanges between Asia and Europe, therefore expanding previous narratives categorising fans as 'Chinese' either 'European'. Not only they were 'transcultural objects', fluidly transgressing geographical labels, but also knowledge and ideas about these folding fans were crossing epistemological boundaries. If in the concession lists they were grouped with objects associated with the furnishing of the interior space (lacquered screens and cabinets, porcelain), in Canton ivory fans could be purchased in ivory carvers workshops as well as fan-makers workshops. Once in London, as can be seen from the trade cards, they were sold along with 'English Fans' by the fan-makers, either by exotica dealers together with 'Chinaware', 'India tea tables', 'Teas & chocolate'

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Danckers_de_Rij_Anne_Catherine_Constance_Vasa_with_a_fan.jpg; Giovanni Battista Moroni)1560-78) https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-3036

[129] See more examples: Queen Anne's engraving (1702) (https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/10/collection/603355/anne); Queen Sophia Dorothea von Preussen by George Wenzelaus von Knobelsdorff (before 1753) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georg_Wenzelaus_von_Knobelsdorff;_Queen_Sophia_-_Dorothea_von_Preussen.jpg; Isabella, Countess of Hertford by Alexander Rosalin (1765) https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/699678; Princess Elizabeth Albertina by Allan Ramsey (1769) https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/22/collection/403553/princess-elizabeth-albertina-duchess-of-mecklenburg-strelitz-1713-61.

[130] See, for instance, fig. 4.20, and the portrait of Maria van Bueren (https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1657)

[131] See, for instance, these portraits from the 16th and 17th centuries at: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-3036; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Danckers_de_Rij_Anne_Catherine_Constance_Vasa_with_a_fan.jpg; https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q18578811#/media/File:Cecilia_Renata_(1611-1644),_Archduchess_of_Austria,_Queen_of_Poland_-_Nationalmuseum_-_16086.tif.

(fig. 1.1). In both cases, folding fans from Canton became 'India fans' (figs 1.1, 1.2), pointing to a generic exotic that was increasingly permeating the material reality of the 18th century elites.

The gendered trajectories of these fans were equally ambiguous and fluid. Commissioned, purchased, and collected by men in Canton, who at times gifted them to their female family members, at times sold them in bulk to the British shopkeepers, the fans in London were not just bought, but also sold by women—both at retail and wholesale level, as shown by Esther Sleepe's case (fig. 1.2). At the same time, visual representations shows that men too, likely only in specific contexts, were still using folding fans in the 18th century (1.8). Furthermore, as women were not allowed in Canton, the negotiations on design variations were carried out exclusively by men, who, in many cases in parallel to their commercial interests, wanted to collect objects that recalled their memories in Asia. Fans were therefore at the same time, souvenirs of their own journey, which could then be a device for recalling these experiences once back home (see Chapter III). Once in London, the ivory folding fan would have been therefore both an accessory used by women, who acquired through them knowledge of unknown places to them and displayed social belonging to the circle of the China trade, while at the same time, it would have likely been also an object of display (of Chinese skills, of trading networks) for men within the domestic space.

Finally, visual representations constitute an important source in re-framing the use of the folding fan as status markers for women and how it was integrated in their gestural language and self-representation. Arugably, they were not only objects of vanity and frivolity, rather they could be associated with power and status display. However, to grasp in greater detail why these specific ivory fans from Canton may have been objects of desire, only the existent fans themselves can reveal the meanings that were attached to them. In the next three chapters, I will investigate how these under-represented fans were sites of design adaptions that were shaped by cross-cultural experimentations and domestication of exotic visual and material content (on both sides). These processes contributed to making the ivory folding fan both an object of desire, memory, knowledge-production, and appropriation.

Chapter II
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Painted ivory: Domesticizing the 'exotic' (1700s-1730s)

This chapter focuses on the *brisé* ivory fans produced in Canton between the 1700s and the 1730s. These fans remain today the only evidence of fan-making in Canton for the European markets from such an early period. For this reason, they arguably constitute a unique material source to investigate how processes of 'domestication […], adaptation, and partial assimilation' have been negotiated in Canton during the earliest phase of the Canton trade.[132] Moreover, this chapter aims to highlight how the mediating role of, among others, the British EIC's officers—traveling and trading between different commercial hubs across Asia—remains crucial to the shaping and local development of these creative processes. Drawing from Grasskamp and Juneja[133] I aim to investigate these fans as 'fields of transcultural experimentation', in the light of the aesthetic patterns conveyed through the craftmanship and painting of the ivory sticks of these early fans.

2.1 Ivory as painting surface

The fans studied here have been grouped based on a set of shared material and aesthetic similarities. They are all made of ivory sticks – in some cases crafted in open-work – then painted in gouache with a colour palette of bright red tones and, to a minor extent, greens and blues (figs 1,4, 2.1, 2.3). The painted decorative elements, following an almost fixed scheme, have been outlined in gold. Despite the fact that ivory is here mainly used as a painting medium, extensive and elaborated passages of craftmanship have been necessary to obtain the bright surface of the sticks. On one hand, ivory had to be prepared as a painting base, smoothed to be pleasurable to touch when held in hand, and cleaned to enhance its brightness almost to reference the surface of the lacquered fans. On the other, the natural colour of ivory had to be carefully protected—as it was the colour of ivory itself to be a marker of richness. The whiteness of ivory was the signifier of exclusive trade and access to unique resources, since only the ivory of the elephant from South and Southeast Asia was of the lightest tone.[134]

Armstrong[135] studied more than other scholars the procedure of ivory craftmanship in Canton. According to her, the sticks would be first pierced when needed and then 'cleaned [only] with pumice and water' to avoid any alteration of the natural colour of the ivory. Then, they would be extensively scraped with a cloth in order to give to the material a polished effect. This bright appearance would be imitated in France through the application of varnish over the painting, therefore transferring to the ivory fans the luxury appearance of those made of lacquerware, while in the Netherlands ivory was left untreated, with its natural surface.[136] This indicates that the appreciation of painted ivory fans, and in particular of their visual appearance and materiality, was strongly interrelated to the appreciation of ivory itself—whether by enhancing its 'naturalness' and being an organic resource or by referencing the luminosity of lacquer—and, moreover, it was tied to local European patterns of taste.

While the polished surface of ivory was a key element in the appreciation of these small foldable fans, which could easily be held inside one's pockets, their decoration, highly eye-catching, was an equal conveyer of fashion and exotic extravaganza. This was particularly true in this earliest phase of the commercial exchanges between Britain and Qing China. These early fans have been painted following a more or less fixed design scheme.

Most of these fans feature a tortoiseshell rivet (or pivot) and a mother-of-pearl stop (see fig. 2.1 for the different components), while the upper part of the sticks has been embellished with a red silk thread.

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[132] Grasskamp and Juenja *EurAsian Matters*, 7.
[133] Grasskamp and Juneja, 8.
[134] Semal, 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)', 241. Semal specifies that although the tusks of the African elephants were longer, those from South Asia were whiter and more malleable.
[135] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 155.
[136] Armstrong, 155; Blum, 'Fans from the Collection', 8.

According to Armstrong,[137] while a continuous thread seems to be linking the sticks, in reality it has been cut in single pieces to cover the top of each stick, thus creating an optic 'illusion'. However, an ivory *brisé* fan[138] from approximately the end of the 18th century has a continuous silk thread passing through each stick thus challenging this assumption. It is therefore possible that both solutions were used depending on the aims and needs of the fan-maker. While by cutting the thread the illusionistic effect could be enhanced and time could have been saved from the process of carving the holes for the thread and passing the thread in, the continuous thread would have given to the final product a more sophisticated look, integrating multiple material surfaces (of silk and ivory) more organically in the same object.

In the upper register, just below the silk thread, geometrical or floral patterns are painted on a darker ground repeated on every stick, while below there is the larger section with the main painted scene framed within a medallion surrounded by series of auspicious elements. In some examples the lower part of the sticks is left unpainted, thus enhancing the natural colour of ivory, whereas in other cases, two additional sections featuring other auspicious symbols were added. Differently from later examples, the design of the front and back of these fans mirror each other. It could be argued that, with the expansion of the fan market in Europe, the fan-makers in China and Europe alike acquired a higher degree of familiarity with the European taste and the preferred visual associations to combine in the front and the back of the fan.[139]

While the painted subjects differ slightly from fan to fan, some iconographic themes are persistent. Design elements associated with the traditional Chinese iconography of auspiciousness—such as the phoenix, the *qilin* (fig. 2.2) the squirrel, the peony, the carp, the crab, and the butterfly (fig. 2.3 details)—would be prominent. At the same time, the central section often features hunting scenes with European male figures dressed in late 17th century attire (fig. 1, 2.1, 2.7). Interestingly, only men are portrayed in these scenes. A *brisé* fan (fig. 2.4) from Alexander's collection remains the only exception where a woman is represented. It has been theorized that this absence is due to the absence of European women in Canton and Macau,[140] but porcelainware from the same period features scenes with women and men engaging in leisure activities, as can be seen in a dish (fig. 2.5) made in Canton between 1715 and 1725 and currently part of the British Museum's collection. Possibly, early *brisé* fans with painted women simply did not survive, as very few examples remain in today's collections. On the other hand, it could also be speculated that since in China folding fans were objects consumed mostly by men, Cantonese painters at the beginning of the 18th century selected hunting scenes because these could be associated with male consumption.[141] On the contrary, porcelainware was collected both by men and women in China and the West alike, although it was rather increasingly associated with women in 18th century Europe.[142]

2.2 Porcelainware, chintzes, fans: A world connected through colours

These early fans have been largely overlooked, when not neglected, in the specialist literature.[143] However, there seems to be consensus that most of the iconographic elements, as well as their arrangement on the medium of the fan, has been extensively drawn by the design repertoire of the Cantonese workshops destined to the painting of porcelainware for the European markets. This point has been first made by Illingworth[144] and referenced and further expanded in later studies—especially by Crossman.[145] In

[137] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 152.
[138] Accession number RV-664-1, Volkenkunde Museum (Leiden, The Netherlands).
[139] By the beginning of the 18th century, not only the front and the back of the fan would have different visual contents, but also hidden images—which would appear only if the fan was unfolded towards the left or towards the right. In the Volkenkunde Museum (Leiden) there is an example of these types of ivory *brisé* fan from Canton. Available at: https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/#/query/dfff62e5-d1f6-49bf-b7c8-a67a6a75164f.
[140] Guangdong Museum, *Elegant & Vogue: Chinese Export Fans in the 18th-20th Centuries*, 12–13.
[141] See, for instance, the paintings of courtesans holding folding fans in Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*.
[142] On the gendered associations between porcelainware and women in 18th century Europe, and in particular the development of the 'China collector' figure, see: Sloboda, 'Surface Contact'.
[143] The only works exploring more specifically these early fans are: Illingworth, *Fans from the East*; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*. However, their analysis remains limited and purely iconographic.
[144] *Fans from the East*, 30.
[145] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 322.

particular, Illingworth[146] points out that the Cantonese artisans painting the fans made specifically for the European market were mostly professional painters who worked in independent workshops to deliver design solutions suitable to the western taste, contrary to the independent artists painting fans for the domestic market.

Auspicious symbols from Chinese culture combined with the scenes with European features alike have been transferred from prints brought first to Canton by the British East India Company officers for the decoration of porcelainware. The fans' colour palettes too, have been associated with those used for the making of *famille rose* and *famille verte* porcelainware, as well as the Chinese versions of Japanese *imari*-ware—all destined to the western markets.[147] In particular, the gold outlines used to finish the painted subjects are a strong reference to the latter. As the design and colour associations of these wares was already, and since long, highly prized and desired on the European markets, these fans—which were new commodities for European consumers—would be more easily appreciated due to their familiar, shared aesthetics with porcelainware.[148]

The link between porcelain-ware and these early fans is consistent with material evidence, as can be evinced through the following examples. If we look at the colour scheme, an enamelled *famille rose* cup (fig. 2.6) from a private collection featured in Godden[149], although it dates from a slightly later period (approximately 1750), is fitting evidence of the link between these early fans and porcelainware in the use of the gold outline. Similarly, the introduction of European figures within the decorative layout can be easily associated with porcelainware—as also shown through the above-mentioned example (fig. 2.5).[150] Interestingly, Blum[151] argues that scenes with male figures in late 17th century dress were also featured in cotton hangings made in the Coromandel Coast.[152] A circulation of motifs and colours interwove porcelain-wares and fans from China, as well as cotton chintzes from South Asia throughout the 18th century, therefore increasingly shaping a defined aesthetics that in Europe was re-appropriated through the production of Chinoiserie objects.

While the decorative connection between the Cantonese porcelainware and these early fans remains an important factor, the process implied here tends to be framed as uncreative—to the point where it is understood as a copy-and-paste transaction. For instance, according to Alexander [153],'[…] because of the expanding trade between East and West, many fans were manufactured in the East especially for the Western markets. Quite often, oriental artists were given models to copy, the subjects of which were totally unfamiliar to them, and so they interpreted them according to their understanding'. Yet, if 'oriental artists' copied, their European counterpart making Chinoiserie fans by 1720s and 1730s were 'inspired' and 'charmed by the exotic.' [154] On a similar note, Illingworth[155], in reference to the V&A fan (fig. 2.7), argues that 'fan paintings of Western inspiration were often difficult to distinguish from their European counterparts. They were, however, generally characterized by a somewhat clumsy and awkward depiction of the subject matter, particularly to regard to costume and physique, for these were largely beyond the experience and understanding of the Chinese professional painter.' And while it is here acknowledged too

[146] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 30.
[147] Illingworth, 30; Alexander, *Fans*, 1989, 16; Hart and Taylor, *Fans*, 39.
[148] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 30.
[149] Godden, *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and Its Influence on European Wares*.
[150] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 33; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 322.
[151] Blum, 'Fans from the Collection', 14.
[152] Although made in the last quarter of the 18th century, an example to get a sense of this could be this petticoat panel made for the Dutch market in the Coromandel coast—and currently preserved at the MET Museum. Available at: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/229993?ft=1992.82&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=1.
[153] Alexander, *Fans*, 1989, 13.
[154] Alexander, 16.
An interesting example of a Dutch version of these early Cantonese ivory *brisé* fans, dated between 1700 and 1730, currently at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Accession number 2305-1876). See at: https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O320260/fan-brise/ .
[155] *Fans from the East*, 30.

that the English fan-makers simply imitated at first the Cantonese fans, shortly after 'elements from China, Japan, India, and Persia [were] transmuted by occidental hands and eyes […]' [156], somehow implying that Chinoiserie was a more complex process of interpretation, that the 'Chinese professional painters' could not dare to equate with their 'clumsiness' and lack of understanding of Western patterns of taste.

This reading of Chinoiserie fans as expression of European translation of Chinese aesthetic elements in contrast with Cantonese fans as unauthentic, resulting from a weak ability to integrate Western scenes in their artistic repertoire, is not only problematic in its own right, but it also reflects a poor understanding of 18th century fan appreciation in Europe. As highlighted by David Porter[157] 'foreign trade in Canton was conducted entirely on Chinese terms', therefore challenging the orientalist perspectives and pointing to the actual role of these early goods from Canton within the various European markets. I would argue that the success of these early fans, which, once fully integrated within European markets, were re-interpreted according to local needs by European fan-makers, was the result of creative design solutions negotiated by the Cantonese fan-makers. From this perspective, I aim to look in greater detail the inter-media references behind the process of design thinking for the fan production and to expand the narrative that has been so far developed to discuss them. I aim to do so not only by looking at the migration of iconographies, but also by including the sensibility and market strategies expressed through specific colour choices and the transmission of know-how in the craftmanship of ivory. I will argue that these fans are an example of creative processes of adaption of foreign patterns of taste as well as of re-elaboration of those belonging to the local craftmanship repertoire, rather than simple imitations of European aesthetic schemes.

Precisely because these fans were produced during the earliest phase of the system which came to be known as Canton trade, they entail a higher degree of negotiation and experimentation than those made in later periods. Thus, if familiarity in Europe with the design of porcelainware certainly facilitated the introduction of these fans in the same market, I would argue that the use of patterns of auspiciousness was equally crucial in 'framing the unknown'. Finally, by highlighting the mediating role of private traders in shaping the aesthetics of these early fans, I aim to point to the flexible nature of these processes of negotiation and domestication—thus contributing to the challenging of the idea of a linear A-to-B interaction and looking to a broader network of exchanges.[158]

As discussed above, the iconographic elements and their very organization on the medium of the fan show a strong connection between the painters of these fans and those decorating porcelainware in Canton. It has even be suggested that in some cases the same workshop would paint both types of objects.[159] At the same time, if we focus on the colour palette and the overall design of these early fans two points can be made. First, the *imari*-ware palette generally involves a prominence of blue tones together with red, which are missing on these fans. Second, the use of strong reds and the combination of floral and certain auspicious elements on light ground is prominent on a different medium highly prized in Europe by the end of the 17th century, namely the chintzes imported by the British EIC from the Coromandel Coast (south-eastern India) (fig. 2.8).

The design and in particular colour associations of the Indian chintzes resulted from the active requests in 1643 by British merchants to maintain the base on light rather than dark grounds, due to a change in British fashion fostered by the growing presence of Chinese porcelains in the domestic space. However, the result of this process of negotiation was a product so successful and unique in decorating boudoirs and bedrooms in the 1670s and 1680s that already by the end of the century sumptuary laws were enforced all-over Europe to contain the 'chintz craze'. [160] And if, as argued by McNeil and Riello[161] 'Chinese porcelain helped to create a taste', Indian chintzes not only decorated entire rooms, but started to be used for dress as well,

[156] Illingworth, 47–49.
[157] Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty', 401.
[158] For a theoretical framework on this new perspective of global exchanges, see: Gerritsen, *The Global Lives of Things*.
[159] Hart and Taylor, *Fans*, 39.
[160] McNeil and Riello, *Luxury*, 105.
[161] McNeil and Riello, 105.

thus defining themselves a specific aesthetic that crossed both spatial and bodily boundaries. I would argue that these early fans partly responded to that specific pattern of taste created by the consumption of Indian chintzes. In the context of the early 18th century, when owning an original Indian chintz was extremely difficult due to the tights controls on these imports in England, these fans could function as a reference to these desirable and hardly attainable goods.

If we look in closer detail the fans, we can see how not only specific elements travelled circularly between Chinese porcelain, Indian chintzes and later fans—such as the phoenix (see fig. 2.8)—but also the overall colour palette of these early fans is distinctively reminding of Indian chintzes (compare, for instance, figs 1, 2.2 with figs 2.8, 2.9). These inter-media references resulted from a context where not only the East India Company as organization interpreted the ever-shifting market demands and European fashions, but more commonly from the negotiations of private actors travelling within Asia itself. As discussed in Chapter I, the British brokers would sell Indian goods in China, both as raw materials and commodities, such as textiles, and secured the revenues in the Canton's treasury of the EIC, which could then finance the tea trade or allow the investors in India to ask for their money back as remittance one year later. [162] Indian chintzes, circulated in Canton through these private traders and brokers, who would then be often those to order the ivory fans.[163] It is then likely that, if the design of porcelainware function as major source of iconographic repertoire, the colour associations of Indian chintzes brought there by private traders could also function as reference.

If the mediating role of British private traders should not be underestimated, collaborative practices and the sharing of know-how between the Cantonese artisans should also be taken into account. The carving of ivory was indeed one of the core centres of production in Canton. However, a common perspective in the literature tends to frame the Cantonese ivory carvings as an 'export product'. While these *brisé* ivory fans were indeed commodities directed to European consumption, the specific way of crafting ivory in open-open work points to a more flexible sharing of knowledge between workshops for the production of products for the domestic and export markets alike. An interesting example is the carving of the hexagram pattern for some of these fans' background, such as a fan currently part of the Cooper Hewitt's collection (fig. 2.8, detail). Two ivory boxes, possibly produced for the local Chinese market and currently stored at the British Museum, feature the same pattern, thus highlighting another layer of inter-media crossings in the production of these early fans.

Far from being simply the result of imitative practices, these early fans were status objects as, unlike later samples, they were still very expensive and destined to a small circle of elites.[164] They functioned as status marker not only because of their precious materials (ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl), but also thanks to these cross-media references, which linked them to other luxury commodities both in Asia and Europe. The experience of pleasure—linked to both touch and sight—played a crucial role in the early experience of these new objects. Their lustrous surface functioned as reminder of the brightness of lacquerware, just as the natural colour of ivory was indication of commercial and political power. At the same time, the bright red tones and colour palettes more broadly referenced the highly desired—but also increasingly inaccessible—chintzes from the Coromandel Coast, and their crafted sticks defined at times as ivory carving collectibles—whose craftmanship remained unmatched in Europe.

2.3 Dressing body and space

Fans as 'portable objects' shifted between different functional statuses. At times they were fashion accessories, and these early fans in particular were of a smaller size than those made in later periods, thus they were easily carried into pockets. Because they were *brisé* fans made of ivory, they were also extremely resistant and almost unbreakable, making them easy to handle and maintain. Yet, because they were status markers, they could also be displayed on toilet tables in bedrooms and boudoirs, domestic spaces

[162] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)'; Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)'.
[163] Pritchard, 'Private Trade Between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (I680-I833)', 126–27, 137.
[164] Polak, 'Chinoiserie Fans, a Link between East and West', 48.

increasingly 'feminized' from the early 18th century, as 'ivory objects' and exotic gifts, as they often were. The connection between the fan and the interior space was, I would argue, enhanced by its aesthetic reminders to other ivory objects, such as toilet boxes, and to the *famille rose* and *famile verte* porcelainware, at that time already filling the 'Chinese rooms' and mostly collected by women. At the same time, though their aesthetic connections with Indian chintzes, these fans reminded to the cotton hangings (fig. 2.9) decorating, for instance, the canopy beds, as can be seen by this reconstruction by the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 2.10).

Yet, most of the time, fans functioned as extensions of the female body itself, and in particular of one's hand. It could be speculated that in the few occasions when it was possible to wear a full chintz gown (fig. 2.11), these early fans would be the perfect accessory to match not simply the decorative style of the dress, but also to expand a narrative of exotic luxury and British commercial power that often derived from private social networks. It is unfortunate that they have never been represented in early 18th century paintings, and part of the history of these early fans will remain unexplored until further research is done through private letters or inventories. And yet, we can imagine that while these early fans still functioned as status markers, they were still small items transported privately by supercargoes, and therefore likely owned by the wealthy wives of British officers.

In conclusion, these early ivory fans are a unique source to investigate how ivory was used in Canton as painting medium through processes of experimentation across different workshops. These collaborative practices, bringing together the know-how of professional painters and ivory craftsmen alike, took place in the context of the first negotiations between the British private traders and the Chinese merchants and artisans. Likely, women in Europe were already familiar with products such as Chinese porcelainware and chintzes from the Coromandel Coast, and the British officers conveyed parts of this demand to the fan-makers as well. The fan from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (fig.1), with its swastikas framing device, might be one of the earliest examples of these experimentation, bringing together the iconographic repertoires developed in China and Europe.

In terms of consumption, the beginning of the 18th century coincided with an increasing 'feminization' of the domestic space and demarcation of gendered patterns of fashion as well. The areas of the house associated with the feminine, such as bedrooms and dressing room, brought the dressed female body and the interior space to an organic connection more than ever before. Chintzes from the Coromandel Coast, together with Chinese silks, played a crucial role in the shaping of these new perceptions of the body and the home. The Chinese fans, because of their portability and in-betweenness (at the same time object and fashion accessory), functioned as mediating agent between the hand and the vanity table, the perception of the female self and the feminized space.

Chapter III
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Ivory mounts: Framing memories of the port views (1760s-1800s)

This chapter investigate a group of folding fans produced in the second half of the 18th century (mostly from the 1760s onwards). I will study here two, arguably interrelated, groups of fans depicting topographic scenes. The first consists of folding fans painted with the port views of Macao and the Hongs of Canton and produced in China for the European markets; the second includes folding fans depicting the port view of Naples (also called 'veduta fans' or 'Grand Tour fans') and painted in Italy for the British and other Northern European travellers. This chapter aims to bridge these two specific traditions of fan-making both from a material and a theoretical perspective, by focusing on, respectively, processes of collaborative practices between artisans, and the patterns of consumption deeply rooted in the 18th century travel cultures of the Northern European, and later American, elites.

This chapter investigates three aspects. The first section studies the selection of ivory as preferred material for the mounts of the fans produced in China and in Italy. By focusing initially on the mounts, it can be evinced that the port views of Canton and Naples were similarly 'framed'. The relevance of studying the materiality of sticks and guards has been fostered, in particular, by Mathilde Semal.[165] The second section explores how the trope of the port views travelled, both in China and Italy, across media, through different workshops. Building on the theoretical perspective offered by Schmidt,[166] this section looks at the role played by the artistic migrations between two-dimensional and three-dimensional mediums and the additional layers of meaning shaped by this process. The third section of this chapter aims to engage with studies on processes of knowledge production and memory preservation shared by the 18th century elites. In particular, it investigates how these fans shifted between their identities as fashion accessories and display objects, thus enhancing their function as tools of knowledge sharing that often crossed the conventional gender boundaries,[167] and as souvenirs of private and collective memory.[168]

3.1 Ivory mounts as framing devices

Not many pieces depicting the Chinese trading hubs, such as Canton and Macao, have been preserved in contemporary museums' collections. Although possibly many fans have not been digitalized yet, and some might be stored in private collections, it is surprising to notice that even the Guangdong Museum's [169] exhibition catalogue on Chinese fans*,* does not include almost any fan of this type. However, the limited evidence that I could gather shows a certain consistency in the selection of the materials for the making of the sticks and the guards of the topographical fans. Arguably, these fans have been mostly mounted with precious materials, and more specifically ivory, and a similar selection can be traced in the Italian fans of the Grand Tour. It could also be argued that these fans were preserved precisely because more precious, and therefore they might not be as representative of the Italian Grand Tour fan-production overall as much as we could speculate today; however, many fans depicting other subjects mounted on other materials have been preserved and, I would argue, animal-derived materials sourced across Asia and Africa were specific signifiers of economic and political power which would well-fit with the topographic content.

The finest fans of this type made in China would have been made in mother-of-pearl (fig. 3.1), while cheaper versions could have been made with bone (fig. 3.2).[170] Later examples, such a folding fan currently

[165] 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)'.
[166] *Inventing Exoticism*.
[167] Lindeman, 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans'.
[168] Stewart, *On Longing*.
[169] *Elegant & Vogue: Chinese Export Fans in the 18th-20th Centuries*.
[170] According to Crossman (1991, 323), this fan was mounted with ivory. However, I believe that the analysis of the curators of the MFA Boston may be more updated, as even from the picture, the yellowish colour typical of bone rather than ivory is visible.

preserved at the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, dated 1810-15, features a lacquered mount—but it is the only fan of this type that I have found.[171] The choice between mother-of-pearl and bone was ivory. Three examples dating around 1790-1800—respectively preserved at The Fan Museum Greenwich (fig. 3.3), Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 3.4), and the Peabody Essex (fig. 3.5)—feature ivory mounts carved with geometric patterns.

Similarly, the 'veduta' fans produced in Naples were mounted on ivory carved in geometric motifs (see fig. 6 for a comparison). As the carving techniques mastered by the workshops in 18th century Guangzhou remained unmatched in Europe, scholars[172] have succeeded in identifying the mounts of these Italian fans as made in China. Indeed, most of the Grand Tour travellers would purchase in Italy only the fan leaves and would mount them later, once returned home. According to Kitson[173], this was probably due to the custom duties that were applied to the goods imported, for instance, in England, but also to the postponement of the souvenir shopping at the end of the travel—as the leaves could be more easily transported together with other pictures. It is therefore possible that once the English aristocrats and their families returned to England, they had the Italian leaves mounted on ivory sticks and guards either carved in England,[174] or imported from China—as the trade in fan components was rich too.

Therefore, it was not accidental the fact that in England were used ivory mounts for the Italian leaves that were extremely similar to those of the port views of Canton and Macao. As highlighted by Semal[175] in a recent study on the fans from the Collection *Preciosa* of the Musée Art et Histoire (Bruxelles), the choice of the materials for the making of the fans' sticks and guards was likely connected to the visual content of the leaf. The mount defined the fan as status object. From her analysis, it appears indeed that the fans depicting what were perceived as 'higher subjects' (historical and mythological scenes) were mostly mounted in mother-of-pearl and, to a lesser extent, ivory; fans depicting seductive scenes such as romantic encounters and pastoral scenes were largely framed through ivory; and finally the fans with political content featured wood mounts, likely both for practical and symbolic motivations (they were more easily produced in larger quantities, and at the same time wood was less precious than ivory or pearls, thus enhancing the political message).[176]

Mounts and leaves together shaped the folding fan as *objet de luxe*, as the material used for the guards and the sticks pointed to the power-relations embedded in its sourcing as well as to the particular sets of skills necessary to its craftmanship. I would argue that using ivory as mount entails the acknowledgement of its 'deeply imperial' characterization, as highlighted by Smith[177] while discussing the patterns of consumption of Anglo-Indian ivory furniture. Precisely because ivory was associated with commercial and political power in Europe as in Asia, it was used for the framing of visual contents that were inextricably associated with the elites. While folding fans were increasingly purchased by a larger section of the population throughout the 18th century, fans pointing to specific sites of private and collective memory could only belong and be displayed by those connected to that specific memory, namely the elites (whether intellectual or commercial).

Finally, one of the key features motivating the success of these ivory objects laid in the difficulty of reproducing them.[178] Although fans were not as valuable and irreplaceable as furniture pieces, from my viewpoint her perspective remains valid. The very impossibility of perfectly 'copying' the Asian techniques for the craftmanship of ivory (whether from South or East Asia)—a factor that indeed allowed the

[171] Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, accession number: 2019.6.1.5.
[172] Kitson, 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf', 134.
[173] 127.
[174] See for instance this fan with the view of St. Peter's square in Rome at: https://www.thefanmuseum.org.uk/collections/fan1195985.
[175] 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)'.
[176] Semal, 247.
[177] 'Production, Purchase, Dispossession, Recirculation: Anglo- Indian Ivory Furniture in the British Country House', 79.
[178] Smith, 69.

specialists studying the fans to identify whether the mounts were produced in Europe or in China—was a particular marker of the 'exotic' among the 18th century European elites. Not only the Chinese techniques of ivory carving could not be replicated in Europe, but ivory itself could hardly be substituted—as bone had a much cheaper outlook and was easily sources in Europe itself. The ivory mounts could therefore enhance the 'exoticism' of the painted content too. If China was the 'Orient' increasingly known while the century progressed, Southern Europe (and in particular Italy and its classical heritage) was for the British elites at the same time known, studied, visited, and 'other'. To some extent, these two types of topographical fans pointed, although differently, to specific associations between the acts of visualizing power and mapping that distinguished certain types of the British elites.

3.2 Watercolours, oil paintings, boxes, and fans: The port view as a trope

The port views from China: Canton, Macao, Boca Tigris, Whampoa

The depiction of the port views of Canton, Macao, the Boca Tigris (Humen), and Whampoa can be found on different mediums purchased by the officers of the trading companies in China. The first examples are the paintings in watercolour and gouache (on silk and paper) from the 1760s and persisted on oil paintings and various objects until the second half of the 19th century. As already highlighted by Crossman,[179] these locations were those accessible to the western traders throughout the 18th century, and thus could be more easily sold in Canton to the European officers as souvenirs. Quite surprisingly, there is no extensive research on the subject from an art historical perspective. With the exception of the work by Crossman,[180] most of the studies on the paintings with the harbour scenes and the Hongs of Canton have been conducted from a historical viewpoint, such as the work by Van Dyke and Mok.[181] This is likely due to the difficulty of re-tracing actual artists and studios that produced these pictures[182], and of investigating how the workshops actually functioned in Canton itself.

According to Crossman,[183] the representation of these port views started with the artists in Canton producing watercolours and gouaches and resulted from their encounters with the British and Dutch engravings of the European port views. In particular, the proportion between the sea, the land, and the sky—including the peculiar low horizon—and the flatness of the landscape, could all point to a creative integration of the European and the local traditions of pictorial representations of space. In support to his theory, Crossman[184] points to a set of views of Surinam and a view of Calcutta that both feature a similar pictorial composition (currently at the Peabody Essex Museum), which could have been introduced by the English or the Dutch traders and artists in the region. From the 1780s the port view has been further elaborated by the Chinese oil painters (Crossman 1991, 110).[185] These types of oil on canvas typically came in a set of four scenes representing, respectively, the Boca Tigris, Whampoa, Canton, and Macao.[186] As can be attested through the surviving paintings in contemporary collections and the lists of the pictures exported in the ships bills of lading, it appears that these paintings were extensively traded. [187]

Approximately from the late 1760s the trope of the port view expanded to other objects, including fans, as can be seen in an early fan (fig. 3.2) from that period painted with the port view of Macao. However, the folding fans depicting the port views have been largely overlooked in the literature on fans. Illingworth[188] briefly mentions that painted fans were produced in China by professional artists, rather than 'craftsmen

[179] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 115.
[180] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.
[181] *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822*.
[182] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 106.
[183] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.
[184] Crossman, 115.
[185] Most of these oil paintings were not signed. Between 1780-1825 very few names have been identified (among those painting before 1800 are Spoilum; Pu Qua, Chitqua, Cinqua) (Crossman, 109.)
[186] Crossman refers that Sullivan Dorr of Providence sent four port scenes of Bogert, Whampoa, Canton and Macao in 1800 (Crossman, 106.)
[187] Crossman, 106.
[188] *Fans from the East*, 30.

who added decorations', but he does not elaborate on the subject. Crossman[189] discusses few fans of this type, in particular those destined to the American market. More in detail, he focuses on a fan (fig. 3.1) depicting the *Empress of China* in the port of Whampoa painted in watercolour and mounted on mother-of-pearl. Not only this fan remains one of the most precious of this kind still existing today, but it seems to be the earliest representation of the *Empress of China* itself. Moreover, Crossman[190] has reconstructed its provenance, which has been rarely investigated in the case of the fans made in China for the export markets at large. Likely, the fan was a gift that Captain John Green received in 1784 from the Chinese officials—the importance of the gift would also explain the choice of a precious mount.[191]

The trope of these four Chinese ports, from the late 18th century, circulated among different mediums and has been re-created through multiple techniques and materials, as can be evinced by the objects (such as toilet boxes (fig. 3.10), writing tables) still preserved in contemporary collections. Yet, it remains difficult to re-construct the trajectories of this trope. Possibly, as argued by Crossman,[192] the officers of the British and Dutch trading companies, Western artists, and Jesuit missionaries (such as Giuseppe Castiglione) played an initial role in the development of these port views. A folding fan (fig. 3.7) depicting the harbour of Lisbon, and made in England or Portugal in 1739, might show that on the folding fans circulating in Europe the harbour view was already a popular subject (and was already 'framed' with ivory).

Yet not only these views of Canton and Macao evolved into a completely original trope—thus becoming an actual *genre*—but also they remain today an extremely relevant source to investigate the sharing of knowledge and memory shaped by the 'Canton trade system.' As highlighted by Van Dyke and Mok,[193] only when the trade between western Europe (and in particular England) and China was sufficiently established, and thus popularized among a larger section of the population, these objects with the harbour views have been produced. They functioned as souvenirs, and the officers of the trading companies 'proudly displayed these items in their homes as reminders of their involvement in that commerce, and as conversation pieces to show to and discuss with friends and relatives.'[194] Because both the paintings and the other objects functioned as souvenirs, they had to be at the same time accurate (in their representation of the buildings and the flags), while stimulating the imagination of those who could not travel to China. In particular, the details of the Cantonese Hongs were regularly adapted by the Chinese painters to match the actual landscape changes, as these details were indexical of both the narrative of political and economic power that was constructed in Europe, and especially in England, throughout the 18th century.[195]

A port view from Italy: Naples

The practice of undertaking the 'Grand Tour', a long journey across Europe embarked mostly by British aristocratic families, as well as educated young men with their tutors, spanned throughout a period between the 17th and the 19th centuries. The main aim of the journey was to achieve a higher degree of knowledge in classical culture and would often end, for the wealthiest travellers, with the selection of a painting as souvenir. [196]According to Lindeman,[197] the 'veduta' painting as proper *genre* resulted as a development from Canaletto's views of Venice. Subsequently, many artists based between Rome and Naples elaborated their own versions of the cityscapes and harbour views, as there was an extensive market of Grand Tour travellers with an art historical education (named *virtuosi*) ready to acquire their work.

[189] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 324.
[190] 324.
[191] Crossman 326.
[192] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.
[193] *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822*, xxi.
[194] Van Dyke and Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822*.
[195] Van Dyke and Mok.
[196] Lindeman, 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans', 54; Kitson, 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf', 123.
[197] 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans', 51.

However, paintings were in many cases too expensive and uneasy to be brought back to England and other parts of Europe, and folding fans offered a great solution to overcome both obstacles.[198] From a letter written by a British woman travelling in Rome in 1784 (Mary Berry), it seems that a fan would cost approximately the equivalent of today's 50 pence. [199] Moreover, it is likely that the women accompanying their family throughout the Tour wanted to collect additional souvenirs to the paintings selected by their male relatives. [200] The fans that have been preserved throughout the generations from these cultural journeys have been survived in such a great amount, that they have been labelled as a distinct 'category', namely that of 'The Grand Tour Fans' or 'The Grand Tour Leaves'. These fans were produced mainly in Venice[201], Rome, and Naples, and in most cases only the fan leaf, whether painted on paper or vellum, would have been bought in Italy, as discussed before.

Fans from each of these cities would differ in its visual content. Rome was more austere, and its highlights consisted in the ancient ruins and palaces from the Roman empire, thus the fans from there were often showing subjects connected to the Italian classical heritage. By contrast, Naples was a city to enjoy the mild weather and wellness, experience the visual pleasure of the Gulf and the view of the Vesuvius, and listen to the Opera.[202] As pointed by Kitson,[203] the 'veduta fans' collected in Naples were more 'informal' and the representations of the landscape and cityscapes were more common than the architectural references found on the fans from Rome.

Collaborative artistic practices & the creation of a trope

Although the fans produced in China and those made in Italy were produced and consumed with different purposes, they similarly functioned as souvenirs. Both these groups of fans used a trope to embody and recover a memory that was strongly connected to a specific site. Moreover, in both cases, the port views travelled from two-dimensional sources to three-dimensional objects, a concept extensively explored by Schmidt.[204] According to him,[205] the practice of sharing visual motifs across different workshops and ateliers in Europe fostered the adaption of 'design practices' that resulted in a common, pan-European, 'aesthetic of exoticism'. Exoticism was thus built through practices of 'replication' which led to a 'cross-fertilization' between media. What Schmidt[206] defines as 'aesthetic of exoticism' could be understood as the creation of a trope. By applying his theory to the study of the fans as souvenirs of the exotic, I aim to address the role of the Chinese and Italian port views as tools to project and invent, at the same time, realism and a romanticized version of reality.

The artists painting watercolours, fans, and oil on canvas in Canton would seasonally adjust the design of flags and European factories, but would preserve the visual scheme of previously realized paintings.[207] From Crossman's analysis of the paintings produced from the 1760s onwards, it can be evinced that despite the adaption of the ships to the contemporary maritime technologies, the placement of the ships would remain persistent—following a defined schema (fig. 3.8). Interestingly, through a process of circulations and repetitions, as discussed by Schmidt,[208] a unique and identifiable trope of the Chinese ports was created. Through these intermedia transfers (what Bucher and Volmert[209] define as 'artistic transfers'), the port view became a postcard or, borrowing from Stewart,[210] 'a prototype.' By contrast, the 'veduta' paintings and fan

[198] Kitson, 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf', 123.
[199] Kitson, 127.
[200] Kitson, 123,131.
[201] Mainly custom-made fans. See also: Kitson, 127.
[202] See, for instance, an Opera fan made in Naples, and part of the Fan Museum's collection at: https://www.thefanmuseum.org.uk/collections/fan350900.
[203] 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf', 133.
[204] *Inventing Exoticism*.
[205] Schmidt, 229.
[206] Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*.
[207] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 115.
[208] *Inventing Exoticism*.
[209] *European Fans in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, 12.
[210] *On Longing*.

leaves from Naples would not follow a consistent composition but would frequently use the Vesuvius as geographical reference. The memory of the specific location would be recovered through indexical elements such as the flags, but would be equally moved through the representation of the volcano, or, especially on fans, by combining the view of the port of Naples with references to other experiences that could be consumed there (such as the opera).

The circulation of the trope of the port views, in China as in Europe, resulted from the efficient network of artisans collaborations for the fan-making. In Canton, the workshops of the painters would depict the scenes on the fan leaves, which later would be mounted by the ivory carvers, who made the sticks. This system facilitated the migration of visual tropes from pictures to the fan themselves, as they were produced in the same atelier.[211] This collaborative process might contribute in shaping the associations between the port views and ivory. As this resulted into a successful combination for fans, other objects were made following the same design, as can be seen from this carved ivory box (fig. 3.10) with a miniature painting on the lid of the Boca Tigris, dated 1800.

Similarly, folding fans in Europe resulted from the cooperation between different specialized ateliers. Semal,[212] analysing the production of fans in France, illustrates how two distinct *corps de metiers*—namely those of the *maitres-éventaillistes* (master fan-makers) and the *tabletiers* (ivory turners)—would coordinate in order to produce folding fans with ivory and mother-of-pearl mounts. The fan-makers would take care of painting the leaves. However, in Italy, we know that independent artists—although little is known about their names and individual stories—based in Rome and Naples were painting the fan leaves without mounting them. [213] To a certain extent, the fan leaves were produced and circulated in Italy as pictures,[214] and in many cases the same artists would make both 'veduta' fan leaves and the paintings.

Not only the Chinese and Italian port views on fans resulted from a constant transfer of design practices between ateliers and artists, but throughout their 'lives', multiple layers of meanings and values were attached to them. The trope of the Chinese ports evolved on watercolours of papers and gouache on silk – images that were collected into albums and books by the EIC's traders. Once in Europe, these pictures were at times framed and hanged on the walls as paintings, at times preserved as books and stored into the cabinets of the Chinese rooms. The trope travelled on sets of oil paintings too, which were produced and displayed in sets, as to reconstruct at home the landscape of what was accessible of China as a whole to the western traders.[215] Fans too remained *objects in-between* in the process. The format of their leaf was inherently 'panoramic'. Contrarily to the views from Naples, which moved to fans from paintings without adapting to the medium format, as if they were just postcards pasted on the leaf[216], or a 'mounted painting'[217], the views of Macao and the Canton were often adjusted to the shape of the leaf. The horizon followed the curved line of the mount (figs 3.1-3.3), the landscape becoming fully integrated with its mount.

Finally, throughout this process of 'intermedia crossings', the trope of the port view, once canonized, resulted into a souvenir, thus functioning as a projection of an idealized reality. Schmidt[218] extensively investigates the European quest for 'agreeableness' in the western production of the material culture of the exotic. To some extent, the 'agreeableness' constructed through the 'generic sameness' of the European Chinoiserie objects, could be seen as the counterpart of the glamourized gaze over the specific location of

[211] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.
[212] 'L'indispensable Monture de l'éventail, Véritable Attribut Social? La Richesse Des Montures de La Collection Preciosa (Musée Art & Histoire, Bruxelles)'.
[213] Kitson, 'Typical Imagery of the Grand Tour Fan Leaf', 127.
[214] These circulations also happened in China itself, where fan leaves were often never mounted into proper fans.
[215] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 107.
[216] See, for instance, this fan leaf made in Italy between 1780-1800 from the collection of the British Museum (London): https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1891-0713-600.
[217] On the transformation of fans into paintings, see: Lam, 'From Ephemeral to Eternal: Unfolding Early Modern "Fashion" for Asia'.
[218] *Inventing Exoticism*, 322.

the port view. [219] The glamourization was achieved through the creation of a trope, by transforming the view of the ports into a pattern (which was integrated with other patterns associated with 'Chineseness', such as the floral motifs that are painted on the reverso of fig. 3.4). Motifs, while circulating across workshops in Canton, and then shops and houses in Europe, built what Schmidt defines as a 'discernible narrative', 'a logic or form of legibility'. Through this legibility, I would argue, private memories of traders could become family and then collective memories. Women too, who could not access China, could discern an idealized part of the experiences of their husband, fathers, and sons.

3.3 Fans on display: Whose knowledge? Whose memories?

In Europe, these folding fans (either made in China or Italy) were largely consumed by women. However, when considering the fans depicting the port views, it may be relevant to explore how 18th century women could interact with and understand the places represented. How did these objects increasingly associated with women start to incorporate visual contents from paintings that were generally collected by men? Drawing from scholarship on the act of mapping [220] and the language of the souvenir [221], I aim to frame these folding fans as tools of knowledge production—a theme already partly explored by Lindeman[222]—and constitutive of private and collective memory of specific social groups belonging to the European and American elites. Painted folding fans, shifting between their identities as extensions of the body and pictures—which could be framed and displayed in the interior space—fostered knowledge sharing and the appropriation of spheres of lives associated with men among the women of both the aristocratic and the commercial social strata.

Mapping: Knowledge of China and Italy

In her study on the 17th century Dutch art, Svetlana Alpers[223] investigates the relationship between the act of mapping and picturing. According to her, within the 17th century Dutch artistic context, the boundaries between decorative and scientific maps were flexible, as much as those between art and maps, and 'decoration' and knowledge at large.[224] The cityscape was therefore, at once, an artistic expression, a display object, and a tool to share knowledge. It is from this perspective that I would like to investigate the folding fans depicting the port views: as, at the same time, art objects and tools of knowledge production associated to two distinct travel cultures (respectively, those of the trading companies and those of the intellectual elites) which 18th century women could only partially access, if not at all.

Owning and displaying fans with the port views would therefore function, for European, and in particular British women, as a token to share the knowledge associated with these journeys that they could rarely experience. As argued by Lindeman[225] in her study on the 'veduta fans' collected by Anna Amalia[226] during her Italian Grand Tour, throughout the 18th century, the topographical pictures were strongly associated with scientific knowledge and with their popularization women could increasingly develop an interest in areas of knowledge usually limited to men. Along with pictures collected and displayed by men, the fans bought by the women who could undertake the Grand Tour were more tangible devices to share experiences within spaces associated with the feminine, as they were *portable* objects.

While that of Anna Amalia might have been a rare situation, as she was in her older age and travelled to Italy alone, women could still travel with their families to Italy and select their own souvenirs. Yet, if for the English women from the upper social classes Naples could be accessible, the Chinese ports were not. However, as much as the Italian 'veduta' pictures circulated and became objects of connoisseurship—

[219] Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 183.
[220] Alpers, *The Art of Describing.*
[221] Stewart, *On Longing.*
[222] 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans'.
[223] *The Art of Describing.*
[224] See 'Introduction' in Alpers.
[225] 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans', 56.
[226] Anna Amalia was the Duchess of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisensach (1739-1807). She undertook her Grand Tour between 1789 and 1790. From Lindeman, 51.

increasingly integrated by women into their own objects of consumption (such as fans and porcelain)—the Cantonese port views, decorating the studios and halls of the British merchants' homes, shaped ideas of China and the English commercial power connected to its topographies. By using the fans as fashion accessories, but also as objects of interior display, 18th century women appropriated commodities associated with male consumption (the Chinese port views paintings, and the Italian 'veduta paintings'), thus highlighting the fact that 'men and women lived lives that were and are not polarities.'[227]

Remembering: Private memories, family memories

Knowledge of China and Italy passed through the memories that those who could travel to these locations aimed to project. How did then these folding fans, especially those produced in China, function as souvenirs for the women who could not travel to China? What was the imaginary projected through these fans? As discussed in the previous section, fans represented a glamourized and exotic version of the reality experienced by the British and American traders and travellers. According to Stewart,[228] the souvenir has to bee understood as an 'allusion, not a model' and can only be 'collected by individuals.' The folding fans with the port views made in China and Italy were not, I would argue, 'made for export'. They were objects privately purchased, often customized (fig. 3.9), that could only unpack their own imaginary if shared through family's or close friends' networks. It could be speculated that once in Europe, these fans were mostly commissioned as gift, rather than sold. Only the traders who had been to China or the intellectuals who had experiences the Grand Tour could find meaning in the port-views. They could use them as devices for sharing their own experience, while also projecting what Stewart[229] defines as the 'privatized view of the individual subject.'

However, were these memories exclusively those of the individuals? Both the China trade and the Grand Tour were experienced shared by specific sectors of the English elites, namely the commercial and the aristocratic ones. Women who could display these folding fans, as objects collected by their husbands and fathers, marked their integration within these specific social strata, and their own power to challenge the gender norms associated with the consumption of certain visual tropes. As rightfully discussed by Germann and Strobel,[230] the topographical folding fans were objects transgressing the gender boundaries. The study carried by Lindeman[231] looks at the 'veduta' fans collected by Anna Amalia throughout her Italian Grand Tour and argues for their role as 'souvenirs of her experience of the masculine realms of science, architecture, and classical archaeology.'[232] Women who possessed the fans with the port views from China and Italy could display knowledge of systems of economic and cultural power, while also retrieving memories associated to the painted sites—which were individually and collectively owned by the merchant and aristocratic elites.

This chapter illustrated how the folding fans with the port views made in China and Italy equally functioned as souvenirs of specific travel cultures. By focusing on the ivory mounts, it challenges the assumption that the 'Asian' and 'European' traditions of fan-making functioned completely independently from each other. Painted folding fans resulted from extensive networks of trade and specialized workshops, through which the trope of the 'port view' took shape. Similarly, the port views from China and Italy were souvenirs of the exotic in 18th century England, and folding fans likely have facilitated the transfer of ideas of the Canton trade and the Grand Tour across the gender boundaries.

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[227] Germann and Strobel, *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 3.
[228] *On Longing*, 136, 138.
[229] 138.
[230] *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 3.
[231] 'Gendered Souvenirs: Anna Amalia's Grand Tourist Vedute Fans'.
[232] Germann and Strobel, *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 5.

Chapter IV
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Carved ivory: The taste for transparency (1780s-1810s)

This chapter focuses on *brisé* fans entirely made of carved ivory and produced in Canton between the 1780s and the 1810s. While ivory *brisé* fans have been produced until the 1850s with an extensive range of different design solutions (including those integrating miniature paintings[233]), I will limit my scope to the fans produced in the earliest phase and that feature the use of a carved 'ribbed ground' – a design innovation that transferred to the ivory sticks the materiality and transparency of lace.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the impact of the technical developments of ivory carving on the design of these ivory fans in Canton. Building on specialist literature on fans, it explores how the artisans achieved through carving different degrees of plasticity and unique surfaces. The second section looks at how these surfaces resulted from an exchange of artistic and material sensibilities between Europe and Canton, mediated by the officers of the trading companies. It aims to highlight that, on one hand, the shifting patterns of taste and fashion in Europe—and, in particular, changes in the elite cultures of dress and their appreciation of lace—fostered research in design innovations for the production of these fans in Canton; on the other hand, it interlaces the production of these fans with the development of custom-made solutions across workshops in Canton (such as those producing silverware and porcelainware for the export markets). Finally, the third section explores the possible meanings that were attributed to these surfaces in the 18th century fashion cultures in Europe (especially in England). In particular, it looks at these fans as 'extensions of the hand', drawing from the recent work of Davies,[234] and their function as connective devices between body and dress. By investigating the associations attached to the act of concealing and revealing shaped by the materiality of lace and carved ivory, this section reflects on how these fans *mediated* between the female dressed body and the social spaces experienced by 18th century women and interacted with other objects.

4.1 Plasticity: Thinking the fan as an ivory object

These *brisé* fans have been considered among the most valuable fans produced in Canton, and, for this reason, they have attracted a greater degree of attention from curators, collectors, and specialists. Museums' collections and auction catalogues around the world—and especially in the US—feature more of these *brisé* fans than of any other type—among those made in China.[235] The earliest fans of this type that have survived in contemporary collections date around the 1780s and are examples of an extremely high showcase of carving skills. Among those, an outstandingly crafted *brisé* fan (fig. 4.1) displays a layout integrating iconographic elements from different artistic repertoires from China and Europe (such as Chinese architectural elements and typically neoclassical medallions) delicately carved as to transfer to the substance of ivory the lightness of an embroidered net.

From a technical viewpoint, these fans were among the most 'intricately export items' produced in Canton, and thus required weeks of craftmanship before becoming ready to be sold.[236] The quality of these fans, especially of those produced between the late 1780s and the 1810s, was extremely high.[237] Only in the mid-

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[233] As reference for an ivory fan incorporating miniature paintings, see, for instance: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/209922; https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/143916.html?mulR=1019072050|169 ; https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1916.366 ; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613590254. See a British 'copy' of these fans today part of the Royal Collection Trust at: https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/24/collection/25375/fan-depicting-frederick-duke-of-york. On fans and miniatures, see : Letourmy-Bordier, 'Miniature et Éventails En Europe. Le XVIIIe Siècle et Le Goût Du Portrait'.

[234] 'Fanology'.

[235] In particular, see the ivory fans featured in the catalogue of the Guangdong Museum, *Elegant & Vogue: Chinese Export Fans in the 18th-20th Centuries*.

[236] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 296.

[237] Crossman, 305.

19th century the techniques used for ivory carving at large started to fall into decline, with the exception of the work of Hoaching.[238] In China, Canton was considered one of the major centres of ivory carving—which was even defined as 'the supreme ivory craftmanship of the South China school.' The two major techniques consisted in ivory 'piercing' and 'strip weaving'.[239] Both techniques were applied by fan-makers, and it was the latter to set the Chinese carving techniques on a different level from those developed in Europe.[240] The procedure would be as follows. Ivory was first softened into chemical liquids, split into extremely thin slices, which were later interwoven together. Once this first stage of material manipulation was completed, the ivory was carved with a drilling shuttle, finally resulting into the production of almost impalpable fans sticks and guards. This very technical process entailed a transformation of the very materiality of ivory—which while being divided into slim slices was almost altered into a thread.

This technique of carving allowed the Cantonese artisans to transfer different degrees of plasticity and three-dimensionality to the ivory surfaces, which were at times creatively combined within the same fan. In particular, the guards remained mostly thicker and with a deeper use of the carving work, which, in turn, transferred to the patterns (often floral) a stronger effect of three-dimensionality.[241] By contrast, the sticks were crafted as to enhance their bi-dimensionality, delicacy, and lightness. Within the same object ivory was manipulated to display a unique set of crafting skills that fostered at once ivory's richness and lightness (fig. 4.2). In particular, with these fans the design innovation the 'ribbed ground'[242]—vertical ivory lines thinner than 1mm— was first developed to convey to ivory a feeling of transparency. From the beginning of the 19th century however, this ground has increasingly gained less importance, while the foreground elements became predominant, thus covering the entire surface (fig. 4.3).

Interestingly, the design layout selected for the earlier *brisé* fans with a wider ribbed ground tend to differ from those from later periods. It seems that the shifts in the manipulation of ivory and its design followed a linear development in techniques and aesthetics.[243] At first, ivory was pierced almost exclusively in geometric patterns for the making of mounts, as those studied in the previous chapter. Increasingly, the mount became the object itself, and *brisé* ivory fans have been made entirely with a combination of geometric patterns and shields (fig. 4.4). Through a constantly developing process of experimentation, the design of these fans became more complex, and monograms and shields have been incorporated within a combination of floral motifs, geometrical patterns from the neo-classical artistic repertoire—at that time considered highly fashionable in Europe—pagodas, and auspicious animals (fig. 4.1). All these subjects appeared as light as lace patterns on the ribbed ground. However, from the beginning of the 19th century, the ground has increasingly been covered with motifs such as pavilions, rocks, and figures in Chinese dress, mirroring the western demand for Chinoiserie compositions (fig. 4.5).[244] At this point, *brisé* ivory fans started to be increasingly with a 'smaller, thicker, carving cruder with decoration only on one side' and therefore considered of lower quality in the scholarship.[245]

While the later *brisé* fans displaying a more explicit reference to the Chinoiserie aesthetics may resulted from broader trends experimented at large in Canton for the making of a wide range of objects, the earlier fans with the ribbed ground remain an isolated case within the ivory carving's production. Indeed, while different types of ivory boxes featured similar iconographies to those of the later examples (compare, for instance, figs 4.6-4.7 with fig. 4.5), and fans carved in different materials such as tortoiseshell reproposed similar

[238] Crossman, 330.
[239] See also the *brisé* fans of mother-of-pearl incised on the natural shell texture. As they were extremely rare and precious, fans of this type did not survive in large quantities, as mother-of-pearl was more commonly used for the making of smaller objects. From Bai, 'Cantonese Export Brisé Fans in the Qing Dynasty', 27.
[240] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 155.
[241] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 30.
[242] Illingworth, 30.
[243] Illingworth, 30.
[244] Illingworth, 30; Bai, 'Cantonese Export Brisé Fans in the Qing Dynasty', 26.
[245] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 30.

compositions;[246] any other object or material has been crafted in such a way to acquire the transparency transferred to the fans from 1780s-1810s with the ribbed ground.

The *brisé* fans that display the design solution of the ribbed ground, especially when hold in hand, seem to emulate lace not only because of the integration of neoclassical aesthetics at times used for lace, but especially because of their surface and tactility, which reference a sense of transparency that is alien to ivory itself. If compared to other carved objects made in Canton, these fans thus remain a unique example of 'intermedial adaption.' How did the Cantonese craftsmen arrive to experiment this technique exclusively for fans? While later examples, despite their extremely high quality, are more directly connected to the technical know-how already built for the making of boxes and other carved souvenirs exported from Canton to Europe, this transitional group of fans remain important evidence of this process of experimentation and cross-cultural exchange.

4.2 Lace and fans: Cross-media referencing and appropriation

In the specialist literature on fans, it has been already noted that the *brisé* ivory fans of this type 'may resemble frozen lace'.[247] However, a deeper reflection on this association between the materiality of carved ivory and lace has remained overlooked. Interestingly, fans have functioned in Europe from the very beginning of their consumption as site of cross-media experimentations between lace and other materials. Indeed, it has been notedthat the two earliest preserved folding fans (figs 4.8-4.9) and dating approximately to the 1620s, have been made vellum cut in openwork[248] that mimicked a particular type of lace—named *reticella*—that was extremely fashionable since the 16th century for the making of collars and cuffs among the European elites.[249]

Reticella lace (fig. 4.10) was one of the first type of lace to be produced in Italy and later developed in the Flanders and was considered as an extremely high marker of luxury. At that time, the term *reticella* indicated 'a geometric needle lace worked over grid of threads left in a piece of linen after some threads had been withdrawn'.[250] Shortly after, it further developed into one of the two still existing techniques of lace making, namely that of needle lace (as opposite to the bobbin lace).[251] The centres for the making of *reticella* lace were Milan, Venice, and the area of the Flanders. As we can see from an early 17th century portrait of Lady Anne Cecil, countess of Stamford, (fig. 4.11), it was still one of the most relevant status markers in the early 17th century fashion, together with the folding fan.

The two early fans made in openwork remain a relevant material evidence of the mobility of lace patterns across geographical areas and media. Throughout the 16th century and the 17th century, lace pattern books promoted the spread of the *reticella* lace patterns (fig. 4.12) especially throughout different ateliers within Europe—among these were the workshops making folding fans with vellum and paper. Indeed, it seems that the diffusion of these pattern books did not played a crucial role in the spread of actual techniques between the major centres where lace was made (Northern Italy and the Flanders), but rather it enhanced the diffusion of lace patterns and aesthetics across the major commercial centres where the books were printed and collected.[252] While circulating across geographical borders and artisans workshops, the *reticella*

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[246] Another interesting example of a carved ivory box made in Canton with a monogram is currently part of the Rijksmuseum's collection.: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/NG-1984-15 .
A tortoiseshell fan is currently preserved at the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales (accession number 2019.6.1.6) and it features a design layout obtained through carving that strikingly resembles to those of the ivory fans.
[247] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 152; Alexander, *Fans*, 1989, 19; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 289.
[248] Later, these fans have been called '*decoupé* fans'.
[249] Armstrong, *A Collector's History of Fans*, 152; Alexander, *Fans*, 1989, 10. To grasp the extent to which vellum cut in open-work mimicked the transparency of the reticella lace, see a photograph of the curator of the exhibition 'Unfolding Pictures' holding this early fan: https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/rhian-wong-who-is-a-co-creator-of-the-unfolding-pictures-nieuwsfotos/832592992?adppopup=true.
[250] Browne, *Lace from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 7.
[251] Browne, 7.
[252] Germany and France were among the major centres where the pattern books were sold, while only one book was published in the Flanders—possibly destined to the English market. See: Levey, *Lace*, 6, 67.

lace pattern, among others, was reproduced, adjusted, and re-materialized for the production of, for instance, the fan leaves of paper and vellum cut in open-work (compare, in particular, figs 4.8 and 4.10).[253]

This process of visual and material referencing across media highlights first, how objects that were both status-markers for the elite—fans and lace components for dress—were productively interacting with each other to create a new idea of fashion and the female dressed body; and second, how the folding fan, which arrived from Japan through the Portuguese networks of trade, was shortly after appropriated through the use of Milanese and Flemish patterns that were indexical of local aesthetics of distinction and wealth.

Similarly, in the 18th century, through new channels of technical innovation and aesthetic preferences developing across Europe, lace and fans interacted once again. Throughout the early 1700s, the lace craftmanship suffered a period of sharp decline, probably due to a mix of factors, such as the diffusion of a new taste for a less exuberant fashion, and the import of muslin from India by the trading companies—and in particular the British EIC—and used in Europe for the making of collars, cuffs, and ruffs that were previously made of lace.[254] However, muslin, despite its practical use, freshness, and lightness, could not function as status marker to the extent of lace, because of its less elaborated appearance and texture.[255] From the 1720s, lace artisans in Brussels innovated their lace production and developed a technique that produced a bobbin lace that mimicked the lightness of the Indian muslin. In contrast with muslin, these new laces featured highly elaborated designs, especially those developed from the bizarre silks.[256] From the mid-18th century (especially between the late 1740s and 1760s), Chinoiserie designs (fig. 4.13) started to be integrated as well, reflecting the Western 'taste for the exotic' of the period.[257]

With such a successful return in fashion of lace—in particular in the mid-18th century—it is not surprising that once again lace patterns, but also aesthetics (entailing transparency, delicacy, skills-display) circulated across media. The new bobbin lace, by keeping its status as luxury commodity, has been used in furnishing textiles, accessories, and clothes of high-class members of all gender and ages. It permeated the 18th century visual culture as the large number of portraits surviving today still remind us.[258] Ivory *brisé* fans made in China participated in these new aesthetics. While they were surely developed thanks to the local know-how in carving techniques more broadly, these fans commissioned by the EIC traders pointed to a unique taste for transparency and lightness virtually absent in other objects. This distinctive group of fans highlights how, in one object, multiple meanings were attached to and expressed, namely the desire for displaying an item inseparable from its association to the 'China trade' and 'the exotic', while also appropriating the surface of one of the materials with the highest value of social distinction—lace.

If from the 16th and 17th centuries there is no existing evidence of fans made of actual lace[259], but only the paper and vellum cut imitations of it, from the 18th century survives the earliest lace fans. The earliest folding fan with a lace leaf (fig. 4.14) dates from the mid-18th century. It features a bobbin lace leaf in *point*

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[253] For additional information, see the curator's notes of the fan from the Royal Collection Trust at: https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/29/collection/25350/fan-from-the-stuart-collection

[254] Browne, *Lace from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 11, 13.

[255] Levey, *Lace*, 45.

[256] Bizarre silk was particularly popular in the 17th and 18th centuries. Its main feature was the use of asymmetrical, all-over motifs that originally were inspired textiles imported from Asia. See an example of bizarre silk from the early 18th century at: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/228939.

[257] Browne, *Lace from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 11. As additional examples of Chinoiserie lace, see, for instance: https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18444873/ ; https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/BK-16004.

[258] A particular detail representation of lace can be seen in the portrait of the Queen of Denmark Juliana Maria (1729-1796) by Virgilius Eriksen. In her left hand she is also holding a folding fan: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vigilius_Eriksen,_Enkedronning_Juliane_Marie,_1776,_KMS4056,_Statens_Museum_for_Kunst.jpg. See also, as additional examples of the use of lace, at: https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/22/collection/403553/princess-elizabeth-albertina-duchess-of-mecklenburg-strelitz-1713-61 ; https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-638 ; and this lavish lace dress in the style of bizarre silks at: https://www.habsburger.net/en/chapter/maria-theresa-empress-and-mother-her-peoples#o-7476.

[259] There is, however, one painting dating 1595 and depicting a noble lady with a flag fan that might have been made of *reticella* lace. It could not be excluded that it was an imitation of lace, and yet the intricacy of the pattern seems to suggest that the fan was made of actual lace. See picture at: https://www.1stdibs.com/art/paintings/portrait-paintings/frans-pourbus-younger-portrait-lady-venetian-lace-fan-c1595-remarkable-condition/id-a_10071662/.

d'Angleterre[260] mounted on sticks made of mother-of-pearl with inserts in gold and diamonds. The central shield on the leaf and the mount belonged to King Ferdinand VI of Spain (1713-1759). Possibly, the fan was thus gifted to his wife, Maria Magdalena Barbara of Portugal (1711-1758). The design of the leaf—e.g. the use of floral motifs, angels, and decorative bands—reflects a broader aesthetic trend of bobbin laces of the 1750s-60s. Another early lace folding fan belonging to a royal figure is that of Queen Charlotte (1744-1818) (fig. 4.15). Dating from approximately the 1780s, it features a much simpler design on its Brussels lace leaf with floral motifs, and a mount in mother-of-pearl incised with Chinoiserie motifs—birds, peonies, and 'Chinese figures'. Both fans combine the most fashionable lace techniques mounted with mother-of-pearl—the most precious material used for folding fans.

Although it could be possible that lace fans were not exclusively owned by royal and high-aristocratic family members (as likely these fragile items survived *because* belonging to royal families), the provenance of these two fans highlights that lace folding fans could function as extremely high-status markers, that only few members of the elite could display. The emerging social group of wealthy traders (especially in England and America) involved with the 'China trade', and who were collecting and at times commissioning the ivory *brisé* fans in Canton, were certainly aware of the status of lace fans and possibly negotiated with the Cantonese fan-makers new design solutions as those seen in these transitional *brisé* fans. While the overall design composition of the ivory *brisé* fans may resonates with those of lace fans (compare figs 4.1 and 4.15?) without directly replicating the patterns, their materiality and surfaces strikingly recreate the unique tactility of lace. While it is unlikely that lace has ever been intentionally brought to China throughout the 18th century—as it was too fragile to be transported throughout such a long journey—and there is no historical evidence in support of the fact that lace pattern books circulated in Canton, it should not be excluded that the aesthetic of lace was completely unknown there. Not only the traders might have worn themselves lace cravats that could be used as reference (fig. 4.16), but portraits that were used as source for the making of glass paintings in Canton would often depict lace. Finally, these is no sufficient data in support that lace was imported to Canton, however, a document dating 1731-35 shows that lace items were among the goods that the British officers were allowed to invest in gold in China[261] (fig. 4.17). This point to the fact that although never in great quantities, lace did arrive in Canton.

Arguably, these fans had a more explicit material connection with the 'China trade', not only because they were produced there, but also the materiality of ivory directly referenced to the trade in exotic animal-derived materials and a technical knowledge that was not equally mastered in the West. There is almost no ivory fan made in Canton within any royal collection across Europe, with one exception (fig. 4.2), whose provenance, however, has not been investigated. Therefore, it is likely that these fans were meaningful to those who actively participated to the international trade, and that only within that specific social circle they could be objects to display power and economic connections. Due to a lack of documentation, it remains difficult to investigate the provenance of most of these ivory *brisé* fans. However, few have been associated to historical figures also thanks to the insert of monograms within the design layout. For instance, an ivory fan (fig. 4.18) that seems to have belonged to Marie Lansing—the member of a wealthy Dutch American family of traders and landowners—may be evidence of the social groups that consumed these fans.[262] The insert of monograms on the ivory *brisé* fans from the 1780s onwards in particular highlight how fans were part of a wider system of custom-made production that lead to the personalization of silverware, porcelainware, and carved boxes.[263]

While ivory carved fans were produced building on the Cantonese broader knowledge in object-carving, private traders commissioned individual fans thus fostering the productions of new designs and new

[260] While in the 18th century the local techniques of lace have been developed, evolving into specific lace styles named 'Brussels,' 'Valenciennes' laces and so on, as they started to spread out around Europe, these names stopped to refer to the actual production place, but only to the style. The 'point d'Angleterre', for instance, was not a type of lace produced in England. Rather, it referred to the market where this type of lace was mostly appreciated. See more on this in Levey, *Lace*, 45.

[261] For a detailed analysis of the investment in gold in China and its shifting value in the 18th century, see Pritchard, 'Private Trade between England and China in the Eighteenth Century (Concluded)', 222–23.

[262] More in Lee, *Philadelphians and the China Trade, 1784-1844*.

[263] Illingworth, *Fans from the East*, 29; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 329. Miniature depicted on fans similarly resulted from the collaboration between different workshops, for instance between those carving ivory and the watercolourists.

material sensibilities. In a moment as the mid-late 18h century—when new lace techniques brought lace back in fashion and innovative experimentations in design that were appropriated by the elites across Europe as display of wealth and taste—it is likely that the aesthetics of lace at large, entailing lightness, refinement, technology, and the making of an exclusively pan-European and American taste, circulated across media. These were the qualifications that were materially translated into the ivory carving. As rising social classes would emulate the aristocratic systems of fashion and taste, the fans made in Canton were commissioned while keeping in mind how they could interact with another status object that was to be indexical of luxury across all sectors of society because used for clothes, interior, and accessories—lace.

These *brisé* ivory fans resulted from a fluid combination of technical knowledge in carving hard materials that was applied to different objects (boxes fig. 4.6, .4.7); an increasing request for custom-made items in Europe and especially America that were indexical of power and economic relations on a global scale and referenced to the objects commissioned by aristocratic families (such as those with royal shields); and finally, the interconnections between fans and lace decorations. While in the 16th – 17th century the lace techniques and fan-making intersected especially through the circulation of specific patterns—and by replicating patterns new meanings and associations with local crafts were added to the paper and vellum fans—in the 18th century the texture, surface, and inherent transparency of lace were mimicked through carving. If in the 16th century the folding fan, a 'new object from the East' was therefore appropriated through the reference to local, European skills entailed in the production of lace, similarly, the ivory fans made in Canton incorporated a broader taste for lace that was an explicit marker of luxury for the contemporary elites and those aspiring to acquire that position.

4.3 Ivory re-materialized: Alterations of the body and the home

While the historical information and provenance of these ivory *brisé* fans might help us broadening our understanding of their 'social lives' and value within the context of the 18th century society, it remains extremely difficult to retrieve the private meanings and emotions transferred to these objects by their owners. However, by investigating how ivory fans interacted with the dressed body and the interior space might contribute to shading some light on the collective perceptions attached to the surfaces of carved ivory. If on one hand, ivory fans as 'extension of the hand', interacted with collars, cuffs, and ruffs while mimicking lace and together shaped the 18th century dressed female body; on the other, ivory fans as 'Asian ivory objects' were organically integrated in the furnishing of the house. By shifting between these different identities, the dressed body and the domestic space were interrelated.

Already in the mid-16th century, when lace and fans interacted for the first time, ideas of gender were constructed through a process of shaping the body—in particular with the introduction of foundation garments.[264] Yet the 'distortion', manipulation, and dramatization of the bodily features happened also through the use of collars and ruffs that seemed to reproduce the shape of the folding fan itself (fig. 4.12). In the 18th century this manipulation of the body resulted in an even sharper distinction between notions of femininity and masculinity. The folding fan, increasingly carried exclusively by women, maintained a strong visual connection with the dress, but also with the decorative accessories made of lace, as can be seen in a portrait of Queen Charlotte from the 1770s (fig. 4.19).

The folding fan, especially if made of lace as the one depicted in the painting, because referencing both on a material and visual level the end of the sleeves, enhanced their function as 'extension of the hand' but also transferred ambiguity to their role as face-screen. The transparency of lace, which was mimicked through ivory, left the communicative role of the folding fan, based on the coordination of acts of unfolding, covering the face, and fanning, more imaginative and only suggestive. Transparency fostered the acquisition of new layers of meanings attached to the languages of the fan, which were far from being formally regulated.[265] At once, it contributed to shaping new perceptions of the female body and new communicative resources that impacted on ideas of modesty and femininity. Although there is no visual evidence representing the ivory *brisé* fan exported from China, we can speculate that they participated to this process of correlations between lace and the hand, as can be seen in a portrait of a noble woman by Donat Nonotte (fig. 4.20).

[264] Bendall, *Shaping Femininity*, 1.
[265] Biger, 'Vrais et Faux Langages de l'éventail'.

At the same time, these ivory fans were also objects of display, 'exotic' souvenirs that occupied cabinets and display tables along with carved ivory boxes. Together with personalized silver and porcelain sets, ivory fans with monograms created a form of decoration that was built on the display of wealth and economic connections with Asia, and in particular China. For the wealthiest, ivory commodities, being mostly associated with the colonization of South Asia—where many of these objects were made—became a device to materialize processes of appropriation and increasing political oppression. Ivory in some cases became integral part of the construction material for houses, such as can be seen on the staircase of Claydon House (Devon, England), a residence owned by the noble Verney family. Interestingly, in Claydon House itself the surfaces of the ivory fans from China, and the Chinoiserie visual fantasies of Asia merged in the insert of white canopy (fig. 4.21), originally covering the bed. The whole room was transformed into a carved ivory object, while at the same time being appropriated through the use of an aesthetic purely European—that of Chinoiserie.

In conclusion, these carved ivory fans resulted from a process of experimentation, blending the Cantonese local know-how in carving techniques with the European patterns of taste shaped by technical innovations, such as those contributing to the revival of lace. British EIC's officers played a crucial mediating role in fostering these negotiations between local and foreign aesthetics, which involved the increasing introduction of miniature paintings with European subjects within the fan themselves.[266] These fans have been, in turn, object of copying in Europe itself. These pieces, however, could not match in quality and sophistication the Chinese carvings.[267] The very fact that these carved ivory fans made in Canton were copied highlights how successful they must have been in the late 18th century. On another level of domestication, carved ivory fans were adjusted to the cockade shape, which was becoming extremely popular in Europe.[268] Cantonese ivory carvers showcased a wide range of design solutions that highlight how highly desirable were carved ivory fans.

In contrast with lace fans which were embodiment of European, and in particular Flemish, technical refinement, however, these ivory fans were expression of skilful innovations mastered exclusively in Asia, and in particular Canton. They were likely collected and desired as ivory objects and souvenirs of China, which could convey stories of individual interactions that the British officers established in Canton itself. Being often carved with initials, these fans entailed a degree of personalisation that, once in London, would have point to personal and family ties with the China Trade and, increasingly, British colonial ambitions, together with silver and porcelain tea sets and dishes. However, ivory was inextricably connected to South Asia too, which not only was the link through which often Southeast Asian ivory would arrive to Canton, but also the region where ivory furniture and other objects were produced to furnish the British houses. Women who owned these fans, ivory gifts from Asia specifically produced for female consumption, could display through them their social status.

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[266] See, for instance, https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1916.366 ; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613590254 ; https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/AK-RAK-2005-3/. https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18311995/

[267] These carved ivory fans with miniatures have been copied in Europe, as these examples can show: fan made in England (1790) https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/24/collection/25375/fan-depicting-frederick-duke-of-york ; dan made in England (1777-1800) https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/BK-1960-57;

[268] See as examples of ivory cockade fans made in China for the export market: https://collections.mfa.org/objects/125109/circular-fan?ctx=8a2e2af3-9ba3-4c8f-aa01-0ff1b2fb2e72&idx=74 ; https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/133113.html?mulR=499059323|40 ; https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/39342.html?mulR=472986055|210. An example of a French cockade fan: https://collections.mfa.org/objects/124446/calendar-fan

Conclusions
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Fluidity as analytical category

The trajectories of the ivory folding fans produced in Canton for the export markets highlight a far more complex, nuanced, and flexible narrative on the fraction of material culture that has been categorized as 'export art'. Folding fans were made in Canton with the mediation of British officers, individual traders within South and Southeast Asia, and Chinese Hongs, who, all together controlled the flow of raw materials such as ivory into Canton. Through the same trading routes, which were at once controlled by official and private systems of trade, precious objects from South Asia and Europe were brought into the city, as prototypes of successful and desirable commodities. Prints, paintings, textiles, and designs for porcelain-ware circulated across the Cantonese workshops, thus fostering processes of domestication of unknown patterns of taste. Ivory folding fans materialized these commercial and technical interactions, by becoming devices to display local technical knowledge in ivory craftmanship—ranging from its polishing, its painting to its carving—and skilful negotiations to the different markets where the fans were consumed.

Ivory folding fans made in Canton were objects to explore innovative synthesis of different traditions of decoration and colour associations (Chapter II); to create individual and collective memories of a romanticized story of the 'China trade' (Chapter III); to experiment with technical solutions practices of intermedia mimesis (Chapter IV). In all these cases, ivory fans resulted from a constantly developing adjustment to the European fashions of the period, while remaining items that pointed to the technical advancement of the Cantonese workshops in the manipulation of hard materials such as ivory. This manipulation of ivory as painting surface, as mount at times appropriated in Europe for the local fans' production, and as carved object contributed to making the 'China fan' a constantly new, desirable object in Europe—functioning as gift, fashion statement, and marker of power.

Whether these folding fans were understood as exotica, as ivory objects, or as status markers connected to the China Trade, they were owned by women who, through the act of display, could access, participate to and finally appropriate narratives and individual stories connected to the building of the British Empire that were experienced by their husbands and fathers. Ivory fans were therefore indexical of involvement in the English commercial and political ambitions. Although produced in China, many of these fans were re-framed as 'India fans,' an area from which ivory furniture and objects was being collected by the wealthiest families. At the same time, however, these fans were also co-producing a vision of China, which will then evolve into the aesthetics of Chinoiserie, that was also a resource for fostering new, female perspective on artistic taste. This new vision permeated the 18th century women's wardrobes, walls, and dressing-rooms as a tool to acquire knowledge on multiple materials, textures, and colour associations. The interior space became throughout the century a space to incorporate, appropriate, and develop ideas on the 'East.'

Ivory folding fans from Canton were part of this mutual process of negotiation of the 'unknown,' both in Canton itself—where European visions of material culture were integrated into the local production—and in London—through the multiple social meanings that were attached to them in warehouses, shops, and homes. Stressing the mutuality of these exchanges remains the larger aimed contribution of this research project, which argues for a re-evaluation of the 18th century objects made for the export markets as *things in-between* on multiple layers. By fostering an understanding of the material culture as fluid, this research project offered an alternative to the theory of 'hybridity.' As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, while scholarship on 'export art' as well as on 'decorative arts' has either directly or indirectly fostered the preservation of a divide of fans produced for the local and the foreign markets, the reality of production and consumption was far more complex and less regulated. In particular, I discussed in Chapter III how fans that have been labelled as 'Italian' were in reality assembled with ivory mounts produced in Canton. Similarly, textiles and laces from outside China were re-interpreted as references.

More layers could be unpacked in future research on the subject, as for instance materials that were considered as exclusively for the making of fans for the European markets such as ivory were in reality employed in China as well,[269] and that, contrary to what has been thought, 'export folding fans' were used within China itself in the second half of the 19th century (fig. 5). Similarly, future research could investigate the multiple levels of 'intermedia crossings' embodied by the production and consumption of fans. On one hand, they were produced in Cantonese workshops with different technical knowledge and design traditions that were linked to specific materials. Lacquered fans for instance show innovative adaptions of design layouts from the decoration of lacquered screens and boxes.[270] Similarly, silver and golden paper fans combined techniques from the local production of paper fans, while integrating Chinoiserie elements, and were mirroring new sensibilities for embroidered and painted Chinese silks that were used in Europe for the making of dresses and bed covers.[271]

Investigating the cross-media circulations offers a fresh perspective for the field of material culture studies, especially by promoting a re-framing of early modern things as sites that could appeal to multi-sensorial experiences of reality. While retrieving the historical sensory experiences of objects remain a difficult task in academic research, exploring the references that were built across materials and objects may offer an innovative angle in how communities experienced and desired things that were associated with luxury and rarity. Finally, this perspective gives us the opportunity to reflect more broadly on the meaning of objects as things that were 'designed' and created new realities that lead to an increasing *humanization* of the space and a manipulated vision of the body. Objects made for the foreign markets were encoding at once multiple visions of what the design of the material reality could mean in specific historical moments, while also fostering processes of knowledge-sharing of previously unknown aesthetic perspectives.

Objects were (and are) not fluid only by transgressing geographical and media entities. As this research project has highlighted, folding fans were gendered objects, but visual and advertising sources refer to a more complex picture then the one framing fans simply as items of vanity and femininity. While ivory folding fans were used as fashion accessories, they were also objects to display ties with social networks related to the China trade. Fans with topographic views functioned as souvenirs and tools to create visions of the life in Canton, inaccessible to them. Through the paintings from the period, it can be evinced that folding fans could express vanity and eroticism, but more often were fully folded communicating authority and power. For this reason, the mount was enhancing the fan itself as status marker, more then the visual content on the leaf. Painted and carved ivory mounts were signifier of involvement with the China trade as well as markers of access to commodities of rare sophistication, which could even be custom-made (Chapter IV).

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[269] See, for instance, an ivory fan used for Daoist rituals in the Qing dynasty: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2018-3005-507.

[270] A lacquered bamboo *brisé* fan from the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales (accession number : 2012.9.1) made approximately between 1620 and 1720 features a design layout with animal motifs in the lower borders that can be seen on a lacquered screen made in 1689-90 in China for the domestic market (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/61665?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&when=A.D.+1600-1800&where=Asia&ft=screen&offset=100&rpp=20&pos=104). At the same time, on the upper border of the screens the fan shape has been used as decorative element, highlighting the cross-referencing between these two objects—fans and screens. Likely, fans from China of this type were used in Europe already by the end of the 16th century, as can be seen in a portrait by Giovanni Battista Moroni (https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-3036).

[271] Painted silver and gold paper was used for the production of fans' leaves both destined to the domestic consumption (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/49255?when=A.D.+1600-1800&where=China&ft=folding+fan&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=19) as well as foreign one (https://collections.mfa.org/objects/96964/folding-fan?ctx=b5bf93e2-5f6f-4c5b-a356-5bc8ac977d59&idx=50). In 18th century Europe, the appreciation of luminescent textures was shaped in particular by Chinese silks, used both for the making of dresses (https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1123210/gown-unknown/dress-unknown/) and home furnishing (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/69860). Desire for silks from China may have contributed to the success of painted silver paper fans, as they could reference the reflecting surface of the silks.

Ivory folding fans challenge coded perspectives on gender not only because they question the assumption that they were exclusively used by women as expression of vanity, but also because they offer an insight on individual histories of female entrepreneurship in the 18th century (as the story of Esther Sleepe shows, see fig. 1.2), and finally folding fans were in reality used also by western men (although probably not so commonly) (fig. 1.8). As objects of 'performance' folding fans were communicative devices as they emphasized forms of postural language and articulated ideas of self-representation together with dress.

This research project has illustrated that ivory folding fans were objects shifting between cultural, gender, and material identities. The different contexts of production and consumption altered the meanings that could be attached to them. Today folding fans more broadly are back in fashion, they are again used as 'object of performance' and expression of the queer identity within the ballroom culture. As much as folding fans are objects of desire, ivory objects are today the outcast of every museum's collection. Within the contemporary context of human exploitation of natural and animal resources, we are left with the dilemma of the place that could be occupied in the future by objects that embody stories of violence and extermination, such as those made of ivory. A possible path may be to give a history and identity to objects that resulted from such a problematic sourcing, rather than letting their trajectories to be erased.

(29.738 words)

Appendix—Illustrations

Fig. 1—*Brisé* fan made in Canton for the European market, 1700-1720, painted and lacquered ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, silk thread. Note the Buddhist swastikas on the upper border as decorative elements.

Fig. 2—Portraits of Italian Jesuit missionaries holding Chinese folding fans. From left: an engraving depicting Matteo Ricci; a portrait of Matteo Ricci; a portrait of Prospero Intorcetta (Palermo, 1671)

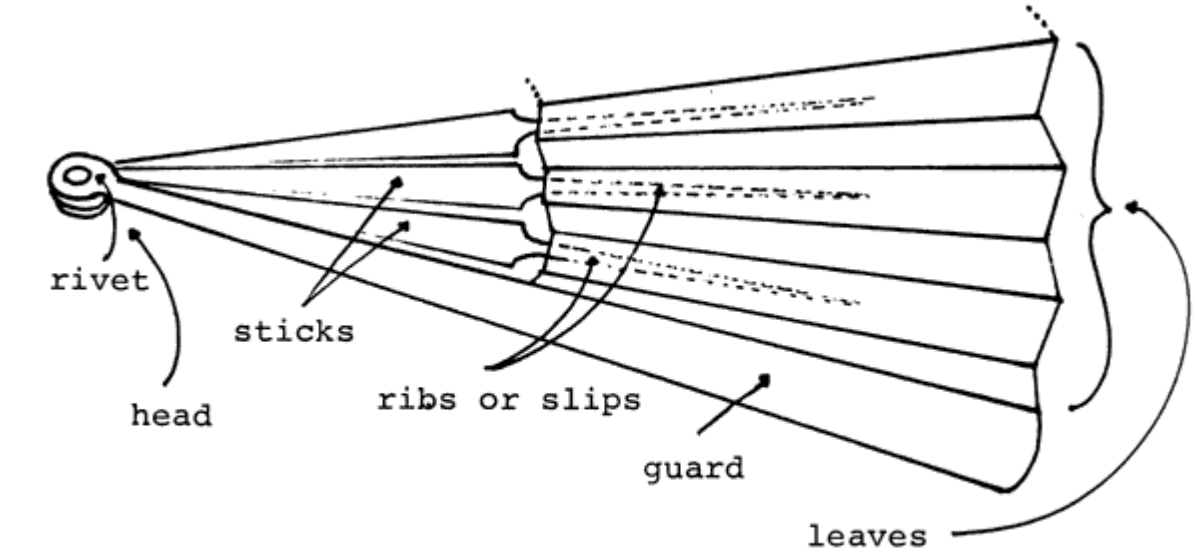

DIAGRAM A

THE ANATOMY OF A FOLDING FAN

Fig. 3—The components of the folding fan. The sticks and the guards composed the 'mount' of the fan

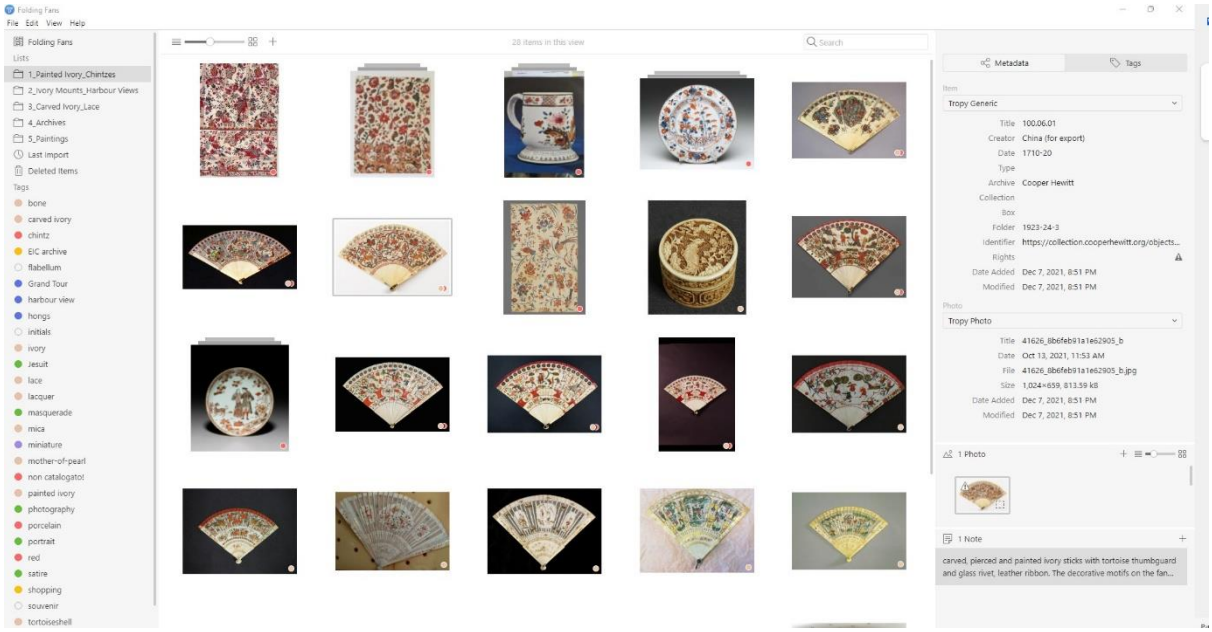

Fig. 4—Overview of the fans and other sources studied in Chapter II as organised in Tropy

Fig. 1.1—Two trade cards of London's exotica dealers. On the left: the trade card of Charles Vere at the Indian King; on the right: the trade card of Blanch Kemp

Fig. 1.2—Trade card of the fan-maker Esther Sleepe

Fig. 1.3—Two satirical prints (detail) from the 18th century. In both cases, the folding fan was depicted fully unfolded and close to the face

Fig. 1.4—'La Galerie du Palais, Paris' by Abraham Bosse (France), c. 1737. Note the two folding fans in the upper central section of the display

Fig. 1.5—A fan leaf later transformed into painting depicting all the commodities exported from the East. See the folding fans on the floor

Fig. 1.6—A porcelain shop ('Venetian fair'), made by Ludwigsburg Porcelain Manufactory (Germany), 1765. See the folding fans in the left corner in the background

Fig. 1.7—Portrait of Maria Amalia of Saxony by Giuseppe Bonito, c. 1744. The folding fan in official portrait was often held fully folded and vertically

Fig. 1.8—Two portraits of 18th century men holding an unfolded fan. The figure on the right, in particular, is holding a fan mounted on carved ivory made in Canton

Fig. 1.9—Folding fans close to the face as expression of seduction

Fig. 1.10—‘Rehearsal of an opera’, c. 1709

Fig. 1.11—'A lady receiving a cavalier’ by Pietro Longhi, 1754-55

Fig. 1.12—Detail from the trade card of Benjamin Cole, a haberdasher

Fig. 1.13—Venice ridotto, by Pietro Longhi, 1750

Fig. 1.14—Portrait of Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer (council of the Indies and major of Amsterdam) with his family, by George van der Mijn, 1763

Fig. 2.1—*Brisé* ivory fan, made in Canton for the European market, 1700-1730

Fig. 2.2—*Brisé* ivory fan, made in Canton for the European market, 1700-1720

Fig. 2.3—Details of figs 1, 2.2. From up left, the butterfly, the *qilin*, the phoenix, the squirrel, the carp, and the Buddhist swastikas as framing device

Fig. 2.4—Detail of a brisé fan from Alexander's collection. See a woman in the right corner. Could this be a representation of a local woman? The hairstyle remains quite difficult to identify with the western hair style of the period

Fig 2.5—Porcelain dish made in China for the European market, 1715-1725

Fig.2.6 —Detail of a *famille rose* cup. Note the gold outline on the leaves, as well as the upper border with the floral motifs framed by a geometrical background

Fig. 2.7—Ivory brisé fan, 1700-1730, currently preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum

Fig. 2.8—Here I compare 1) an Indian chintz with a fan from the Cooper Hewitt's collection dated around 1710 1720. The colour palette with the ivory ground, the prominence of red and the double outline in pale blue are extremely similar, as well as the presence of the phoenix integrated with floral motifs. 2) The hexagram pattern used for carving in open work the same fan (see detail on the lower right) with an ivory box from the British Museum.

Fig. 2.9—Cotton hanging (chintz) made in the Coromandel Coast, 1680-1700

Fig. 2.10—Canopy bed with Indian Chinzes cotton hangings

Fig. 2.11—Painted and dyed cotton petticoat, *c.* 1725

Fig. 3.1—Folding fan with the representation of the Empress of China anchored at the Whampoa Reach, made in Canton, 1784, watercolour on paper (leaf) and carved mother-of-pearl (mount)

Fig. 3.2—Folding fan depicting a port view of Macao, made in China, dated c. 1760 by Crossman [272], watercolour on paper (leaf) and ivory or bone (discrepancy between Crossman and the museum's description). The flags on the three ships are those of the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark

[272] *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.

Fig. 3.3— Folding fan depicting the port view of Macao, c. 1790, made in China, watercolour on paper (leaf) and carved ivory (mount)

Fig. 3.4—Folding fan depicting the port view of Canton, made in China, c. 1785-90, watercolour on paper (leaf) and carved ivory (mount). The flags on the buildings (left to right) are those of Denmark, Sweden, and France. The larger vessels are Chinese junks

Fig. 3.5—Folding fan depicting the hongs of Canton, made in Canton, 1790-1800, watercolour on paper (leaf) and carved ivory (mount)

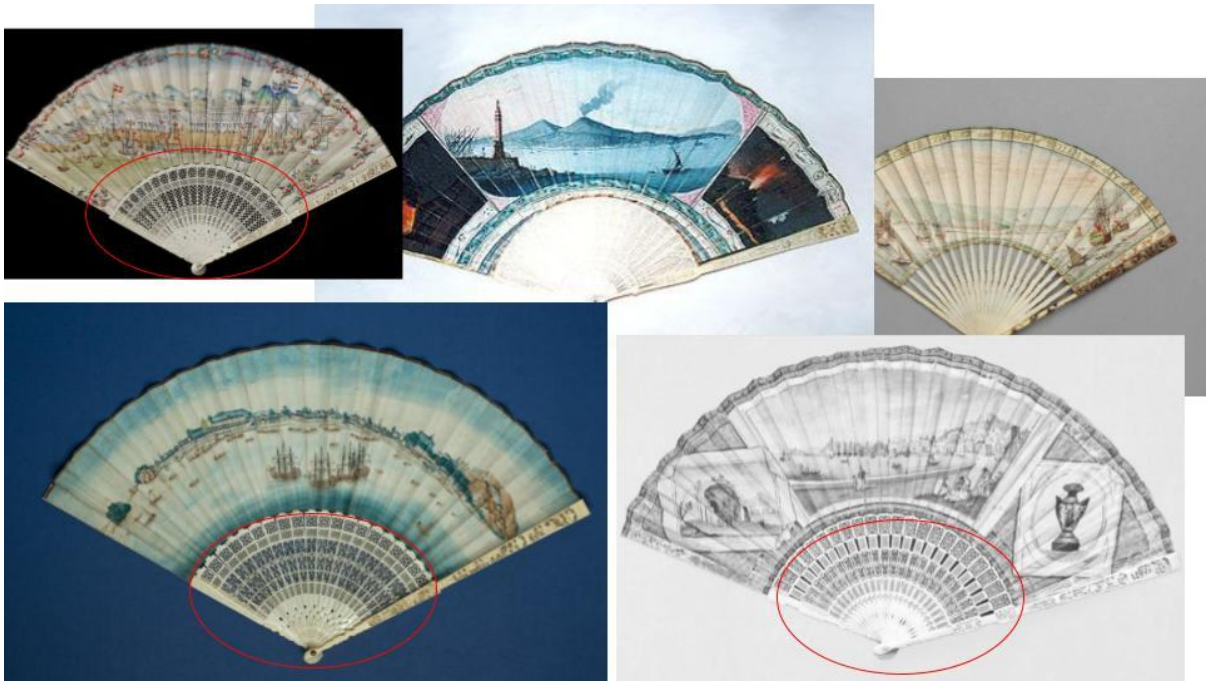

Fig. 3.6—In this image, I compare the ivory mounts of two fans made in China (figs. 3.3, 3.4) and one made in Italy, likely Naples (lower right corner). The mount of the latter has been identified as made in China. Indeed, we can see that the geometrical patterns and their layout on the sticks (as well as the motifs on the guards) are strikingly similar. Interestingly, all these mounts 'frame' leaves depicting the port views

Fig. 3.7—Folding fan depicting a view of the harbour of Lisbon, 1739, made in England or Portugal, signed by A. Michel, watercolour on paper (leaf), ivory mount

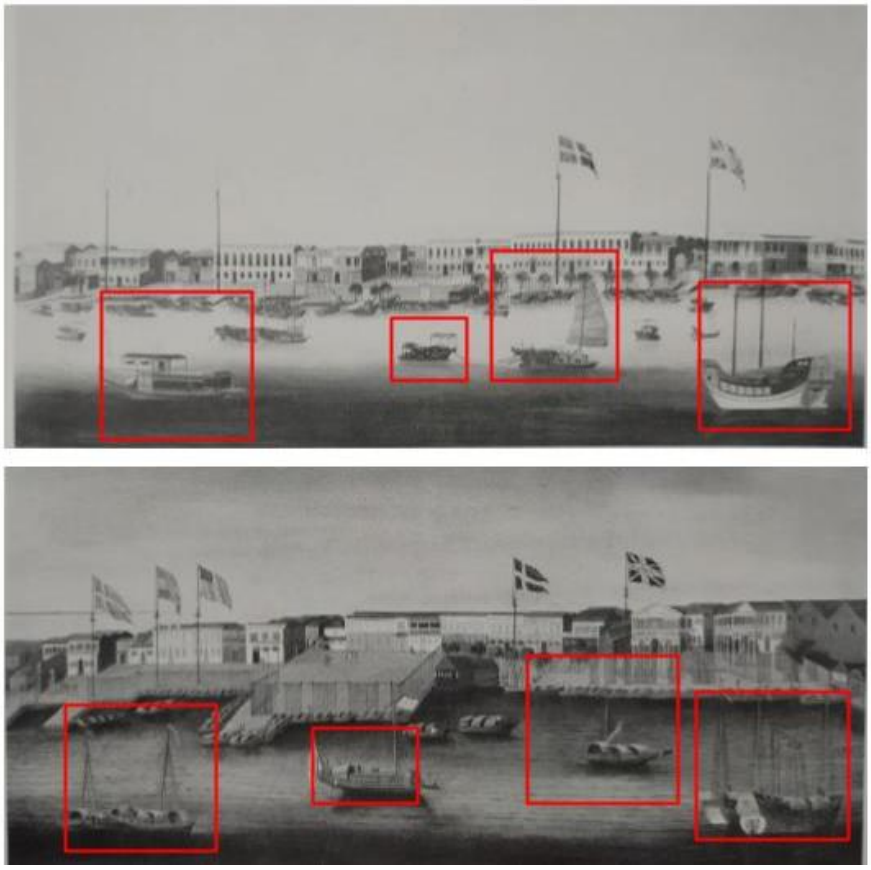

Fig. 3.8—Compositional scheme for the placement of the ships in two paintings of the view of Canton. The upper is a painting attributed to Spoilum, dated c. 1790, oil on canvas; the lower is a painting made by Michel Felice Corné, made after 1800 (but with the Hongs of the 1790s), oil on wood panels

Fig.3. 9—Folding fan with the view of the Hongs of Canton, made in China, 1800, gouache on paper (leaf) and ivory (mount), carved initials AB, possibly for Anne Brown of Providence

Fig. 3.10—Carved ivory box with a miniature painting of the Boca Tigris, made in Canton, 1800

Fig. 4.1—Ivory *brisé* fan, c. 1785- 1800, made in Canton for the European market

Fig.4. 2—Detail of ivory *brisé* fan. Note the difference of the carving techniques (and three-dimensionality achieved) between the guards and the sticks

Fig. 4.3—Compare a fan with the ribbed ground more visible (left) with its later development with richer motifs (right)

Fig.4. 4—Ivory *brisé* fan, c. 1790, made in Canton for the export market. Note the use of geometrical motif and the net-technique for the background

Fig. 4.5—Ivory *brisé* fan, c. 1800-25, made in Canton for the export market.

Fig. 4.6—Carved ivory box, made in Canton.

Fig. 4.7—Carved ivory box with CSB monogram. It belonged to Maria Ingle and was gifted to her by her father, who commissioned it in China with the initials of the wife. Could hold sewing tools or other small accessories[273]

Fig. 4.8—Folding fan, c. 1590-1600, made in Italy or France. Cut skin leaf with mica and silk inserts mounted on ivory. It is the earliest preserved fan.

Fig. 4.9—Folding fan, c. 1600, place of production unknown. Leather leaf mounted on bone

[273] Provenance from https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O73967/box-unknown/.

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[275] According to the note, it is the same fan to appear in the painting: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Laurits_Regner_Tuxen_%281853-1927%29_-_The_Marriage_of_George%2C_Duke_of_York%2C_with_Princess_Mary_of_Teck%2C_6_July_1893_-_RCIN_402437_-_Royal_Collection.jpg

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*Sales value in China of goods permitted to be invested in gold**

Article of Merchandize	*Sales Value Tls.*
Gold and silver lace. (Sold for) $ 514.75	308.85
Gold and silver thread	401.81
Amber Cattee	99.85
Sundries for the factory bought in England	199.96
Enamels	124,00
Laced hats, 2. (Sold for) $ 25	15,00
Diamond , $ 625	375.00
Ale, 8 chests, $ 388.25	232,25
Mathematical instruments	9.30
Plate (Silverware)	379.51
Perugues, 2, $ 90	54.00
Painting on copper	240.00
Silk stockings, 2 pairs, $ 15	9.00
Gold Watches $ 85 and gold studded box $ 15	60.00
Gold boxes, 1 square, 1 oval	150.00
Inlaid gold box	39.00
Pocket book, 3 snuff boxes witn stone, silver and agate covers $ 44	26.40
Snuff box with a moving picture	30.00
Snuff box of tortoise shell with arms	24.00
Crystal trunk	35.00
Tobacco	19.38
	Tls 2,832.31 = £944

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[276] https://www.mcny.org/story/fantastic-fans . On the Lansing family history see https://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/l/lansing.html and on Marie Lansing https://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/l/malansing3522.html

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[288] Levey, *Lace*.

[289] According to the note, it is the same fan to appear in the painting: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Laurits_Regner_Tuxen_%281853-1927%29_-_The_Marriage_of_George%2C_Duke_of_York%2C_with_Princess_Mary_of_Teck%2C_6_July_1893_-_RCIN_402437_-_Royal_Collection.jpg

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Conclusions

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