Images of the Canton factories

The port city of Canton (now Guangzhou), China, served as a vital hub in the early phase of modern global trade. In the 18th century, numerous European companies set up shop in the designated foreign quarter of factories and warehouses. Like their peers around the world, Chinese artists adapted quickly to the sweeping social, economic, and aesthetic changes wrought by these mercantile aspirations on a world scale. The resulting artworks—often labeled as ‘export art’—have long been characterized by art historians as inauthentically hybrid, and thus not deserving of scholarly attention. As a broad category, export art encompasses a great diversity of objects made by artists throughout China in a style of varieties and mediums. These include paintings, fans, textiles, decorative and utilitarian ceramics, lacquer ware, and much more.

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Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Karwинг Mok. 2015. Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822: Reading History in Art. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
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THIS OBJECT-ORIENTED VOLUME, co-authored by Paul Van Dyke and Maria Karwинг Mok, examines representations of Canton via a specific type of Chinese export art, using fresh eyes and new angles. Bookended by an introduction and conclusion, the volume consists of nine chapters: six are chronological surveys, each spanning approximately a decade; the remainder consist of thematic analysis. The introduction provides a succinct history of the founding of Canton’s European merchant district, beginning with the construction of China Street in 1760 (p. xx). The study concludes with the years preceding the Great Fire of 1822, when the entire quarter of factories burned down, thus changing the landscape forever.

The authors train their eyes on painted panoramas of the Canton factories, specifically those found on porcelain punchbowls and on two-dimensional surfaces, from small ghouche panels to large canvases in oil. Their objective, as referenced in the book’s subtitle, is ‘reading history through
of Majapahit architecture, expands geographically across the vast region of Majapahit influence and architecturally across the periods of research. The authors argue that, although traditions of architecture and artwork from Majapahit have been studied and interpreted by scholars, the current understanding is incomplete. They present a comparative approach to understand the evolution of Majapahit culture and its impact on the arts and society.

The study is distinguished by two fresh approaches to the topic. The first chapter relates some of this story briefly, while the second chapter is dedicated to a comparative approach to understanding Majapahit culture. The authors present a methodological approach that is based on the comparison between Majapahit and other cultures in the region, providing a fresh perspective on the development of Majapahit architecture.

The authors use a wide range of sources, including ancient texts, inscriptions, and modern archaeological findings, to support their arguments. They emphasize the importance of careful observation of the details in the artworks and the archival records to gain a deeper understanding of Majapahit culture. The authors also use a variety of techniques, including analysis of visual and textual data, to provide detailed insights into the evolution of Majapahit architecture.

The authors argue that the study of Majapahit architecture is important for understanding the development of Southeast Asian architecture, as well as the cultural and social changes that took place in the region. They believe that this comparative approach is necessary to understand the complexities of Majapahit culture and its impact on the arts and society.
There are other proverbs with the same sentiment: “The apples on the other side of the wall are the sweetest,” “Our neighbor’s hen seems a goose,” and “Your pot broken seems better than my whole one.” These all have the idea of others having it better off, even if it’s not true. We’d love to learn about other proverbs from around the world similar to “The Grass is Always Greener,” and also if the same proverb exists elsewhere. Please share your versions, with translations if possible, in the comments below. Thanks in advance! Mama Lisa. References