

The Long History of “Made in China”

Written by Libby Holloway

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Today the tag “Made in China” often makes us think of cheaply made items that are inexpensive and disposable. If we could step back a few generations our ancestors would be shocked by our attitude.

Long before Europeans even thought about coming to America they were enthralled by China. Large and mysterious, China was the land of economic opportunity. It was the source of silks, spices, tea and beautiful china made from an exotic product called porcelain. This article is the short-story version of a very long history of trade.

I’m really picking up somewhere in the middle of the story when I start by talking about porcelains. Tea had been desired by Europeans since the mid-1600’s and was considered a luxury for royalty and their wealthy friends. Its export increased later in the century and, though still pricey, was more readily available. As with anything that has great expense, the consumption of it became something of a ceremony. Maybe the Chinese habit of ceremonial tea drinking had an influence because sea captains who would take part in the ceremony in port would take those stories back to their own tea tables at home. At any rate, the drinking of tea became quite an event, especially in England.

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