

A Chinese of Rank and a Marked Example

by Michael Sack

One of the most elusive objects in the transferware world is an example of the “A Chinese of Rank” pattern made by Spode, and even rarer is an example bearing the Spode factory mark. Recently, I noticed on eBay a listing for an 8.38 inch (21cm) plate described as “Antique Staffordshire Blue Transferware Spode Plate Chinoiserie Opium Smoker”. My curiosity was aroused, because I knew that the “Opium Smoker” pattern was made by Miles Mason, not Spode, so how could it have a Spode mark? After looking at the picture and overcoming my disbelief, I quickly pressed the “Buy It Now” button, with no thought of checking its condition or bargaining for it. Here was a pristine plate (Fig. 1) with the “A Chinese of Rank” pattern and also an impressed (Fig 2) and printed (Fig 3) “SPODE” mark and printed worker’s mark (Fig 4). Note that because of inaccurate printing, the workman’s mark is missing a curved line at the top that connects what looks like a “1” to what looks like a “4”. It actually is workman’s mark WMT2 (Fig. 4a), as shown on page 90 of Robert Copeland’s *Spode & Copeland Marks*. My luck was compounded, because I also have the source print (Fig. 5), which my daughter happened to have in a box with some other prints removed (by somebody else) from the book, Thomas and William Daniell’s *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China*, published in 1810 by Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, London.

The text accompanying the print states “The grave personage in the arm-chair is known by the

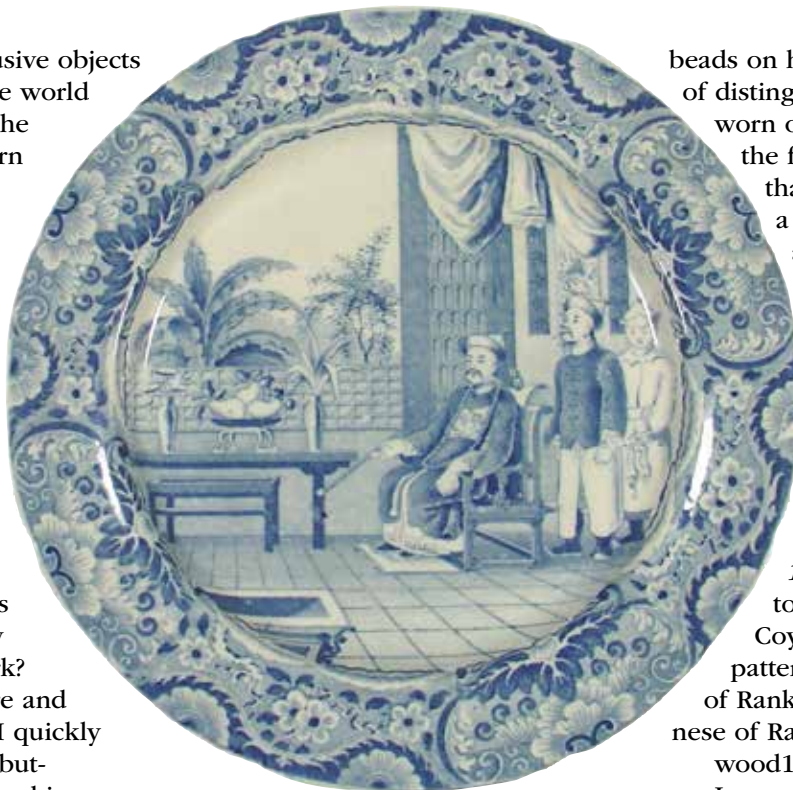


Figure 1. Plate



Figure 2. Impressed mark



Figure 3. Printed mark

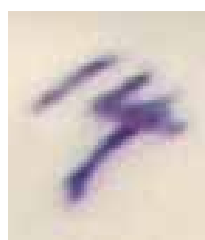


Figure 4 & 4a. Worker's mark



beads on his neck to be a Mandarin of distinguished rank; and the badge worn on his breast, exhibiting the figure of a bird, intimates that he fills not a military but a civil department; the two attendants are ready to light his pipe, an operation frequently performed by a lens, or to replenish it with tobacco”.

The rarity of the Spode pattern has been documented for many years. In *The Dictionary of Blue and White Printed Pottery 1780 – 1880 Vol. I* (referred to in the TCC database as CoyshHenrywood1982) the pattern is called “The Chinaman of Rank” but is corrected to “A Chinese of Rank” in Vol. II (CoyshHenrywood1989). It is illustrated in Vol. I on an egg cup stand with (not illustrated here) both impressed and printed marks, but the entire pattern is not visible because of the holes for the egg cups. It is further described in Vol. II as “the only known marked specimen”. It has recently come to light that another private collection holds a different egg cup stand with only an impressed mark.

Paul Holdway, in an article in Vol. 1, page 79 (1988) of the Spode Society’s Review (Spode-Society1986-) mentions uncovering “A Chinese of Rank” with shards in large waste disposal sites used by Spode, near the factory. Though many of the shards show a workman’s mark, none has a factory impressed or printed mark.

The Drakard and Holdway books *Spode Printed Ware* (DrakardHoldway1983) and *Spode Transfer Printed Ware* (Drakard-Holdway2002) show an unmarked 8.25 inch (21cm) “bread and butter plate of saucer shape” in

the pattern, which they have designated as P632. On the same page is a photo showing a broth bowl and a mug “attributed to Spode”. However, the pattern on these two shapes, while following the source print, is different in composition and refinement of engraving from the marked Spode examples. The broth bowl and mug seem to be from the same maker as a 6.75 inches high (17cm) “low Dutch jug” (Fig. 6) also in my collection. This jug uses the same border as the marked Spode pieces.

Two other “A Chinese of Rank” patterns by one or possibly two unknown makers in my collection comprise yet another version of the pattern, though on two different shaped jugs. One, marked “Opaque China”, is so heavily clobbered that at first, I didn’t realize it was the same pattern as that on the blue and white larger jug, which is unmarked. The former (Fig. 7) is 4 inches high (10cm), and the latter (Fig. 8) is 4.5 inches high (11.5cm). Both have an identical chinoiserie pattern on the reverse side which differs from “A Chinese of Rank” on the front.

The TCC database includes a similar jug, marked “Opaque China” with the initials ‘R & H’. It has the pattern reversed on one side, and its border is different from that on Figures 7 and 8.

Copeland and Garrett, successors to Spode, continued producing the pattern, and made a marked black printed version with pink lustre. The holdings of the Spode Museum in Stoke-on-Trent include approximately 40,000 hand-engraved copper-plates, including several with this pattern in various sizes based on the shapes to which they were to be applied. One of the most beautiful examples of the pattern is that produced by Miles Mason on bone china. An ironstone version printed in red was also produced, presumably after the Miles Mason period. All of these examples are included in the TCC database.

I would be happy to have information about any additional examples of “A Chinese of Rank” not mentioned in this article. Please let me know at msack@michaelsack.com.



Figure 5. Daniell print



Figure 6. Low Dutch jug



Figure 7. Opaque China colored



Figure 8. Blue & white jug