



A CHINESE COFFEE CUP

I have a small collection of Chinese coffee cups from the eighteenth century. My favourite is the cup that is illustrated.



It dates from between 1750 and 1760, and was made for the western market. The shape was purely western, as the Chinese drank tea, (in Chinese Cha, hence our "cup of char"), not coffee, and only from handle-less bowls. Most of the Chinese export wares are decorated in the oriental style, which was very much in vogue in the West. This cup was decorated with a European scene of a lady, with a rather quizzical expression, wielding a needle and thread. She is dressed in the contemporary western fashion of a dress with a very low bodice, narrow waist and full skirt. The sleeves are short, with layers of lace frills. Scenes like this were copied from instruction books that were supplied by Jesuit priests. The Jesuit missionaries first reached China in 1610, and within 100 years attained a position of some influence. By the middle of the eighteenth century they had established a school at Ching -te-Chen (Jingdezhen) which had been the centre of the porcelain and pottery industry for several hundred years. Encouraged by the Jesuit priests, the Chinese porcelain was sometimes painted in the western style. Often, illustrations in the Jesuit literature were copied, hoping that it would be popular in the West, and therefore sell well - which it did. These pieces remain popular with collectors today.

See Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in detail*, Pages 27 and 28 for similar dresses from about 1750.



the stomacher of the dress in the small study show. The original front of this robe been similar. The pink satin shoes were not called mules; that was a 16th c. term revived in the 19th c.

**Michael Signy March 2021**