

Where is Home:  
**Colonial European  
Furniture Made with  
Asian Influences**

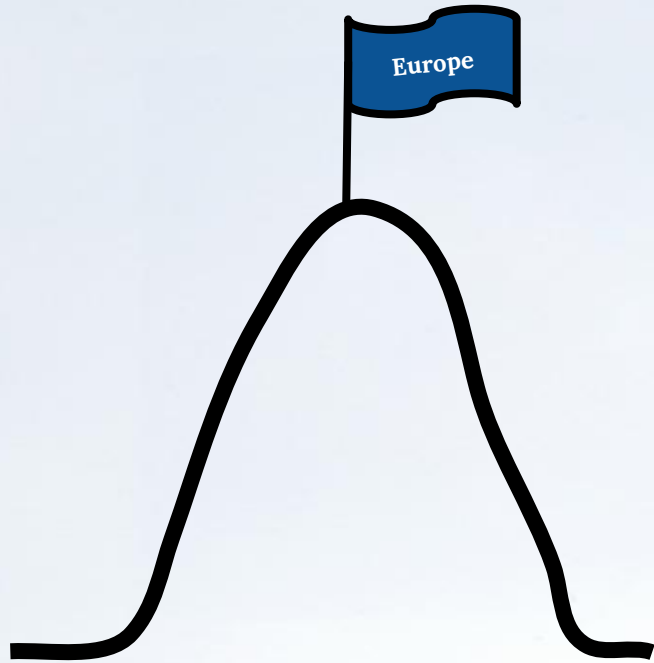
Team 9

## **Where is Home?**

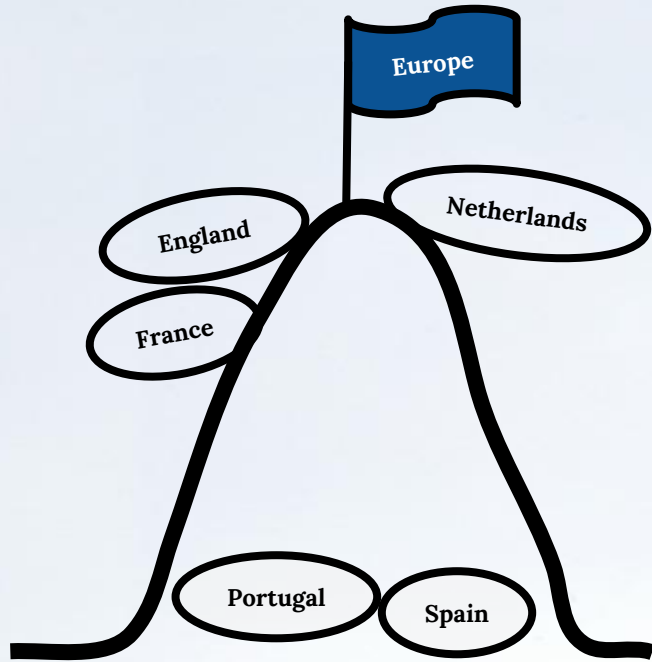
- Where - complex origins of materials
- Home - furniture

## **Colonial European Furniture Made with Asian Influences**

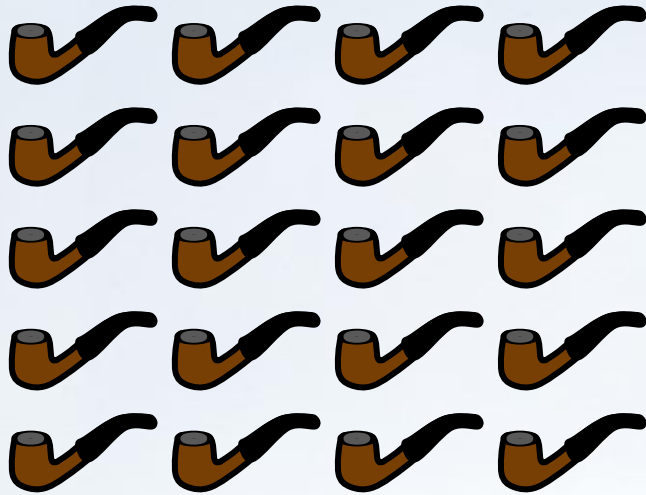
- For European use
- Influence - more than just the materials



**The 17th and 18th Centuries were the peak of colonialist Europe.** By this time, England, Netherlands, and France had caught up with Portugal and Spain in establishing ports and, eventually, colonies in Asia Pacific, Africa, and the Americas. While they did not colonize China and Japan, they were also popular countries to trade with and were able to establish ports there.



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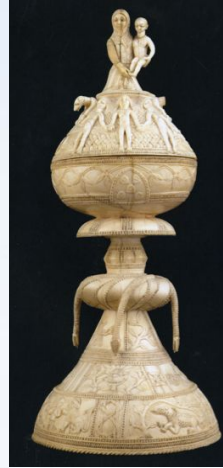
In honor of the monarchs who ruled over the European states, explorers and later, traders, would bring back **crafted items made of precious materials** to their kings and queens. They were a mix of sculptures already crafted by Asian natives and objects commissioned by the Europeans to be used by royalty. These were items with European functions and forms, like saltcellars and pipes.



Oliphant with the coat of Arms of Portugal, Sapi Portuguese, Sierra Leone, 1500-1560, Ivory and Metal  
Armeria Reale, Turin  
Source: *Encompassing the Globe*



Pyx with figure of the Virgin and Child, Sapi-Portuguese, Sierra Leone, 1500-1545  
Private Collection  
Source: *Encompassing the Globe*



Saltcellar with the figure of virgin and child Sapi Portuguese, Sierra Leone, 1500-1560  
British Museum, London  
Source: *Encompassing the Globe*

They were also made with precious materials found in Asia. In this exhibit, there are various items made of ivory, ebony, and lacquer. Ivory is found in India and Southeast Asia, only acquired through the tusks of elephants.



Secretary (*secrétaire à abattant*), 1783  
Jean-Henri Riesener (French, 1734–1806)  
Oak veneered with ebony and black and gold Japanese  
lacquer, tulipwood, holly and black stained holly,  
amaranth, gilt-bronze mounts, white marble

Source: Met Museum



André-Charles Boulle (French, 1642–1732)  
Walnut veneered with ebony and marquetry  
of engraved brass and tortoiseshell, gilt-  
bronze mounts, verd antique marble top

Source: Met Museum

Ebony, in contrast, is a dark, heavy wood found in Africa, whose people traded with India and Persia long before the Europeans came. Because it was so sturdy, it was an excellent material for furniture.

Lacquer is a resin originating in China, eventually making its way to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. It is used to paint and creates a metallic effect, usually used to show gold.

Eventually, even larger items like cabinets and chairs made of these materials were transported to showcase the craftsmanship of these colonies.

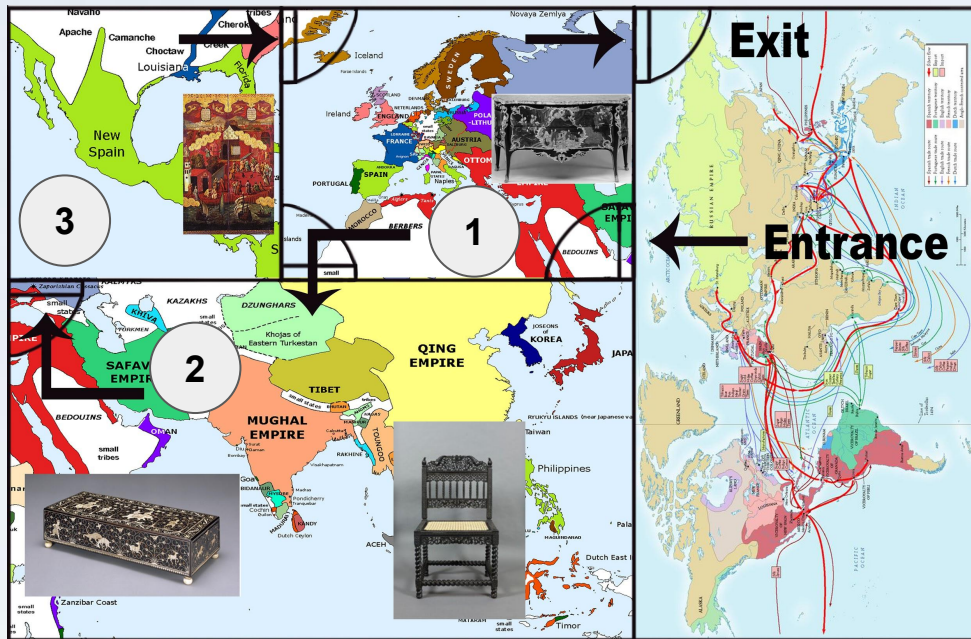
Also, since these were easier to transport and more ships were coming back and forth from Europe to Asia, **more people were able to gain access to these materials.** Collecting items from colonies was no longer just a royal hobby: if one was rich enough, these items could easily be bought from various merchants.

At this time, furniture represented an **individual's social status** and contributed to a significant part of their assets. It was popular to keep a well-acquainted living room, especially with the variety of tables and textiles one could use for decoration. Having furniture from Asia was trendy at that time, especially as it was a show of wealth and worldliness. The aesthetic of these Asian materials was so popular that even European furniture makers were influenced to **combine the designs of different cultures.**



Despite Europeans being the ones who colonized Asia, Asian influence was able to colonize the homes of the Europeans.

The colonizer has in turn been colonized.



# Exhibition Plan Layout

### Chest of drawers

1745

Bernard Van Risenburg

France

Japanese lacquer on oak and African ebony veneer

The two main materials used to make this chest of drawers were from **different European colonial ports**. The **ebony** used to construct the frame of the drawers were imported from Africa, where France had colonies. On the other hand, **panels**, painted in red and gold **lacquer**, were from **Japan**. These were sold in Europe by Dutch merchants and all eventually ended up in France, where French furniture designer **Bernard Van Risenburg** was inspired by these **oriental designs** to create this ornate chest. Rococo, the style which the French had created during this time, was heavily inspired by these Chinese designs, specifically their porcelains, especially in making their **floral ornamentation** and **elegant curved lines**. This kind of design was popular at the time, showing clearly the privilege of the owner.



### **Indo-Portuguese Style Box**

16th/17th Century

Mughal India

Teak, ebony & ivory



This is an extremely rare Mughal Indo-Portuguese Box made of teak overlaid with ebony and inlaid with ivory. The ivory inlaid furniture such as this is a representation of the active export market from Mughal India to the European countries from late 16th century. There are a lot of finely detailed decorations on the surface of the box, which show some Portuguese figures dressed in 16th century costume engaging in a hunting scene. Some are on foot, one riding on horseback, and some of them riding an elephant. This box belongs to a group of ivory inlaid furniture, possibly from the same workshop. All the pieces from the workshop show a great consistency of decorative principles and details, with dense tree and flower decoration covering the whole surface of the panels. The undulating branches and composition of the trees seems to flow in an idyllic and naturalistic Persian inspired scenario with great details and precision. The decoration technique of the ivory inlay is very similar to the work sets from Gujarat workshops in the early 16th century, which are mainly for the Islamic and Persian market. The frieze on the base of this box can be found on others lac type boxes which are not usually found on the ivory inlaid group. This box, with all these different decorative styles and influences from Europe and Asia, is one of the most expressive and iconic piece from its group.

### **Side Chair**

India, Coromandel Coast, 17th century  
Ebony, remains of ivory (new cane seat)  
98.5 x 56.3 x 48.4 cm

Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, inv. 2011-00716 (artwork in the public domain)

The Side Chair, produced in the 17th Century, was produced in Coromandel Coast, India, where it was the main production area for ebony furniture. Coromandel Coast also saw establishments of the European powers - Portuguese, Dutch and British - who fought over the control of Indian Trade during that period of time, thus for whom this side chair belongs to was not known.

It may have been the Portuguese who first commissioned this type of ebony furniture. In 1662, Catherine de Braganza travelled from Portugal to England, bringing with her luxury goods made in India, for the portuguese. She met Charles II at Portsmouth and they got married the following day, thus the luxury goods were perhaps for the marriage. Catherine's possession included two ebony chairs, hence is also the probable owner of this side chair.



Ebony wood was used to make this chair. It became a popular wood type when the Portuguese, Dutch and French imported it in large quantities in the 16th century. Ebony was admired for its dark colour and sturdiness. It was seen as exotic wood and was too rare and precious to be used as a solid wood for the making of furniture.

The furniture makers thus incorporated other techniques and materials while making ebony furniture. It is often used together with other materials such as Chinese or Japanese lacquer. The side chair was carved in delicate ornamental designs, which gives it a sense of lightness to the bulky-looking dark coloured wood. The chair incorporated European and Indian motifs, featuring winged cherubs and makara, as well as other mythical creatures. It is possible that ebony furniture as such was carved by artisans of different ethnicities.



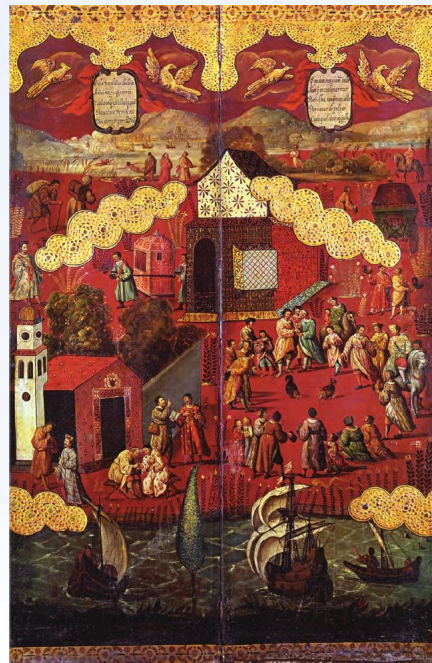
## Cock Fight Folding Screen

17<sup>th</sup> Century

Mexico

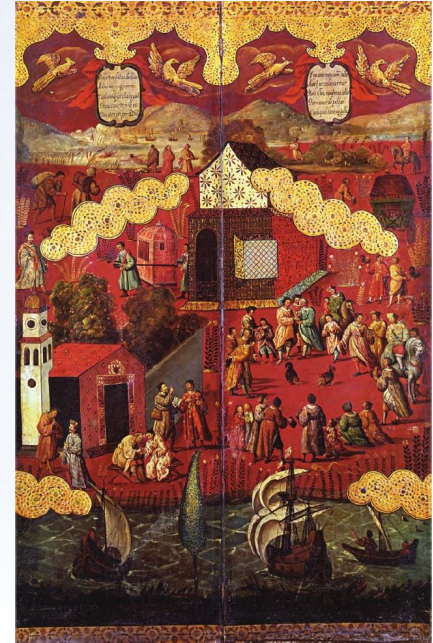
Lacquered wood with gold decoration and paint

The Folding Screen (*Biombo*), with its Chinese-style (*Achinado*) aesthetics were highly sought after by the officials, settlers of New Spain, emerging from the conquest and colonisation of the continent. They were able to consolidate their positions with such status symbol objects. These accessible *biombos* in New Spain imitated the European style of wall hangings and assumed their narrative element. Forming part of a New Spanish material culture with its highly valued Asian origin, artisans made a conscious and selective appropriation of its Asian elements to give it a new meaning.

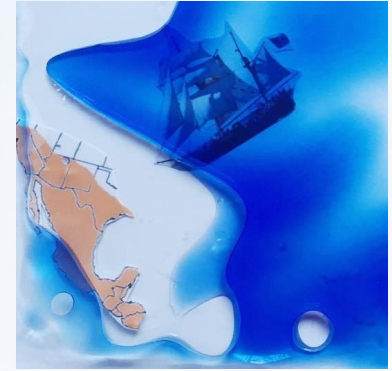


Cock fight is a favourite traditional pastime, deeply entrenched in Mexican, Spanish and Chinese cultures. The focus on the cock fight is further accentuated by the concentric formation of the crowd framing the spectacle, creating an imaginary buzz. Adopting the lack of perspective and vanishing point in this Chinese screen, New Spanish buildings are juxtaposed with pagodas.

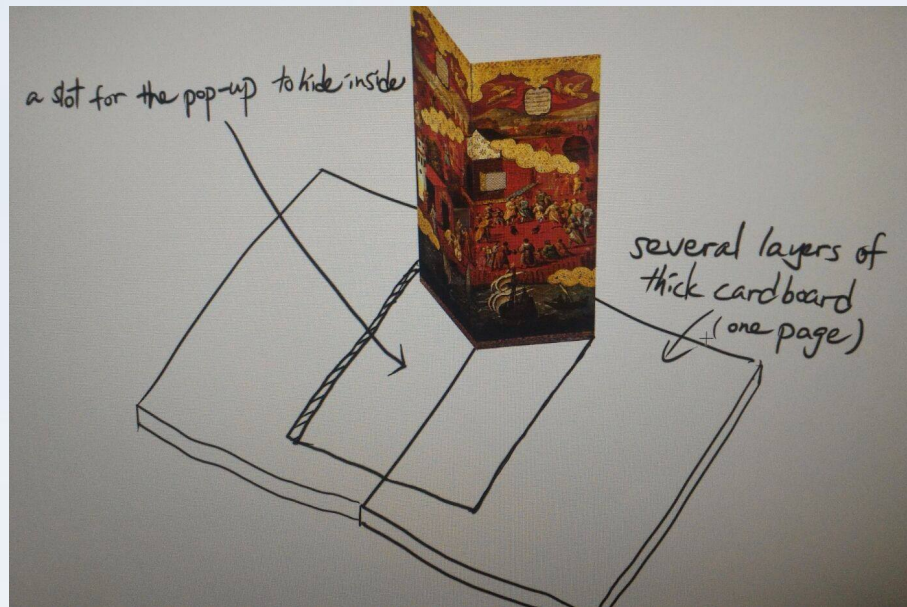
In this other-worldly setting, the bridge with two pipes that intersected the mountain on the grove of poplar trees creates the illusory of the capital of the New Spain. Clad in European dresses, kimonos with their hair dressed in long pigtails, human figures dotted the landscape. Gold nanban clouds are placed contrastingly to create hidden visual directions to its entirety. This folding screen illustrates a representation of Mexico City in an Oriental environment, framed by a mix of Asiatic and New Spanish architectural elements.



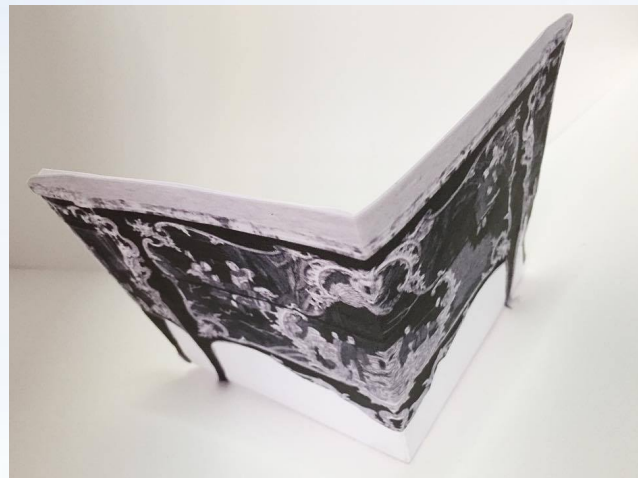




Interactive Cover Page  
Laminated maps and ships in bag of water



In the process of using more interactive ways of the pop-up book method



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