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Made for trade - Made in China. Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections: art and commodity

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“Eene schilderij is

eene stomme geschiedenis,

en de geschiedenis

eene sprekende schilderij.”

A painting is a silent story, and the story a speaking painting,
Van de Kasteele 1824, II.

Made for Trade
Made in China

Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections: art and commodity

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Bark ship Wilhelmina of shipping company P. de Boer, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1863-1866, 45.5 x 59.4 cm (inside frame). Rotterdam Maritime Museum, inv.no. P3807.

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Preface and acknowledgements

Through my research internship at the Museum Volkenkunde (currently a part of the National Museum of World Cultures) in Leiden in 2006-2007, I found myself on a path that I will continue to travel in the future.[1] I am indebted to Paul van Dongen, the then China curator in the Leiden museum, for asking me, in 2007, to investigate a number of matters relating to the Chinese export oil paintings in their collection.[2] This research formed the basis of the 2008 MA thesis *Rijk Palet – Chinese exportschilderkunst* (Rich Palette – Chinese export painting overseas).[3] Content and meaning regarding various themes relating to Chinese export painting in Dutch public collections were central to that study. During my internship, my investigations focused on a group of approximately 40 paintings, the research corpus for *Rich Palette* and for *Made for Trade – Made in China* extended much further. (See Figure 4.1. and Appendix 1)

Subsequently, a number of meetings and events took place that was relevant to the research trajectory, some of which played an important role during my 'journey' to the point I have arrived at today.

In 2007, as a Master's student of Art History, Non-Western Art and Material Culture at Leiden University, I participated in a two-day international workshop (also at Leiden University) on Asian art and material culture, with a focus on the state of postgraduate research in this domain. In the presence of authoritative scholars such as John Clark, Timon Screech, Oliver Moore and Kitty Zijlmans, I became a direct participant in the ongoing discourse.[4] Also in 2007, I accepted an invitation from historian Leonard Blussé van Oud Alblas to present a

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1 Since 1 April 2014, the Museum Volkenkunde, the Africa Museum and the Tropenmuseum have merged. Together, the three collections now belong to the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures). The three existing public locations and public brands remain. The three ethnological museums already worked closely together. In September 2016 the National Museum of World Cultures and the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam agreed on a new and far-reaching cooperation.

2 Van der Poel 2007.

3 Van der Poel 2008.

4 John Clark is Professor at the Department of Art History and Film Studies, Sydney University, and Director of the Australian Centre of Asian Art and Archeology. In the fall of 2007, Clark spent some time at Leiden University as a guest researcher. Timon Screech is Professor in East Asian Art History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Oliver Moore is Professor in Chinese Culture and Language at the Faculty of Arts, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. His present research centres on different forms of the visual image in late imperial and early modern Chinese history. His current project is a book-length study of the early history of photography in China. From 2013 September 2016, he has been Curator China at Museum Volkenkunde. Kitty Zijlmans is Professor Contemporary Art History and Theory/World Art Studies at the Leiden University Centre for Arts in Society (LUCAS), Leiden University. In addition, she is interested in the contemporary development of art and art theory and in the formation of art theory in the discipline of History of Art. She writes about these processes and is the author of articles and books in the domain of world art history, reflections on the history and practice of art history to develop new theories and discourses. In 2010 she was accepted as member of the KNAW, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences.

paper at the international conference *Canton and Nagasaki compared, 1730-1830. Dutch, Chinese Japanese relations*, in Guangzhou and Macao.[5] Since my presentation at this conference, I have become part of a lively network of specialists, (art-) historians, Asian studies scholars and museum curators of non-Western material culture, Japanese and Chinese ethnographica and Chinese export art. Discussions with Paul Van Dyke, at that time Assistant Professor of History at the University of Macao (currently, Professor of the History of the China Trade at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou), Daniel Finamore, curator at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem (US), Cesar Guillen, researcher at the Matteo Ricci Institute in Macao and former curator of the Chinese export art wing at the Macao Museum of Art, and Marie MacLeod, Director of the Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macao, ignited my enthusiasm for fieldwork and the study of relevant archives in Hongkong, Macao and Guangzhou.

Of the esteemed scholars in the Netherlands, special mention should be made of Christiaan Jörg, former Curator at the Groninger Museum and Emeritus Professor *Material History of the Interaction between Asia and Europe*, at the Art History Department, Leiden University, and Jan van Campen, Curator Asian export art at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and writing extensively on the eighteenth century collection of Chinese art of the Dutch collector Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807).[6] In the Netherlands they are regarded as experts *par excellence* in the field of Chinese export art. Their enthusiasm has been an inspiration to me in the production of this dissertation about one aspect of Chinese export art: export painting. They made me realise the importance, as a Dutch researcher, of being aware of the collections of Chinese export paintings in the Netherlands.

During the research period for this dissertation, from 2009-2016, parallel to my contact with Dutch colleagues, I also sought contact with colleagues abroad. I shall mention some – but by no means all: Patrick Conner, Director-researcher at the Martyn Gregory Gallery in London, connoisseur in the field, compiler of a comprehensive series of informative exhibition catalogues and author of countless articles about Chinese export paintings; Jack Lee Sai Chong, lecturer-researcher at the Hong Kong Baptist University and author of the dissertation *China trade painting: 1750s to 1880s*; and Alan Bradford, specialist restorer of Chinese export paintings. They quickly gave me the feeling that I was dealing with a fascinating subject and had access to a unique collection of paintings. Further, Ifan Williams, the Scottish private collector of Chinese export pith paper watercolours, and Ching May Bo, Professor at the Department of Chinese and History, the City University of Hong Kong, and Distinguished Professor of the Pearl River Scholars of Guangdong Province (Sun Yat-sen University), have been a source of inspiration over the years. Their perseverance in terms of gaining access to the most important pith painting collections worldwide is admirable.

During my first study trip to the Pearl River delta in the summer of 2007, I would not have been able to visit the collections of Chinese export paintings in Hong Kong and Guangzhou without the willingness of curators such as Maria Mok Kar-wing (Hong Kong Museum of Art), Helen Swinnerton (Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation), Stephen Davies (Hong Kong Maritime Museum), Zeng Lingling and Cheng Cunjie (Guangzhou Museum). Selflessly, they showed me their collections and tirelessly they shared their expertise. During the same summer, I went to the Resource Centre of the Hong Kong Museum of History and, thanks to curator Josephine Wong, I was able to study thoroughly the DVDs of the 2005 George Chinnery Seminar about Chinese export painting. Also during this trip, I contacted the editorial offices of *Arts of Asia* and *Orientations*, journals for collectors and connoisseurs of Asian art. I gratefully accepted the offers from Elizabeth Knight, the then managing editor of *Orientations*, and from Tuyet Nguyet and Stephen Markbreiter, former publishers of *Arts of Asia*, to write an article in the future about Chinese export paintings in the Dutch collections. Furthermore, there were valuable

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5 Leonard Blussé van Oud Alblas is Emeritus Professor of European-Asian Relations at the East-West Institute of the Institute for History, Leiden University. The conference was held in Guangzhou and Macao, 3-7 December 2007. Blussé van Oud Alblas was initiator and co-organiser of this conference. The title of my presentation: *China back in the frame: A comparative study of Canton, Whampoa and Macao harbour views in the Leiden National Museum of Ethnology and in the Guangzhou Museum.*

6 Christiaan Jörg held this Chair from 1998 to 2009. He is author of many publications on Chinese and Japanese export porcelain and other export goods from these countries.

conversations that summer with Joseph Ting, Assistant Professor in Chinese History at the Chinese University Hong Kong and former curator at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, and Jiang Yinghe, Professor in the Department of History at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and author of *Western painting and Canton port during the Qing period*.

I will never forget the exchange of views, at that time, with John Clark, Director of the Australian Centre of Asian Art and Archaeology, Professor at the University of Sydney and, in 2007, Guest Professor at Leiden University. In his own way, he emphasised the importance of the concept of local modernity (further explained later). Furthermore, his ideas about Western-style painting in China and the influence of the Jesuits at that time on Chinese painting through contacts and distribution and the art historical discourse gave me a new insight into the material.[7]

No research into this kind of Chinese export art would be complete without a visit to the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem in the United States. This collection, which I visited in 2010, is known as the largest, most famous and internationally significant one among other public historical collections with decorative art produced in China, Japan and India for export to other cultures. The museum's roots date back to the 1799 founding of the East India Marine Society, an organization of Salem captains and supercargoes, who brought to Salem a diverse collection of objects from Asia and elsewhere. I was received most kindly and given a tour by Karina Corrigan, the H.A. Crosby Forbes curator of Asian export art, and we examined the collection's acclaimed albums of Van Braam Houckgeest.[8]

Subsequently, in 2013, it was the turn of the collections in London. The visits to the depots of the British Library, the British Museum and the V&A, with globally renowned icons of Chinese painting, were impressive. Being face to face with world-renowned paintings sometimes gave me goosebumps. The assistance of Jennifer Howes (BL), Clarissa von Spee (BM) and Xiaoxin Li (V&A) in this regard was heartwarming.

On a second visit to the South China coast, in the fall of 2013, in addition to Hong Kong and Guangzhou, I also visited Macao for archival research. In Macao, it became clear to me that there were no useful archival sources about the Dutch who lived in Macao as traders in the nineteenth century. However, to my delight, I found that in this triangle of once booming China trade cities enjoying the attention of academics, there is a vivid interest for the subject of 'historical China trade'. The initiative to establish the Thirteen Hongs Research Centre at the School of Humanities of Guangzhou University in 2009, is a concrete example of this. At the invitation of Ellen Cai, a Leiden University PhD alumna and affiliated with this centre as a researcher, I gave a lecture at Guangzhou University in November 2013.[9] Furthermore, the provincial Guangdong Museum, established a number of years ago, also pays great attention to the old China trade era. I can still remember my visit to the interesting exhibition *Chinese export fine art in the Qing Dynasty from the Guangdong Museum*. What a wealth of artistic material culture! With the opening of the Guangzhou Council for Promotion of the Culture of the Thirteen Hongs at the Guangzhou Culture Park on Shamian Island in 2013, the city is underlining once again the importance of this period and has made it possible to communicate this history to a broad public. The enthusiasm in Guangzhou for research into this specific time in Chinese history and the related art products was contagious.

There have been a number of people at Leiden University who continue to be an important source of inspiration. Firstly, Kitty Zijlmans, Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory/World Art Studies. I could not have wished for a better supervisor. From the beginning of my studies in Art History, I found the content of her seminars on the different methods of art historical research instructive and I have utilised them in the research for this dissertation. In addition, her inspiring leadership of the biannual PhD afternoons at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS) always left me feeling excited and full of ideas on my way home afterwards. She understands better than anyone the art of asking

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7 Clark 2005, 11-33, 49-69.

8 Karina H. Corrigan lectures and publishes on many aspects of Asian export art and the material culture of global connections. She organises exhibitions as, among others, *Asia in Amsterdam: The culture of luxury in the Golden Age*, which the Peabody Essex Museum has co-organised with the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in 2016.

9 In this lecture, I treated the set of three Chinese export harbour views from the Royer collection, which have been exhibited in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam since its reopening in 2013.

the right questions, giving insightful and effective feedback and how to move me forward in my thought processes. I found her pragmatic and academic attitude during the design, supervision and execution of this dissertation to be very pleasant. The appointment of my second supervisor, Anne Gerritsen, as Professor of *Asia-Europe intercultural dynamics, with special attention to material culture, art and development*, at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), was a gift in terms of timing.[10] She directs a research project entitled *Shared Taste*, which aims to develop research-based activities related to the rich history of Asia-Europe exchange, especially in the fields of food and material culture.[11] During the writing of *Made for Trade* I followed her lectures and heeded her intelligent advice many times. Furthermore, Oliver Moore's unwaveringly scholarly approach to diverse themes, styles and periods of Chinese art history, when he was still teaching at Leiden University, has always been in the background as a strict guideline when it came to the reading, organising and writing of texts for this dissertation.[12] And finally, without the encouragement of Korrie Korevaart, Institute Manager at LUCAS, to officially register myself as a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Humanities, this scholarly work might never have materialised.

There would have been no hands-on research on the spot without the kind cooperation of curators, registrars and collection managers in the Dutch museums, libraries and archives, and the heirs of the once proud owners of Chinese export art. Since 2008, I have been able to study hundreds of paintings and their related documentation on their sites, in museum basements, and I have spoken to descendants of first owners of these works.[13] In all cases, Chinese export art proved to be an appealing theme that opened many doors. Although the curators involved belong to a small circle of specialist (art-) historians and anthropologists, they play a key role in the further opening up of these sub-collections. In that sense, they are important mediators between caring sometimes unique and fragile material and their pleasure through public access. They are not just in charge of the preservation of these paintings but also their actual display, either in the museum or virtual through the internet.

The research for *Made for Trade* took place at the intersection of art history, history, visual anthropology, visual studies and art sociology. I was selected as a participant for diverse

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10 From 2013 to 2018, Anne Gerritsen holds this Chair, sponsored by the Kikkoman Foundation and the Association of Friends of Asian Art in the Netherlands (VVAK). She has her institutional home base in LIAS, but productively contributes to LIAS-LUCAS collaboration. Gerritsen is also Professor in the History Department at Warwick University. Her research interests include (Chinese) material culture within (global) history, theory and method of history, and gender. She teaches and publishes on topics concerning early modern global connections related to material culture. At Leiden University, in addition to programs in Asian Studies and Art History, she contributes to the University's collaboration with external partners such as VVAK and museums.

11 Read more: www.sharedtaste.nl.

12 Since 1 September 2016 Oliver Moore holds the Chair Chinese Culture and Language at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

13 Amsterdam Museum: Joyce Edwards; Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam: Cécile Bosman; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: Jan van Campen; Tropenmuseum/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen: Koos van Brakel, Ingeborg Eggink; Museum Nusantara (Prinsenhof) Delft: Nico Schaap; Dutch Navy Museum Den Helder: Leon Homburg; Stadsarchief en Athenaeumbibliotheek Deventer: Jan Keuning and Ina Kok; Groninger Museum: Caspar Martens; Westfries Museum Hoorn: Cees Bakker; Keramiekmuseum Het Princessehof Leeuwarden: Eva Ströber and Eline van den Berg; Museum Volkenkunde/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen: Oliver Moore, Lex Verhey, Harm Linsen, Sijbrand de Rooij, Paul van Dongen, Ingeborg Eggink; Zeeuws Museum Middelburg: Caroline van Santen; Maritiem Museum Rotterdam: Irene Jacobs; Wereldmuseum Rotterdam: Eline Kevenaar; Museon The Hague: Gisèle van Eick; Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten The Hague: Marcel van Bommel.
It goes without saying that I have made contact with a much larger number of curators than is mentioned here. I received a negative response, or no answer at all, when I asked the largest auction houses in the Netherlands (Christie's, Sotheby's and Van Glerum) whether they are aware of significant private collections in this area. I am aware of a small number of private individuals that have a Chinese export painting on their wall or watercolours in a portfolio or box.
Correspondence with Arnout Steffelaar, Rotterdam (17 December 2014), telephone and email (July and August 2015) related to his gift of two ship portraits to the Maritime Museum Rotterdam in 2007.
Phone calls with Mrs A. Reinders Folmer-Reinders Folmer, Heemstede (24 November 2014 and 30 July 2015), because of her gift of three reverse glass paintings to Museum Volkenkunde in 2006.

international conferences or workshops in these areas during the research period, or as observer I was the right woman in the right place.[14] I thank Museum Volkenkunde and LUCAS for their financial support to travel to Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Honolulu, London, Macao, and to Princeton.

The ever-enthusiastic, cooperative worldwide encouragement I have experienced and the insatiable curiosity of many colleagues in the field, both in the Netherlands and abroad, convinced me to confront the current ignorance about the extensive and historically valuable material by conducting new research on the subject.[15]

The realisation of this dissertation would have been impossible without the help and friendly support of three persons. I want to thank Anna Yeadell-Moore for her English translation and editing, Shu Guan for her help in translating the Chinese chararacters on paintings, and Colette Sloots for the design and her ideas on print matters.

I was able to write *Rijk Palet* (Rich Palette) and still operate from Museum Volkenkunde and make use of the facilities; the production of *Made for Trade* took place largely at home. I thank Piet Spee for his patience, his unstinting support and encouragement that allowed me to successfully accomplish this enthralling project.

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14 Chinese wallpaper: trade, technique and taste (National Trust, De Montfort University, Sussex University and V&A, London, 2016); PhD masterclass with Jan Stuart, curator of Chinese art at the Smithsonian's Freer and Sackler Galleries (Hulsewé-Wazniewski visiting Professor at Leiden University, 2015); Global Asia Scholar Series (GLASS) workshop by Clare Harris on *The museum on the roof of the world: art, politics and the representation of Tibet* (Hulsewé-Wazniewski visiting Professor at Leiden University and Museum Volkenkunde, 2014); Private merchants of the China trade 1700–1842 (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 2013); Culture and trade through the prism of technical art history – a study of Chinese export paintings (Nottingham Trent University, V&A Museums and Royal Horticultural Society, London, 2013); Qing encounters: artistic exchanges between China and the West (Peking University, Beijing, 2012); World wide Asia: Asian flows, global impacts (Leiden University, 2012); Visualizing Asia in the modern world (Princeton University, 2012); 'China trade' merchants and artists (1760–1860): new historical and cultural perspectives of the trade's Golden Age (Matteo Ricci Institute, Macao, 2011); China: globalization and glocalization (Leiden University, 2011); Art histories interarea/border crossing (AAS/ICAS, Hawaii, Honolulu, 2011); Chindeu Seminar (Institute for Conservation, London); Defining the visual (Leiden University, 2008); Canton and Nagasaki compared, 1730–1830: Chinese, Japanese and Dutch relations (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou Museum, and the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao S.A.R. Government, 2007).

15 There is increasing international interest in the subject of 'Chinese exports paintings in the Netherlands' as a research topic. A call on my own professional network in April 2010, via the ACC (a list of academics in the field of Asian Studies in the US), and the China Collections Group, to get a sense of the level of scholarly interest, resulted in many interesting reactions, including those from Craig Clunas (University of Oxford), John Clark (Australian Research Council), Kevin McLoughlin (National Museums of Scotland), Nick Pearce (University of Glasgow), Frances Wood (British Library), Susan Naquin (Princeton University), Roderick Whitfield (SOAS, University of London), John Finlay (Paris), Jenny So (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Paul Van Dyke (Sun Yat-sen/Zhongshan University Guangzhou), Cheng Cunjie (Guangzhou Museum), Jiang Yinghe and Zhou Xiang (Sun Yat-sen/Zhongshan University Guangzhou), Ellen Cai (Guangzhou University) among others. The response was unanimously in favour of further research leading to better access to the Dutch collections.