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

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Chapter I

Historiographic mapping of the field

This dissertation draws upon relevant scholarly work in the field of Chinese export painting. Since the mid-twentieth century, a wide body of studies has been published. Prior to this, there was no mention of this phenomenon in either official historical documents on the history of Chinese paintings published in China, or in the historical documents of the Qing period (1644-1911).¹

The state of the field of Chinese export painting can be characterised as a research field ‘in motion’. As Gilian Rose posits in the third edition of *Visual Methodologies*, when analysing relevant discourses, attention must be paid to “the ways of seeing brought to particular images by specific audiences, or to the social institutions and practices through which images are made and displayed.”² This chapter demonstrates that the discourse referring to Chinese export painting is, not surprisingly, mainly constructed by (art) historians and is articulated through diverse literary sources. As mentioned in the Introduction, hitherto, most research dealing with this artistic form of Chinese painting has examined: the transfer of stylistic aspects; Western and Chinese painting conventions; literary sources; historical models; socio-cultural and aesthetic differences; dating and iconographical issues; and technical analyses regarding conservation of pigments and paper. In recent years, there have been ever louder calls for the study of other aspects of this art genre, namely, the cultural, temporal and spatial-

specificity of these paintings and the typical integration of artistic values as a consequence of global and transcultural trade relations. Furthermore, the materiality of these paintings as *actants*, which is fundamental to their lifecycle and cultural biography, as well as the individual human and institutional valuation of these works through time and space, urgently need more in-depth examination. In conclusion, this chapter elaborates on these new insights. I begin by providing an overview of the most influential discourses on the subject by Western and Chinese scholars.

I.1.

Research by Western scholars

Long before any academic attention was drawn to the history of Chinese export art, an important historical reference work on this subject appeared. James Orange’s (1857-unkn.) *The Chater Collection: Pictures Relating to China, Hong Kong, Macao, 1655-1860* includes more than four hundred oil paintings, watercolours, ink- and pencil drawings, etchings, prints and lithographs as representations of Canton, Hong Kong and Macao centuries ago.³ The categorisation of topics in this book – Chinese foreign trade, early British diplomatic relations, the Chinese wars, the Pearl River, harbour views, ships portraits and northern landscapes – have served as a model for the classification of subjects in many exhibition catalogues or collection-classification systems.⁴

1 Wang et al. 2011, 29.

2 Rose 2012, 189.

3 Orange 1924. After the death of Sir Catchick Paul Chater (1846–1926), his art collection was gifted to the English (colonial) government in Hong Kong. A large part of the collection was looted during the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in 1941. The part that was recovered (94 artworks, including photographs) is currently in the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

4 Lee 2005, 14. Indeed, this classification has literally been copied in diverse exhibition catalogues of the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

The majority of the images in this book are produced by Western painters.⁵ This extensive collection catalogue, with 246 illustrations, is worthy of mention due to its early publication date and the widely accepted high degree of reliability of the representations of the locations and objects pictured. In its time (1924), this rare book of great value was immediately adopted as a reference work. It meticulously illustrates the history of the Chinese south coast between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and it is for this reason that Orange's book is a valuable guide for the studies of images of Chinese export paintings.

In 1950, another important illustrated reference work about Chinese export art appeared. Margaret Jourdain and Roger Soame Jenyns wrote *Chinese Export Art in the Eighteenth Century*, which can be considered as a first attempt to define the term 'Chinese export art'.⁶ Attention was given to lacquerware, wall hangings, prints, paintings, porcelain, enamel painting, ivory carvings and silk. Within the theme of 'paintings' they mostly deal with reverse glass paintings. Woodblock print art is also mentioned, albeit indirectly. In addition, the authors wrote a short passage on Chinese watercolour paintings on 'rice paper' [sic] with images of Chinese flora, butterflies and insects. There is no mention of Chinese export oil paintings with depictions of Chinese ports or ship portraits, which were also very popular in the West at this time. Jourdain and Jenyns provide comprehensive historical information from primary seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources. However, an omission in this book is any reflection on the content of the depictions. By contrast, their footnotes are particularly informative and encourage further reading.

In the 1980s, American scholar Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) posited that the genre of Chinese export painting should be included in the paradigm of Chinese art. In *The meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, he discusses four

centuries of interaction between the painters of Japan and China and those of the West; in doing so, he provides a good basis for understanding the artistic history of East-West relations in painting. He takes great leaps through history, however, and makes a number of generalisations about Western influence on Chinese painting.⁷ In 1980, in 'The Chinese Response to Western Art' in *Art International*, Sullivan discusses the influence on Chinese painting of Jesuit painters at the imperial court.⁸ In this essay, he makes clear how the spread of Western painting conventions to the Chinese imperial court evolved via the east coast of China to the southern port city of Canton.

One of the most important studies to date was undertaken by Carl Crossman. He wrote *The China Trade* in 1972 and produced a new, extended version in 1991, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade: Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities*.⁹ Herein, he provides a detailed overview of the art and material culture that accompanied Chinese export trade in tea, silk and porcelain. He regularly cites from primary sources on the various categories of export art, such as (reverse glass) paintings, furniture, lacquerware, ivory carvings, fans, silverwork and tinware, wall hangings, etc. Crossman's research traces three generations of an export painter's dynasty. This has made it possible, on the basis of style analyses and technical comparisons, to attribute (or not) Chinese export paintings to individual Chinese export painters and their studios. Given the lack of available sources with regard to these painters, the information that Crossman provides is sometimes arbitrary. A number of the painters he mentions are known from Western travel reports, but other names given by Crossman are questionable. He speculates too often about the origin of certain paintings without any solid research to support his claims. Despite the scarce sources and many ambiguities, Crossman is convinced that it should be possible to identify every Chinese

5 Most of the paintings and graphics pictured are by, among others: George Chinnery (1774-1852), Thomas Daniell (1749-1840), Thomas Allom (1804-1872), Auguste Borget (1808-1877) and William Alexander (1767-1816).

6 Jourdain & Jenyns 1950. Margaret Jourdain was the first to introduce the term 'Chinese export art'. Before 1950 this term was never mentioned in the literature. See also: Wilson & Liu 2003, 10.

7 Sullivan 1989. Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) was Fellow emeritus at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University and author of, among other works: *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, California, 1996, and *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art: Revised and Expanded Edition*, California, 1997.

8 Sullivan 1980, 8-31.

9 Carl Crossman is former curator at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. This museum's collection consists primarily of objects that were sold and collected in the American-China trade. The origin of the Chinese art objects was well-documented on arrival in America. Thus, the objects are reliable sources for art historical research.

export painting style and painter's studio. He is also of the opinion that "a large body of research is still necessary to determine who some of the other painters may have been and how many studios there actually were at Canton, Hong Kong and Macao."¹⁰ However, it is known that, to date, most of the export paintings that ended up in the West remain unidentified. In this monumental study, Crossman also provided one of the earliest chronologies of the Western factory scenes on the quay of Canton. His work is still regarded today as a leading reference work in the study of Chinese export painting.

The research undertaken by Craig Clunas deserves special mention in this dissertation.¹¹ In *Chinese Export Watercolours*, written in 1984, he extensively treats the collection of Chinese export watercolours belonging to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In addition to dating and identifying albums containing detailed watercolour paintings by, among others, the Chinese export painter Puqua and his painting studio, Clunas also discusses the changing Western perception of China and the changing Western taste and style in relation to Chinese export paintings in the last period of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). He investigates the evolution of the trade in Chinese export art from a socio-political perspective. The images of Chinese export watercolours around 1800 were still viewed as 'representations of reality', Clunas argues. In the final phase of this art form, around 1900, the images were particularly imaginative representations of Chinese subjects, in the way Westerners liked to see them, i.e. inaccurate and with flashy colours.¹² His approach makes clear the importance of these

kinds of Chinese watercolours to the West beyond their intrinsic artistic value. According to Clunas, the paintings also say a lot about the ideological change in the relationship between the West and China in the late Qing dynasty. He argues that the Western attitudes to export painting mirror "the decline in the esteem for the culture which we have seen finding expression in the paintings themselves."¹³ If we follow this line of thought, it provides a partial explanation for the renewed interest in this painting genre today, outside and currently also within China. It appears that we can draw a parallel line between the economic rise of China in the last decades of the twentieth century until today and the accompanying wonder and respect for the powerful return of the country. In contrast to its status in the first half of the twentieth century, China today is acting as an international player to reckon with in many regards, including in the cultural and artistic domain. With its *yi dai yi lu* strategy, China advocates building networks of connectivity in terms of trade, investment, finance, and flows of tourists and students and these nineteenth-century paintings are important evidence of early international relations.¹⁴ In this respect, this specific material culture is happily used to impress again. Yet, the attitude to these paintings has changed in recent years, from almost zero interest from the 1920s onwards to a reinvestigation of the genre on a global scale today.

In 1997, Clunas wrote in *Art in China* about the broad spectrum of visual arts in China, from the Neolithic period to the modern art scene of the 1980s and 1990s. It is noteworthy that in the chapter 'Art in the market place', he gives Chinese export paintings an important spot and

¹⁰ Crossman 1991, 150.

¹¹ Craig Clunas is professor of Art History at the History of Art Department of Oxford University. Previously, he worked as a curator in the Victoria and Albert Museum and he taught Art History at the University of Sussex and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London. He is also the author of many academic publications about the culture of the Ming and Qing Dynasty, including: *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (1997) and *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (1991).

¹² Clunas 1984, 68-72.

¹³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴ *Yi dai yi lu* (one belt, one road, or: the new Silk Road) is a comprehensive and inclusive Chinese initiative that established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Infrastructure Fund. *Yi dai yi lu* invests money in projects around the world. This initiative could be a contributing factor in terms of China sustaining growth at 5-7%. See also: Tyler Durden, 'One Belt, One Road' may be China's 'one chance' to save collapsing economy.' <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-06-08/one-belt-one-road-may-be-chinas-one-chance-save-collapsing-economy> (consulted May 2016). According to the chief executive of the Silk Road Fund this fund "will invest in projects with reasonable mid- and long-term returns, and it is not an aid agency that does not consider returns." She added that they "will not be the sole financier of projects; rather it will seek to cooperate with other financial institutions when investing in projects in the future."

approaches this type of art from a historical-sociological perspective.¹⁵ By integrating Chinese export painting within the framework of the Chinese visual artistic practice through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Clunas is approaching this phenomenon in a totally new way. As one of the earliest scholars in this field, he refreshingly argues that the social roles of painters as ‘scholar-amateur’ or ‘artisan-professional’ were not as strictly separated as thought for a long time. As is generally known, Chinese amateur painters in Suzhou and environs had been experimenting with imported techniques of fixed-point perspective and the rendering of mass through shading since the seventeenth century. Furthermore, Clunas argues that it is unlikely that the widely available Western printed and drawn pictures, brought to Canton to act as models for the export porcelain industry, returned to the West with the painted bowls or plates. Rather, they remained in Canton to be passed on for inspiration or to illustrate appropriate Western conventions of representation on all sorts of objects destined for export and to suit Western tastes. I agree with Clunas that, as a result of these cultural interactions and selective integration of painting conventions, Chinese export painters “added significantly to the possibilities for visual representation in China, particularly in technical terms.”¹⁶ In my view, it is high time to integrate the Chinese export painters Lamqua, Tingqua, Sunqua and their so-called ‘artisan-professional’ colleagues into the history of ‘Chinese painting’. In nineteenth-century China, these painters were generally afforded the status of skilled artisans; but this contrasted with the position held by esteemed Chinese literati (amateur) painters who were praised and glorified. Meanwhile, in the nineteenth-century West, the Romantic ideology, with its auratic tradition of locating artistic value in the individual artist, was also strongly present in the discourse on ‘true artists’. Artworks were only ‘true artworks’ when they

were produced as lonely and singular works, directly from the gifted hand of the genius. The relation between ‘aesthetic value’ and ‘individual genius painting’ was a firm one for a long time, and still is in many people’s mind. Strictly speaking, there was no sharp distinction between the studio painting practice in China and the West. On both sides of the world, in the nineteenth century, big painting studios existed with famous masters and their student-painters. Millions of paintings were sent into the world from these production centres, either from the West to the East or from the East to the West. Consequently, today, many of these works are valued as canonical art, emblematic for a period of time or a specific painting studio.

In 1986, Patrick Conner, preeminent connoisseur of Chinese export painting, wrote, together with David Sanctuary Howard (1928-2005) and Rosemary Ransome Wallis, the catalogue *The China Trade 1600-1800* for the exhibition of the same name, held that year in the Royal Pavilion in Brighton.¹⁷ In eight chapters, this book gives an overview of the many aspects connected to the lucrative trade between the men of the British East India Company and *hong* merchants in China.¹⁸ In addition, the reader gets a good picture of the variation in the art objects that returned to the British Isles with this (mainly tea) trade. The exhibition presents, among other things, oil paintings with port views and portraits and watercolour albums with paintings depicting the production of tea and porcelain, Chinese flora and fauna, and scenes of Cantonese street trade. Furthermore, this exhibition showed Chinese porcelain, cabinetry, silk products, silver artworks, fans and Chinese wallpaper. Almost all the exhibited objects are pictured in the catalogue, accompanied by detailed information. Subsequent to this book, Conner has continued to publish prolifically, producing many articles and catalogues on this subject. In one of his latest publications, from 2009, *The Hongs of Canton: Western Merchants in South China*

15 Clunas 1997, 191-199.

16 Ibid., 199.

17 Patrick Conner was Keeper of Fine Art at the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums in Brighton, UK since 1975. In 1986 he became Director of the Martyn Gregory Gallery in London, specialists in historical paintings related to the East India Company and the China trade. He has published several works on the subject and curated a number of exhibitions exploring the relationships between eastern and Western cultures and their artistic exchanges. Furthermore, he is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and he contributes regularly to specialist periodicals and lectures widely in China, Europe and the United States.

18 The Cantonese word *hong* means ‘enterprise’. The same Chinese character is pronounced as *haang* in Cantonese to indicate ‘walking’. This character also has two different pronunciations for the same two meanings in Putonghua. Personal note by Wen Ting-tiang, 28 January 2016.

1700-1900, as seen in *Chinese Export Paintings*, he offers us a history of the hong – as the Western factories in Canton were called – as seen through Chinese export paintings. By using these paintings, with subjects like the façades and interiors of the hong, their surrounding shopping streets and gardens, the forts in the Pearl River, seafaring junks and the busy life on and around the quay of Canton, Conner gives us ‘an image’ of the hong, and the everyday activities of their occupants and other merchants. For this detailed illustrated book Conner consulted and quotes from collections of manuscript material, such as papers and memoirs of American and English China traders and missionaries. He also relies on earlier published work. Conner notes in the Bibliography that the body of English-language newspapers published on the China coast in the early nineteenth century were “an invaluable source” for the day-to-day events in Canton.¹⁹ However, were these nineteenth-century Western sources objective and can we value the painted *hong* scenes as reliable eyewitnesses? In this dissertation, I question these points and will show that their truthfulness can often be refuted.

The richly illustrated bilingual publication *Customs and Conditions of Chinese City Streets in the Nineteenth Century – 360 Professions in China* from 1999 was the first collection of Chinese export paintings published in mainland China, following publication of works in Hong Kong and Macao.²⁰ In this work, Huang Shijian and William Sargent present two sets of export paintings from the Peabody Essex Museum: 100 gouache paintings of occupations in Canton by Puqua and 360 black-and-white (outline) paintings by Tingqua depicting the 360

professions of the city streets of Canton from 1830.²¹ While the introduction provides information about the origin of export painting, types of works, different topics, and their producers, this book only provides a brief description of each painting.²² Some of these descriptions carry so-called Songs of Bamboo Twigs, poems by local literati that provide a strong flavour of life. Apart from the fact that the paintings provide lively records of life in the streets of Canton, no further study has been made of the content of each painting.

After writing his extensive Master’s thesis *Painting in Western media in Early Twentieth-Century Hong Kong* in 1996, Jack Lee Sai Chong concluded his PhD research in 2005 with his dissertation (also in English) *China Trade Painting: 1750s to 1880s*.²³ A large part of his research is an in-depth study into the export painter Lamqua, undoubtedly the best-known and most documented painter recorded. Lee studies the relationship between the English painter George Chinnery (1774-1852), who from 1825 was alternately in Macao and Canton, and the Chinese painter Lamqua. He tries to find an answer to the question of whether there were multiple Lamquas active in the market for Chinese export painting. He sketches the booming export painting practice after 1840, identifying increasing numbers of individual painters and their studios.²⁴ Even though people copied each other’s paintings, the images by Tingqua, Sunqua and Youqua were distinguishable due to their different styles. The new market for export painters in Hong Kong and the advent of photography meant that most painters combined their existing painting practice with the new photographic techniques,

19 Conner 2009, 283. Examples of English-language newspapers include *Canton Register* (1827-1844), *Canton Press* (1835-1844), *Chinese Courier* (1831-1833) and *The Chinese Repository* (1832-1851).

20 Huang & Sargent 1999.

21 Shijian Huang is a retired professor at the School of History, Zhejiang University. He has taught and conducted research into the history of Mongolia, Yuan dynasty and Sino-foreign cultural exchange. William R. Sargent is the former H. A. Crosby Forbes curator of Asian export art at the Peabody Essex Museum.

22 Almost every original picture has a Chinese title. Those missing were added to the book in accordance with their images. All titles are translated into English and some notes are offered.

23 Lee 2005. Jack Lee Sai Chong is an assistant professor of Visual Culture and Art Criticism at the Academy of Fine Arts of the Hong Kong Baptist University. In 2005, he obtained his PhD from the Department of Fine Arts of the University of Hong Kong, where he has taught both Chinese and Western art histories for twelve years. Whilst his research interest is primarily the export art history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China. Lee is also a well-known scholar in the visual arts of Hong Kong. As an active art critic and a historian, he writes regularly on Hong Kong art and visual culture, mainly for art columns of local newspapers, such as the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*. Lee co-founded the Hong Kong Art History Research Society with Edwin Lai, and is vice chairman of the Society, which published *Besides: A Journal of Art History and Criticism*, from 1997-2001.

24 Lee 2005, 197-253.

creating an innovative new art form.²⁵ Lee's research into the *modus operandi* of individual export painters and the identification of their work is impressive. He gives, us a lot of citations from articles in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English- and Chinese language newspapers and journals, such as *Nanhai Xianzhi*, *Illustrated London News*, *The Chinese Repository*, and *Canton Register*. The list of contemporaneous manuscripts and books consulted is huge, as is the number of quotations from relevant memoirs and letters by Westerners who were in Canton at this time. Lee's extensive study of archival sources is very valuable for current researchers.

In 2011, cooperation between Chinese and British scholars resulted in the eight volumes of *Chinese Export Paintings of the Qing Period in The British Library* (Chinese-English bilingual edition). The authors, Wang Chi-Cheng at National Central University Taiwan, Frances Wood at the British Library, Andrew Lo at SOAS, London University and Song Jia-yu at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Beijing, brought together 748 export paintings of Chinese society and life in the Qing period. It is the first time that they have been published as a group. Most of the paintings are rare and a number may well be unique. They are classified into fifteen categories.²⁶ Each category provides a brief background to the topic, a summary of the content of the paintings, and a concise commentary on each painting, based on Chinese and Western written sources. The eight volumes, with rich pictorial and written sources, are a valuable contribution to the scholarly discourse. By highlighting the historical value of the paintings, using pictures to corroborate the historical records, and by using written descriptions to explain the pictures, this work

provides precious reference material for studying Chinese export painting. Yet, caution is the credo here. We must remain conscious of the subjective aspects of the reality-value of these sort of images and the untidiness of them as historical records.

In 2013, in her book *Van Gogh on Demand. China and the Readymade*, Winnie Won Yin Wong, assistant professor in the Department of Rhetoric and History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, successfully refutes the idea that the contemporary painting practice of Dafen in southern China, where thousands of workers paint Van Goghs, Da Vincis, Warhols and other Western and Chinese masterpieces for the global market, produces only 'fake art'.²⁷ On the contrary, by addressing questions of imitation, innovation, and appropriation, Wong gives us new insights into this highly specific kind of artistic production. She unravels the definition of art, the making of the artist and the ownership of the image. Furthermore, she connects the realms of traditional export painting practice as the "longstanding (if forgotten) modern cultural encounter, one in which intensive Sino-Western trade has connected the Western consumer demand for oil paintings and visual images with the work of skilled painters in China for over two centuries" to the twenty-first century Dafen practice that sees contemporary artists once again form "a global supply chain of creativity."²⁸ Wong's work has guided my view on the production of painting in nineteenth-century South China for Western consumption. She demonstrates convincingly that this specific and artistic painting production did not dissipate at all in the late nineteenth century, as had been suggested previously.

In 2014, Ifan Williams, the Scottish

25 Ibid., 250-253.

26 The categories are: 1. Canton harbour and the city of Canton; 2. Costumes of emperors, empresses, officials and commoners; 3. Street and marketplace occupations in Canton; 4. Handicraft workshops in Foshan; 5. Guangdong Government offices, furnishings, and official processional equipment; 6. Punishments; 7. Gardens and mansions; 8. Religious buildings and sacrificial arrangements; 9. Urging people to stop smoking opium; 10. Indoor furnishings; paintings of plants and birds; 11. The Ocean Banner Temple; 12. Scenes from drama; 13. Boats, ships and river scenes in Guangdong Province; 14. Beijing life and customs; and 15. Beijing shop signs.

27 Wong 2013. Winnie Won Yin Wong is assistant professor in the Department of Rhetoric and Art History at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research is concerned with the history and present of artistic authorship, with a focus on interactions between China and the West. Her theoretical interests revolve around the critical distinctions of high and low, true and fake, art and commodity, originality and imitation, and, conceptual and manual labour, and thus her work focuses on objects and practices at the boundaries of these categories. Currently she works on a second monograph on export painting in the period of world maritime trade centered in Guangzhou from 1760 to 1842. This book will situate the work of anonymous Canton painters within the larger Qing engagement with European painting.

28 Wong 2013, 37, back cover.

researcher-collector in this field, together with Ching May Bo (ed.), published the bilingual (English-Chinese) *Created in Canton. Chinese export watercolours on pith*, a nearly complete inventory of all the publicly-accessible collections of Chinese watercolour paintings on pith paper in the world.²⁹ In the long-awaited bilingual and richly illustrated publication, Williams brings together 40 years of collecting and research. With over 200 illustrations carefully selected from collections of museums and galleries from 29 countries around the globe, this iconic book is like a ‘boutique of the world’ for this art genre. Besides a historical perspective on the use of pith paper and its current status, Williams exposes the four most well-known pith paper painters, Lamqua, Tingqua, Sunqua and Youqua, to the reader.³⁰ He also classifies the various subject matter in pith paper paintings in separate chapters and with associated colourful plates. Chen Yuhuan, Inspector of the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication, writes in the preface of this book that she and the city of Guangzhou realize that they “have done too little about pith” and that they “can take up the role of cultural mediator to make his (Williams’) works known better to Chinese audiences and to the rest of the world.”³¹ It is noteworthy that, together with the Centre for Historical Anthropology of Sun Yat-sen University, this Bureau coordinated the production of this monograph. Likewise, they have sponsored the translation, editorial and

publication work as well as the acquisition of images for this book by appealing for public funds. This co-production has not only established a place in history for Williams’ extensive collecting and ‘pith hunt’, but also for the city of Guangzhou in this regard.

In the latest substantial work on the subject, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*, Paul Van Dyke reconstructs the Euro-Chinese trade in the eighteenth century.³² Based on research of diverse and scattered archival records, Van Dyke relates the Chinese merchants, including export painters, to the complex global social and economic and artistic networks. In 2015, he and Maria Mok published *Images of the Canton Factories 1760-1822*, in which they present the results of their extensive study into the official archive material of the Dutch, English, French, Swedish and Danish trading companies.³³ Van Dyke and Mok searched the archives for information about activities in and around the foreign factories on the quayside at Canton, about architectural changes to the buildings depicted and changes to the quayside itself, in the years 1760 to 1815. They also pay attention to issues concerning vantage points, onsite observations and multiple perspectives. The wealth of new data conveyed from the mentioned archives is combined with information about the movements of members of the foreign trade companies between Canton and Macao. This method yields a clear picture of who exactly was in Canton when, and when

29 Williams & Ching 2014. Ifan Williams (Yorkshire, UK) has been collecting pith paper paintings since the 1970s. When, in 1999, he was told there were no examples of paintings on pith in Guangzhou, he decided to select 60 examples of paintings from his personal collection to give to Guangzhou. In 2001, an exhibition of the pictures he donated was held in Guangzhou Museum. In Guangzhou, it is widely accepted that it was Ifan Williams who brought pith back to this city. With his donations, museum curators and the general public began to pay some attention to pith. For the past eighteen years, Ching May Bo has been working at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. She has published extensively on a variety of subjects relating to social and cultural history of modern China.

30 Williams & Ching 2014, 18-40.

31 Ibid., vi.

32 Van Dyke 2016. This book is the successor of Van Dyke’s first volume on this subject: *Merchants of Canton and Macao. Politics and strategies in eighteenth-century Chinese trade* (2011) that was received as “an important corrective to European-centred accounts of China’s eighteenth-century foreign trade.” (R. Bin Wong, UCLA).

33 Van Dyke & Mok 2015. From 2006 to 2011, Van Dyke was Associate Professor in History at the University of Macao. Since then he has been a professor at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. He can be acknowledged as a contributor to many books and articles on the Canton trade era, such as *The Canton Trade. Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (2007). His influential scholarship and publications are recognised worldwide in the academic field of History and beyond. Maria Mok is curator Modern Art at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Recent exhibitions include *The Chater Legacy – A Selection of the Chater Collection* (2007-2008), *The Ultimate South China Travel Guide – Canton Series* (2009-2011), and *Artistic Inclusion of the East and West: Apprentice to Master* (2011-2012). She is currently pursuing a PhD degree at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, focusing on the dating and authentication of Chinese export painting.

exactly the flag was hoisted as a sign that the factory was occupied and which seagoing vessels arrived and, subsequently, after some months, on which day they headed home.³⁴ With an analysis of this archival information, it is possible to date the images of the factories in Chinese export paintings more accurately than before. (note: not the production date of the painting itself). This scrupulous and time-consuming research by Van Dyke and Mok is very much a continuation of the work of Conner in *The Hongs of Canton*. By combining data from primary sources, however, the Van Dyke and Mok book offers a lot of new information and, for this reason, is a genuine stepping stone for further research.

So much has been written about the phenomenon and specific collections of Chinese export painting worldwide, and so little has been done with regard to the Dutch collections. However, Christiaan Jörg and Jan van Campen have extensively written on the subject of Chinese export art. Jörg's specialist know-how with respect to, in particular, Chinese export porcelain is unsurpassed and world-renowned. His comprehensive reporting on Chinese export porcelain in Dutch collections is recorded in *Porcelain and the Dutch China; Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The Ming and Qing Dynasties* and in *Oriental Porcelain in The Netherlands. Four museum collections*.³⁵ Van Campen, curator of Asian export art at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, with his expertise on Chinese-Dutch cultural relations, covers a broader scope of Chinese export art (paintings, porcelain, soapstone, textiles, ivory). He is editor of *Aziatische Kunst*, the journal of the Society of Asian Art in the Netherlands, and author of, among other books and articles, *De Haagse jurist J.Th. Royer (1737-1807) en zijn Verzameling Chinese Voorwerpen* (The Hague Lawyer J.Th. Royer (1737-1807) and his Collection of Chinese Objects) and *Asian Splendor. Company Art in the Rijksmuseum*.³⁶ In the framework of

my research, his ongoing study on the Chinese collection of Royer is meaningful; not only because the Royer collection is indicative and unique in terms of its size, but particularly because it is so well-documented. In the article 'Een Chinese Beeldbank. Royers Chinese Albums en Schilderingen' (A Chinese Image Repository. Royer's Chinese Albums and Paintings) in *Aziatische Kunst*, Van Campen convincingly asserts that the oldest Chinese export paintings on Dutch soil form a part of this unique eighteenth-century collection.³⁷

1.2.

Research by Chinese scholars

We can conclude from the virtual non-existence of scholarship on this painting genre in China since its beginnings in the eighteenth century as well as from documented accounts of Chinese contemporaries and art critics, that, at the time of its production in Canton and Macao until long after, this art form was not highly regarded in China. The export painting practice produced products for sale to foreign merchants, which meant that this type of painting was simply not in the purview of the Chinese literati and certainly was not seen as 'high art'. The history of this art genre has long been ignored in writings of Chinese art history. Since the 1990's, fortunately, academics in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have increasingly been studying the historical Canton trade and its art products, and the role of Chinese export artists and their work in disseminating artistic ideas and styles across the world.³⁸ With few exceptions, most publications (still) do not provide new insights into the study of Chinese export painting. According to some researchers, sometimes there is even questionable information incorporated, with debatable results and conclusions as a consequence.³⁹ The practical absence of primary Chinese language sources and the limited access to the original artworks – these are, after all, mainly in the West

34 The analysis of the combined data found that the notes in the Dutch records are an important source, because they contain many details about other foreigners in China. It is source material with information that is not found in any other archive material. The Dutch archive material covers the period from 1762 until late in the 1820s. The VOC day registers from September 1762 to January 1816 describe all the important events, activities, and comings and goings of ships and people between Macao and Canton throughout this period.

35 Jörg 1982, 1997, and 2003.

36 Van Campen 2000-a, b and c; 2011.

37 Van Campen 2010, 38-54.

38 Amongst others: Chen Rong Ying 1995; Jiang Yinghe 2000, 2007; Lu Wenxue 2003; Hu Guanghua 2000; Lai Mang-jun 2000; Ellen Cai (Thirteen Hongs Research Center Guangzhou University); Chen Cunjie 2001, 2005, 2012 (Guangzhou Museum); Ching May Bo 2001, 2014 (Sun Yat-sen University); Wang, 2014-a, 2014-b (Academia Sinica).

39 Lee 2005, 30-31. Wang et al. 2011, 52.

– are the reason, also according to Frank Dikötter, why much Chinese language research relies heavily on secondary sources.⁴⁰

As one of the early scholars working on export painting in mainland China, Chen Rong Ying – who has studied this topic since 1989 – published her article ‘*Qingdai Guangzhou de waixiaohua*’ (Export paintings from Canton in the Qing Period) in 1992, in *Meishu Shilun*. Three years later, this work was part of the *Chen Ying Meishu Wenji*, her collected works.⁴¹ Wang et al. inform us that, in this article, she discusses Chinese export paintings and their social and cultural background from the perspective of the history of painting and Lingnan culture. The subjects she addressed can be divided into three parts. First, she treats Western professional and amateur painters in Canton from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In the second part, Chinese export painters and their works in Canton, Macao, Hong Kong and Shanghai from the end of the eighteenth to the late nineteenth century are meticulously discussed. Then, in the third and final part, Chen provides a survey of the transmission of Western paintings in China in the Ming and Qing periods, and analyses Lingnan cultural characteristics as seen in Canton export

painting. As Wang et al. find, this article “is very helpful in understanding the artistic level of Chinese export painting and its position in the history of recent Chinese painting.”⁴²

For years, this subject was neglected in the academic discourse of Chinese art history. Then, in 2000, Jiang Yinghe gained a PhD with his dissertation *Sihua dongchuan yu Guangzhou kouan* (The Eastward Spread of Western Paintings and the Treaty Port in Guangzhou). In 2007, the Chinese language, commercial edition of this scholarly thesis was published as *Qing dai yanghua yu Guangzhou kou'an* (Western Painting and Canton Port during the Qing Period).⁴³ Jiang has investigated the relationship between art and trade in terms of communication-, art- and ideological history.⁴⁴ He explains the arrival of oil paintings in Canton on the basis of trade- and missionary practices since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Jiang’s work aims to clarify the development of Chinese export art on the basis of the themes used, the various media, and the painters and the organisation of their studios in Canton during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). An interesting aspect of his research is his study of contemporaneous Lingnan poetry, with poetic verses about Western painting techniques and

40 Frank Dikötter is Chair Professor of Humanities at the University of Hong Kong. Before moving to Asia in 2006, he was Professor of the Modern History of China at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has published nine books about the history of China, including two international bestsellers, *Mao's Great Famine*, which won the BBC Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-fiction in 2011, and *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945-1957*. Dikötter states in *Exotic Commodities* (2006, 19) and in *Things Modern* (2007) that textual material on modern China of the nineteenth century, whether printed or archival, has long been relatively thin compared with “small countries like the Netherlands or Switzerland.” Recent scholarship has turned to heretofore unknown or little explored primary Chinese sources about the China trade. As we can read in Wei Peh-Ti’s paper (2011, 2), it is Professor Beatrice Sturgis Bartlett of Yale, a leading authority on Chinese archives, who “observed in 2007 that between 1949 and 1977, although China published only 193 books on its own history while the figure for works on Chinese history in English, Russia, and Japanese reached to more than nine times that many (1754 titles), various museums and archival offices of the government of the People’s Republic have more than remedied this omission by “assembling, protecting and printing Ming and Qing archival documents, making them available to research.” Beatrice S. Bartlett, ‘A world-Class Archival Achievement: The People’s Republic of China Archivists’ Success in Opening the Ming-Qing Central Government Archives, 1949-1998’, in *Archival Science* (2007), 369-390. Figures cited by Professor Bartlett came from P.C.C. Huang, ‘Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China’, in *Modern China* no. 5, 4, 1979, 502-523. More detailed information on archival sources is given in the bibliography at the end of Wei’s paper.

41 Wang et al. 2011, 50. Chen Ying was a member of the exhibition committee of *Souvenir from Canton – Chinese Export Paintings from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (2003, Guangzhou Museum of Art).

42 Wang et al. 2011, 50.

43 Jiang 2007. Jiang Yinghe, professor in History at the Sun Yat-sen (Zhongshan) University in Guangzhou, joined in 2013-2014 the Core Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program of Brown University in Providence, United States, for the project *Visualizing the History: Research on the Images Illustrated the Early Sino-American Relations, 1784-1844*.

44 Lee 2005, 29.

the subject matter of these paintings, which were so strange to the Chinese painters.⁴⁵ In his work, Jiang argues that “the commercial activities in the historical China trade made a serious contribution to cultural intercourse; it affected social thought, and let new professions emerge.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, so Jiang states, we must take a new look at Canton from the export art perspective and take export paintings “to show how Canton port played an important role in cultural exchange.”⁴⁷

In 2003, Lu Wenxue completed his dissertation *Yuedu he lijie: 17 shiji-19 shiji zhongqi Ouzhou de Zhongguo tuxiang* (Reading and Understanding: The Image of China in Europe from the 17th Century to the Mid-19th Century).⁴⁸ The English abstract reads that this study focuses on the changing Western image of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first part provides a historic overview of the visual representation of China in Europa, given by early Western traders, botanists, draughtsmen, missionaries, engravers, scholars and geographers. The second part covers a study into the diverse themes in export paintings. Examples of Chinese cities, customs, costumes, plants and flowers are extensively analysed with the aim of investigating what Westerners understand about China from these kinds of images and how this understanding influenced Western ideas about China.

With the use of newly accessible historical Chinese textual sources on, for instance, the materials, pigments and paper used for the production of Chinese export painting, new data comes to the fore. Until the 1990s, for example, public institutions in Guangzhou knew little about pith paper. They neither collected these kinds of artworks, writes Chen Yuhuan in her preface of *Created in Canton*, nor did the curators of the city’s museums and galleries know much about this particular art genre.⁴⁹ The current welcome scholarly efforts broaden

and open up the subject in a more than adequate way. Using different sources and providing new insights on historical facts concerning visual traditions, (post)modernism and globalisation, these studies are a welcome addition to the (still) Eurocentric driven scholarship regarding Chinese export painting.

1.3.

Other research

I would like to mention the recently published work of Wang Cheng-hua, Associate Research Fellow at Academia Sinica in Taipei, and that of Yeewan Koon, Associate Professor at The University of Hong Kong.⁵⁰ Wang’s article ‘A Global Perspective on Eighteenth-Century Chinese Art and Visual Culture’ in *The Art Bulletin* discusses the interconnectedness of the world in art and its specific patterns that drew China and Europe together in the eighteenth century. Wang succeeds in extending the scholarship on the art and visual culture in the late Qing by approaching the phenomenon of Chinese export painting through the lens of appropriation. Wang says, and I agree with her, that appropriation “gives agency to local actors and is thus one apposite response to the concern of Eurocentrism in art historical research.”⁵¹ In her colourfully illustrated book *A Defiant Brush. Su Renshan and the Politics of Paintings in Early 19th-Century Guangdong*, Koon fills the current gaps in the field by connecting different spheres of artistic production into a broader historical context. In particular, her chapter on art and trade in Guangzhou is very informative, in the sense that it gives an answer to the question: What type of art circulated in early nineteenth-century Guangdong? Koon demonstrates that widening the scope of analysis of export art tailored for an audience outside China, e.g. paintings of street peddlers, by including the ‘open circuit’ of the Cantonese domestic image market, broke the

45 Lingnan (Guangdong) poetry flourished in the late Ming- and early Qing dynasties. The Lingnan poets Qu Dajun (1630–1696), Chen Gongyin (1631–1700), and Liang Peilan (1632–1708) were regarded as the Three great masters of Lingnan (source: China and Inner Asia sessions, Session 186: A contending voice from the far South: Lingnan poetry in seventeenth century China, annual meeting Association for Asian Studies (AAS), 4–7 April 2002. Unfortunately, when I consulted this source (<http://www.aasianst.org/absts/2002abst/China/sessions.htm>) again in September 2016 this account has been suspended.

46 Email Jiang, 23 November 2015.

47 Ibid.

48 Lu 2003. Lu’s dissertation was submitted at the Department of Public History, Cross Culture Study, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

49 Williams 2014, ii–iv.

50 Wang 2014–b. Koon 2014.

51 Wang 2014–b, 392.

preconceptions of two completely separate worlds. When she situates export art versions of social types within a broader history of Chinese genre painting, it becomes evident “how the appropriation of existing models, and the blurring of cultural boundaries, contributed to the polysemic nature of urban imaginations.”⁵² With the Dutch collections in mind, it is, therefore, entirely applicable to speak of a shared cultural repertoire, as well as to consider both their intentional artistic production and their consumption in the light of shared intentions.

In addition to the above-mentioned sources, exhibition catalogues, journals and auction catalogues are important for researchers of Chinese export art. Globally renowned and popular journals such as *The Magazine Antiques*, *Orientalism* and *Arts of Asia* and the only Dutch-language journal on Asian art, *Aziatische Kunst*, regularly publish new information on this subject. Furthermore, catalogues with many colourful illustrations and extensive essays feature the most recent studies in the field.⁵³

Presently, around the world, many Chinese export painting collections are being catalogued and digitised. In addition to the already known museum catalogues (V&A, the British Library, Hongkong Museum of Art, Guangzhou Museum, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, the Macao Museum of Art, the Foreign Art Museum in Riga, Latvia, Yinchuan Museum of Contemporary Art in China, Museo Oriental Valladolid in Spain, etc.) researchers are working in, among others, the Peabody Essex Museum, the British Museum, and the National Museum in Liverpool to provide complete (digital) access to their Chinese export

watercolour paintings. The Japanese professor Ogawa Hiromitsu and his team at the University of Tokyo have photographed Chinese export paintings in important public collections. This visual index was published in 2011, as a complement to the *Comprehensive Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Painting*, which up to 2011 only comprised classical Chinese paintings. The V&A, the British Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum now have high-resolution colour photographs of their complete collections of Chinese export paintings. With a view to permanent (online) access to the important collections in the Netherlands, and in connection with international developments, the Dutch works should also be incorporated in this index.

Restorers are also making themselves heard. In 2007, the Institut National du Patrimoine Département des Restaurateurs in France published a thorough research report in response to a restoration of a Youqua oil painting, titled: ‘*Aventures de trois dames Tsin au pays des Fan-Kouei*’, from the collection of the Musée National de la Marine in Rochefort.⁵⁴ In 2014, the *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* published an informative article by Margrit Reuss, restorer at the Leiden Museum Volkenkunde, on the technical treatment when approaching the conservation of three Chinese export paintings in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. This article clearly shows that exploitation of professional expertise from a variety of disciplines, including conservation of paintings, paper and ethnographic objects, as well as art historical knowledge, led to inspiring discussions on “the preservation and display of this little-known group of artefacts.”⁵⁵ In 2016, Pauline Marchand, a Rotterdam-based painting restorer, shared her rich experiences with

52 Koon 2014, 21–68.

53 A number of memorable exhibitions with accompanying catalogues include: *Accommodation of Vision – Early Chinese Western-style Paintings* (2015, Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan), *Chinese Export Fine Art in the Qing Dynasty from Guangdong Museum* (2013, Guangdong Museum), *Artistic Inclusion of the East and West – Apprentice to Master* (2011, Hong Kong Museum of Art), *East meets West* (2005, Hong Kong Museum of History, Guangzhou Museum of Art and Macao Tower), *Souvenir from Canton. Chinese Export Paintings from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (2003, Guangzhou Museum of Art), *Views from the West* (2001, Guangzhou Museum), *Views of the Pearl River Delta: Macao, Canton and Hong Kong* (1996, Hong Kong Museum of Art and Peabody Essex Museum), *The China Trade 1600–1860* (1986, The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery & Museums, Brighton), *Philadelphians and the China Trade 1784–1844* (1984, Philadelphia Museum of Art) and *Late Qing China Trade Paintings* (1982, Hong Kong Museum of Art). The Martyn Gregory Gallery organises several sale exhibitions every year and always publishes an accompanying richly illustrated and informative catalogue. It is, to say the least, curious that – with the exception of England in 1986 – there are not more major retrospectives of Chinese export paintings held in Europe. The total number of remaining paintings in museum collections in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, France, Portugal, Spain, Russia, Germany, Scotland and England is certainly large and (art) historically valuable enough.

54 With thanks to Janin Bechstedt, painting restorer in France, for making this research report available to me.

55 Reuss et al. 2014, 134.

restoring a couple of Chinese export oil paintings in the collection of the Maritime Museum Rotterdam.⁵⁶ We can also add the research group at the School of Science and Technology of Nottingham Trent University, in collaboration with the Science Section, Conservation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK to this growing list. Haida Liang and her team are conducting technical in-depth studies into the pigments, paper, canvas, and glue used in Chinese export paintings.⁵⁷ In ‘A holistic multimodal approach to the non-invasive analysis of watercolour paintings’ Liang et al. report their results.⁵⁸ I look forward to initiatives from the interdisciplinary Netherlands Institute for Conservation Art and Science (NICAS) concerning technical research, conservation treatment and restoration of Chinese export paintings in the Netherlands.⁵⁹

1.4.

New insights

As we have seen in this chapter, Chinese export painting has been the subject of a significant amount of research, publications and exhibitions worldwide. Most of these previous studies, however, restrict themselves to the production phase of this transcultural market. To provide new insights into how we can address Chinese export paintings extant worldwide in general, and the ones in the collections of Dutch museums in particular, I took a careful look at them with fresh eyes. I had to formulate a new perspective, which is elaborated throughout this dissertation. Firstly, I approach the historical Chinese export painting market as a creative

industry (like the contemporary Dafen village) that generated an art practice in which many anonymous painters did their individual job, painting everyday and doing their utmost to meet the demands for artistic quality.⁶⁰ The existing categories in which these paintings are classified in the museums must not be rejected, I argue, but *Made for Trade* shows awareness of the fact that these categories are always constructed and that descriptions of the paintings themselves can lead to new insights. Furthermore, my perspective draws attention to the fact that this art grew out of commerce and that, at the same time, the paintings can, to a greater or lesser extent, be seen as commodities, arising from the integrated economic relations between China and the West. The term ‘to a greater or lesser extent’ is deliberately used here and is important, because, as we will see later, there are certainly boundaries (limits) to the commodification process of Chinese export paintings. This process, through which goods turn into commodities with use value is, to quote Van Binsbergen, “not straightforward and unequivocal, but complex, varied, sometimes unpredictable and enigmatic, and that it is not a one-way-process either.”⁶¹ In addition to treating these handpainted works, produced primarily – and this must be emphasised – to sell to foreigners as commodities, this research simultaneously recognises the importance of their materiality, the human valuation of them and their representational and social function. On the whole, Western merchants and wealthy seamen-entrepreneurs commissioned Chinese export paintings and we may treat them as media in a visual economy. By proposing this term (visual economy is explained more in

⁵⁶ Pauline Marchand, together with Irene Jacobs, curator paintings, prints and drawings, decorative arts, audiovisual collection and photo collection, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, presented her paper ‘Heritage, Techniques and Conservation of Maritime China Trade Paintings’ at the symposium *Chinese Export Paintings: Studies and Interpretations*, held in Leiden, 29 November 2016 at Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures.

⁵⁷ http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/apps/research/groups/22/home.aspx/project/144043/overview/culture_and_trade_through_the_prism_of_technical_art_history_-_a_study%20of_chinese_export_paintings (consulted September 2016).

⁵⁸ Liang, Kogou & Lucian et al. 2015.

⁵⁹ <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/netherlands-institute-for-conservation-art-and-science>. The centre, initiated in collaboration with the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), work in cooperation with the Rijksmuseum (RM), the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Delft University of Technology (TU Delft). Broadly, the centre aims to foster innovative research unifying three different disciplines: art history, conservation, and science.

⁶⁰ Wong 2014. On the basis of extensive fieldwork, practical artistic and curatorial engagement with the world of the twenty-first century Dafen painters, Winnie Wong’s work gives us a clear insight into the highly specific kind of artistic production that prevails in Dafen. In one way or another, the Dafen practice can be compared to the artistic production in the days of the historical China trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, Wong’s work serves as a modern framework for disentangling various aspects related to ‘art’.

⁶¹ Van Binsbergen 2005, 15.

Chapter 2), Deborah Poole gives us a tool to see how the system of production and consumption was strongly coordinated and organised, and how different values are accrued by the same kinds of paintings.⁶² Then, with a strong focus on the consumer-end of this market, it is important to be aware of the fact that once an object lost its contextual mooring, it often functioned as an open invitation to an abstraction and misrepresentation of its situated meaning.⁶³ Along the way, Chinese export paintings, which constructed specific views of China, were moved from one cultural value system to another. Moreover, there are many mechanisms by which values are assigned to them and which determine distinct moments in a painting's social life – that is, the journey of a commodity from its traditional value sphere with an immediate personal emotional value when consumed by its first owner to an *objet d'art* when studied by me in the storeroom a Dutch museum.

The next chapter will outline the theoretical framing in order to study the extensive and valuable collections present in Dutch museums.

62 Poole 1997.

63 Henriot & Yeh 2013, xvi.