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

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Chapter 4

Inventory of the Dutch collections

An aggregate amount of sets, albums, various genres and multiple ways of seeing

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4.1.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the newly formed corpus of Chinese export paintings in Dutch public collections. I have compiled this corpus, which is revealed for the first time in this dissertation, over the past few years, by combing through archives and museum collections, conducting fieldwork (interviews and hands-on research on the paintings), studying historical documentary sources and analysing scholarly literature on the subject. The Dutch collections, I argue, are worth cherishing more creatively and should certainly become part of future museum policy. Accordingly, to advance their current state, my research discloses the variety of genres and media that make up the vast corpus. Its diversity demands a multidisciplinary approach that can contribute to a critical understanding of their meaning and use value, both as artworks and as commodities.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, to evaluate the paintings themselves, which is the core of this fourth chapter, *Made for Trade* explores their ‘sites’ and ‘modalities’. That is, among other elements, a study of the image itself, the technological, compositional and social aspects, with an addition of ‘genre’ or ‘subject matter’ as a modality. We will see that, depending on the genre and the (technical) material, different social effects and value accretions are at stake. In addition to this structured mapping of the corpus, the conclusion of this chapter includes a discussion on apparent truthfulness as a value component in constructing an ‘image of China’ at the time of production and thereafter; an image constructed from the various themes that were painted over and over again.

Furthermore, to grasp the totality of the

corpus’ value and to bring together the documentary sources and the paintings involved, I follow Gerritsen’s idea that both entities (sources and paintings) should not be seen as distinct, but rather as part of a continuum. These paintings appear to us in both their material form and in textual records in which, as Gerritsen writes in a reference to objects from the past: “our imagination conjures their form, and what matters more for our historical understanding is how we ‘read’ both kinds of artefacts.”¹ To this day, the content of the images of Chinese export paintings is still ‘read’ by many as a representation of material referents (real or imagined) in China. We know that the images were not generally scenes painted from reality, but rather idealised, composite copies of earlier paintings, borrowed from fellow-painters or examples from the Chinese painting tradition. I concur with the British social and cultural historian Peter Burke that this ‘quoting’ of another image is problematic when researchers use paintings as reliable evidence.² Much more than an original representation of the subject, the artistic value of such copies was dependent on the complexity of the image and the quality of the artistic execution.³ The paintings, both individually and as a whole, point to a collective idea in the West about what China represented. In other words, Chinese export painting allows us to imagine some aspects of the past more vividly, by simultaneously conveying information and giving pleasure. Moreover, beyond the image itself, it conformed, to some extent, with the prevailing Western visual culture, wherein this kind of painting was ‘read’ by many as a representation of reality. The images were what most Westerners thought China looked like. Or, as William Shang explains: “It helped Westerners

1 Gerritsen & Riello 2015, 6.

2 Burke 2001, 96–97.

3 Tillotson 1987, 77.

envision China in a certain way.”⁴ Moreover, pictorially, they reveal a lot about the Chinese people of the period, and, as Cobb also explains, “their contemporaries in the West may have found them instructive as well as entertaining.”⁵ Did Chinese painters believe in such Western preconceptions, which contributed to the design of their images? We do not know. But even with their knowledge, we can assume that they were painting beyond reality. It is as though the artisans composing their paintings and albums were saying: “This is how our common people work; here is our drama, enjoyed by Chinese of all classes; this is our sense of justice; here are our beloved boats, which fill our rivers and harbors and release us from crowded streets; this shows our fondness for bright colors; and here is our deep love of nature – flower, trees, insects, and birds.”⁶ The buyer’s interpretation of the Chinese world was thus displayed through the Chinese painter’s artworks. Notwithstanding the fact that many channels were responsible for the knowledge construction of China, how the Western audience saw the Chinese images, and what they saw, was culturally constructed. Justified by the visual oeuvre of the various genres pertaining to Chinese subject matter, which were important ‘information’ channels, it appears that the belief in this (distorted) image of China – of ‘China as a concept’ – from the time these images started to flow around the world, is still contemporary.⁷

Finally, to characterise the value of the Dutch collections of Chinese export paintings as a whole, it is also important to mention the broad variety of collections in which these non-canonised paintings are conserved. It appears that, in the past, these paintings were appropriated by various museological discourses. Chinese export paintings in the Netherlands can be found in collections belonging to maritime museums, city archives and libraries, ethnology museums and in leading national art museums. But, even though these

diverse collections differ in nature, the origin and acquisition data often justify the (logical) placing of Chinese export paintings in these assortments. Many of them were part of the collections of these museums from the outset, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Holland. In addition to museums as a (re)source for the history of art, we must acknowledge the importance of the many and diverse private collections, which ended up in a Dutch museum collection – from those belonging to famous collectors, such as the Dutch lawyer Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807), to those compiled much later in time and on a smaller scale by other passionate individuals. Today’s private collections, however, are not the subject of *Made for Trade*.

The next section, Sites and modalities, presents an inventory of the Dutch collections of Chinese export painting. This section is structured with the following subheadings: introduction; sets and albums; and genres with Chinese subject matter. In turn, the specifics of each of the ten distinguished genres – either thematic, technological, compositional or social – are acknowledged in order to understand their meaning and corresponding use value.

4.2.

Sites and modalities: Sets and albums, and genres with Chinese subject matter

Introduction

Obviously, the best way to gain understanding of the various genres with Chinese subject matter is to study the paintings themselves. The collections relevant for this study consist of over 800 inventory numbers, with more than 4,000 paintings, of which about 3,000 belong to the valuable and extensive Royer Collection held at Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures. As mentioned in Chapter 3.3, among the many distinguishable works are: unique singular paintings; identical pairs on

4 Shang 2015, 58. William Shang (PhD) is Professor in the School of Global Studies, Tama University, Kanagawa, Japan, and Honorary Research Fellow, Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Studies (Incorporating the Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong). He co-authored *Picturing Cathay: Maritime and Cultural Images of the China Trade*, 2003.

5 Cobb 1956, 243.

6 Ibid.

7 Gommans 2015, 337. Jos Gommans, Professor of Colonial and Global History, Institute for History, Leiden University, asserts that “[C]hina as a concept still makes sense as it was not superimposed on by foreign rulers. So China provides a strong self-image, proven in history and proclaimed by a long list of Chinese officials and scientifically confirmed by Sinologists. It is only recently that historians, who stress, for example, the Mongol impact or China’s ignored ethnographic and religious diversity has challenged this Sinocentrism. But as a category, China is still highly convenient for global historians.”

different media; companion pieces; sets of oil paintings or gouaches and albums with watercolours; images rendered in oil on canvas, paper, tree leaf, bone or copper or as reverse glass paintings; and watercolours or gouaches on regular Chinese or European paper or on Chinese pith paper. An overview of the locations of the collections studied for this research, together with their technical and formal aspects, is provided in Figure 4.1. and Appendix 1. When analysing the corpus, the relatively limited number of oils, reverse glass, or enamel paintings is striking. Only people who could afford them could purchase these expensive paintings.⁸ Watercolours on pith paper, however, tended to be mass-produced, either as loose sheets, sometimes in small, glass-fronted boxes, or in beautifully bound silk-covered albums, which were much more affordable for a larger group of people.⁹

Additionally, because I am using the Dutch collections as research material, I am aware that a different picture emerges regarding the numbers and subject matter of collections in other European countries that traded with China. A number of rare and early sets, albums, identical pairs and singulars that feature in the Dutch collections are, for the most part, significant enough to submit to a content analysis.¹⁰ In doing so, it is obvious that the Dutch interest was primarily in subjects with a strong iconic value, related to the time spent in China or, more broadly, ‘the East’, such as harbour views and ship portraits (commodity/export and artistic value). Themes that conveyed an image of the life and activities of the Chinese people were also very popular, including images with subjects such as professions, peddlers, street performers, local vessels, figurine paintings of dignitaries and their servants, and of men and women in colourful costumes with accessories (material and artistic

value). In the second place are genres such as Chinese flora and fauna and the different stages in the production processes of tea, silk and porcelain (hinting at scientific and historic value). The value of other genres present in the Dutch collections, which I have studied, is to be found in, respectively, their artistic quality (landscapes and portraits), in the desire to grasp the unknown, their ‘exotic’ Chinese stately and noble character (imperial court, interior and garden scenes), or an emphasis on the inequalities between West and East (the more morbid images of judicial punishments, torture methods and beheadings). By contrast, analysis of genres such as religious practices, medical portraits, Chinese divinities, rituals and festivals, opium practices, shop- and workshop interiors, and erotic scenes, is largely ignored, because, in contrast to English and American collections, these subjects hardly feature in the Dutch public collections.¹¹

I have immersed myself in the corpus for a number of years, and I have had access to, studied, and in some cases photographed the sets, albums and singulars in the Dutch collections. In *Made for Trade*, I relate this hands-on work with the objects to various descriptive sources, such as eyewitness accounts with vivid details, and documentary or scholarly documents that convey information on the different genres and their inherent use value, as well as possible differences and similarities in the understanding of the present subject matter. Thus, I have discovered that there are ambiguities, as a result of which there is a multiplicity of meanings. Therefore, I agree with Burke, when he writes, “that the meaning of images depends on their ‘social context’.”¹² Surely, in the case of Chinese export painting it is important to include social-cultural aspects regarding the commissioning of these paintings in China, as well as the reception of them back

8 About 140 oil paintings, including those on canvas and on paper; 39 reverse-glass paintings, and 14 enamels.

9 About 3,800 watercolours, including 2,960 belonging to the Royer Collection; and 60 gouaches.

10 Rose 2007, 69–73.

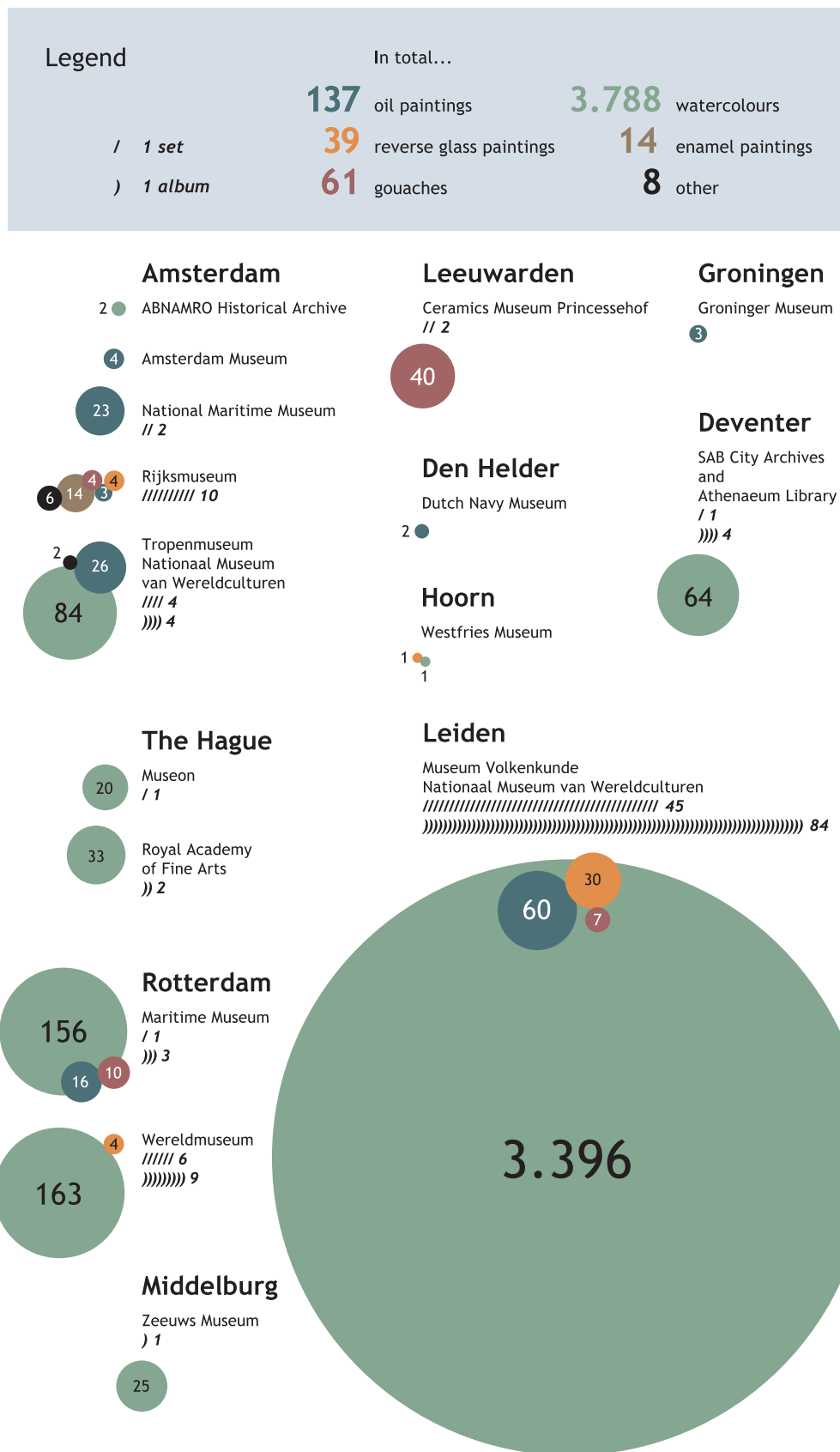
11 During the research period for this thesis, I visited relevant collections abroad, including: various museums in Hong Kong; the Peabody Essex Museum and Philadelphia Maritime Museum (US); the major art museums in the region of the Pearl river delta; and a number of British collections, amongst others, those of the National Maritime Museum Greenwich, the V&A, the British Library and the British Museum.

Museum Volkenkunde has three paintings with the theme of Chinese rituals and festivals: All Souls, inv.no. 360–1124; Dragonboat race, inv.no. 360–1114 and Ploughing emperor, inv.no. 360–1113. Furthermore, there is a set of watercolour paintings in their collection with depictions of Chinese gods, inv.nrs. 360–7517a to 7517v. The same museum also features a set of paintings with nine images relating to the sale and smoking of opium, inv.nr. 2124–1 and 21241a to 21241h. In addition, I am familiar with the private Bertholet Collection in Amsterdam, which comprises paintings with an erotic theme.

12 Burke 2001, 178.

Fig. 4.1.
© Rik van Schagen.

Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections



in Europe and their long afterlife *en route* to the museum storeroom. What, for example, was the original site where the painting or the album was intended to be seen? Were they seen in relation to other artworks from China or not? Was the painting or album intended to be a generic souvenir, a commemorative image, or was the topic meant to express a social or moralistic message? Or were these paintings only ever intended to be successful trade objects? What happened to the painting before and after it found its way into an institutional context? Has there been anything written about the painting or has it ever been on display? In short: what is its cultural biography, which forms its material complex?

It is generally known that texts also construct the way in which we see and interpret things. In the case of documentary records and literary works, time- and culture-specific views guide the vision of how these paintings were received and accrued value or, on the contrary, how they fell into oblivion. Clunas, in his early seminal work on Chinese export watercolours, asserts that the “interest in such material (Chinese export painting) tailed off from the 1920s, while attention was transferred to sporadic and generally less successful attempts to consolidate a collection of ‘real’ Chinese painting.”¹³ In the long twentieth century, almost nothing was written in the Netherlands about Chinese export paintings in public collections and, as far as I know, only one small exhibition was organised on this topic.¹⁴ Fortunately, the increasing scholarly attention given to the field of Chinese export painting in recent years has prompted a reinvestigation of this predominantly nineteenth-century field of acquisition.

Moreover, contemporary eyewitness records of Western missionaries, merchants and explorers, also in ‘the East’, largely guided the gaze of the people back home. While there was still talk in eighteenth-century texts of admiration and respect for the highly-developed, utopian Chinese society, later, in the nineteenth-century, the perception of China became more negative: a backward, underdeveloped nation that still had much to learn from ‘the West’. “A constant factor,” as Arie Pos argues in his elaborate study on the written history of the literary chinoiserie and the Western image of

China from 1250 to 2007, “was the image skewed by Western ideas.”¹⁵ We can see that Chinese export paintings followed this shift in the perception of China in a number of ways, including through the appearance of new themes, or through the explicit (false) rendition of the paintings. Yet, recognising the possibly distorted China-image that some texts present, I was able to interpret the corpus on the basis of scholarly and objective study, through literature research and by examining how the different topics were reused and valued over the course of time.

This section focuses primarily on the site of ‘the image itself’ as one of the sites at which meanings are made. Intersecting modalities, such as content analysis of the compositional features or formal components of a painting, a set or an album, and other aspects, depending on historiographies, play a role in our ability to appreciate their meaning and corresponding use value. Thus, we get a clear-cut image of the confluence of values, i.e. the cohesive ‘commodity/export value’, ‘historic value’, ‘artistic value’, and ‘material value’, combined in the newly formed Dutch corpus. Moreover, this section recalls, on the one hand, parts of Chapter 3.3, in which I outlined the *modus operandi* of Chinese export painters and their practice, the market (site of production), the techniques, methods and materials used, and the formal aspects of the paintings. On the other hand, with a view to understanding their use value, I sometimes look ahead, to the case studies in Chapters 5 and 6, in which the site(s) of where the paintings were and are seen (consumed) by various audiences form the focal point of study and the ‘social’ and ‘compositional’ modalities are at stake.

Sets and albums

Sets of albums, sets of oil paintings, gouaches or watercolours, and sets of single-sheet watercolours can be understood as ‘sets’ because the images clearly belong together. They form a coherent whole in terms of style, colour use, materials used, or as a genre. They carry identical original frames or were commissioned and/or produced simultaneously. The documentary and serial nature of an album or a set, which is often thematically constructed,

¹³ Clunas 1984, 99.

¹⁴ In 2001, the thematic exhibition *Sensitive plates. Nineteen Chinese paintings on glass* was organised in Museum Volkenkunde as a so-called Galerijtentoonstelling (Gallery exhibition).

¹⁵ Pos 2008, 15.

contributes to the individual images within such a set or album accruing value. Together, the images form a narrative that, in a logical and coherent manner, makes the unknown 'exotic' scenes familiar and thus tells a meaningful story.

As a kind of ethnographic souvenir, albums with titles such as 'costumes of China' or 'daily life in China' are, as Yeewan Koon calls them in *A Defiant Brush*, "compelling ways of translating China."¹⁶ In contrast, an album can also be a collection of unrelated individual single-sheets or a programmed sequence of images, eclectically assembled, bound together and covered with paper or cardboard, silk, brocade, lacquerwork or genuine leather. Most Chinese export watercolours were bound as an album or sold as a set of twelve paintings, as is the case for many of those found in the Dutch collections. As we know from Huang and Sargent, the word 'dozen' was introduced into China, where it was later referred to as *yī dá* (一打). Some sets, however, were composed of thirteen pictures. Perhaps this was a unique selling point: "buy a dozen, get one free!"¹⁷

Hereafter, I will explore the different sorts of noteworthy sets (sets of oil paintings, sets of albums, and single albums) of the Dutch corpus.

- Sets of oil paintings

The Museum Volkenkunde owns three noteworthy sets of oil paintings. They all deserve attention for a variety of reasons. The first set



Fig. 4.2. The quay of Canton (from set of 19), anonymous, oil on glass, 1785-1790, 52.5 x 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-III6.

consists of 19 reverse glass paintings, documented in detail in *Sensitive plates*.¹⁸ This set of oil paintings (Figures 4.2. and 4.3.), probably produced between 1785-1790, contains elements suggesting a strong link with this period; for example, the flags of Western countries, the house construction, or the types of ships. Similarities in technique, quality and size lead us to surmise that all these paintings were created at approximately the same time.

The set has an interesting provenance back to 1824. Following a request to the Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences, and after a Royal Decree of 17 April 1824, the then director of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities, Van den Kastele, was able to buy the set.¹⁹ Paid for from state coffers, the set enriched the Royal Cabinet from 1 May 1824 to its surcease in 1883.²⁰ After more than a century, the set was again rightly assigned value by Van Dongen, former China curator of Volkenkunde Museum. He researched all aspects of the different Chinese subject matters represented in the paintings, including their technical and compositional aspects; moreover, he had them restored and subsequently organised an exhibition. In 2001, they were put on public display in the museum and also at Akzo Nobel Coatings in Sassenheim for some months; an informative catalogue to accompany the exhibition was published. Van Dongen's efforts must be understood as a positive exception given the prevailing museum



Fig. 4.3. Kowtowing (from set of 19), anonymous, oil on glass, 1785-1790, 52.5 x 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-III6.

¹⁶ Koon 2014, 58. Yeewan Koon is Associate Professor at the Department of Fine Arts at The University of Hong Kong.

¹⁷ Huang & Sargent (eds.) 1999, 18.

¹⁸ Inv.nos. 360-III3 to 360-III31. Van Dongen 2001.

http://volkenkunde.nl/sites/default/files/attachements/sensitive_plates.pdf.

¹⁹ NA 2.04.01, 4855, 12 April 1824, and 26 April 1824, no.99, A-series.

12 April 1824: "Voordragt aan ZM om autorisatie te verleen tot het aankopen, voor het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden van eene verzameling van schilderijen uit China ten getale van 19 stuks."

26 April 1824: "Besluit ZM, d.d. 17 april, n. 115, de minister magtigende tot den aankoop van voorwerpen, ten behoeve van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden 's Hage, volgens bijgevoegde nota."

²⁰ NA 2.04.01, 4925, Index 1824, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Fifth Dept. Education, Arts and Sciences 1815-1848.

"Executie 1 mei 8.F"; NA 2.04.01, 4882, 1 May 1824, F-series; NA 2.04.01, 4917, 1 May 1824.

practice in relation to this painting genre at that time. I am convinced that the value of these artworks as a coherent set, their appropriate conservation, and the financial support of Akzo Nobel Coatings, helped enormously in convincing everyone to exhibit them.

The second and third noteworthy sets in this Leiden collection consist of ten rare oil paintings with winter views of Tartary and three early (1773) harbour views of Macao, Whampoa and Canton, which are currently on loan to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Both sets will be thoroughly examined in, respectively, Chapter 6 and Chapter 5.4.²¹

Furthermore, this section about sets of oil paintings must make mention of two large and comparable sets with ten and twelve images of harbour and river scenes in the collection of the ethnographical Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and two other, almost identical sets of four harbour views in the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. These sets – both can be dated in the first quarter of the nineteenth century – with their matching subject matter and historical documentary nature, present a meaningful narrative that is significant for determining their use value. Their formal qualities – they all carry inscriptions, are of the same size, and are rendered in the same painting style – also increase their artistic value. The two sets belonging to the Tropenmuseum depict places such as Canton, Macao, the Cape of Good Hope, the Dutch residence at Anjere Point on Java, a view of the Hoogly River and other sights on the sailing route from the Netherlands, via the East Indies, to Canton. One set is painted on wooden panels and the other on canvas. Figures 4.4. and 4.5. show one example from each set.²² All the paintings are in good condition. In 1948 and in 1952, a year after the series were added, separately, to the Amsterdam collection (1947 and 1950), they were beautifully restored. The value of the sets was estimated and they were safeguarded for the future. They can be considered as commodities made specifically for exchange and export to Western customers. Some of these narrative images can be compared with (or maybe inspired by) the series *A picturesque voyage to India by*



the way of China, published in 1810, consisting of 50 hand-coloured aquatints, drawn and engraved by Thomas and William Daniell. The series is based on sketches made during the pair's travels between 1785 and 1794 and are currently kept in the British Museum and National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.²³ It is certainly imaginable that prints from these engravings ended up in Cantonese painting studios and that their painters were inspired by the popularity of these striking examples.

The two sets from the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam, on the other hand, each comprise four harbour views – the famous ensemble of Macao, Bocca Tigris, Whampoa and Canton (we will return to this later). One set features paintings in oil on bone (c. 1810) and the second set are oils on copper (c. 1790).²⁴

Fig. 4.4. Scene on Canton river, inscription recto: Scene on the Canton river (from set of 10), anonymous, oil on wooden panel, 19th century, 13.5 x 19.5 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-1754-2.

Fig. 4.5. View of Macao, inscription verso: Macao. China (from set of 12), anonymous, oil on canvas, 19th century, 13.5 x 19.5 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-2034-7.

21 Inv.nos. 360-349a to 349g, 360-1133, 360-1134, and 360-1138. The missing painting with inv.no. 360-1141 might also have belonged to this set.

22 Inv.nos. 1754-2 to 1754-11 (on wooden panels with a black wooden frame with gilded inner edge), and 2034-1 to 2034-12 (on canvas behind glass with a black wooden frame with gilded inner edge).

23 British Museum, inv.no. 1981.U.468.

24 Inv.nos. A.2068(06)a to (06)d on bone with extravagantly carved wooden gold-coloured frame, and A.3229(01) to (04) on copper with black, flat wooden frame with golden edge featuring a dots and floral design.



Fig. 4.6. The roadstead of Whampoa (from set of 4), anonymous, oil on bone, c. 1810, 9.5 x 14 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. A.2068(06)b.



Fig. 4.7. The roadstead of Whampoa (from set of 4), anonymous, oil on copper, c. 1790, 11 x 15 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. A.3229(02).

What is remarkable about these sets is the detailed artistic execution given the particularly small format. (Figures 4.6. and 4.7.) At the time of their production, around the turn of the century, these sets, with a high commodity/export value (yet, almost every Western trader took one at home), were meaningful and iconic, emblematic of the historical China trade. Today, they still work as strong metaphors for this period in global history when Dutch-Chinese trading contacts were flourishing.

Finally, the Amsterdam Museum owns a set of four export oil paintings (Figure 4.8.) on the leaves of a *Ficus Religiosa*, a so-called *Bodhi* tree, or sacred fig – the tree under which the Shakyamuni Buddha was sitting when in the sixth century BC he first attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya in India. This set includes a small stick, with colourful images of birds, *figurines*

(mandarins, women with their servants), featuring a multi-coloured border with flowers, fishes and ‘valuables’.²⁵ I follow the idea of Canadian curators of Asian art, Barry Till and Paula Swart that pith paper painters probably painted these leaf paintings, as “the style, subject matter and the colours are often similar.”²⁶ Their refined look is a result of soaking the tree leaves in fresh water for about three weeks, prior to painting. This caused, so Till and Swart state, “the green of the leaf to disintegrate, resulting in the leaf skeleton to look like a fragile piece of intricate gauze.”²⁷ The fabulously and skilfully hand-painted tree leaves in the Amsterdam Museum wholly fit this description. They probably functioned originally as elegant fans.

- Sets of gouaches and watercolours

Looking at the sets executed in gouache, it is appropriate to mention first the beautiful and early produced sets featuring images of the different stages of the production processes for Chinese porcelain, growing tea or weaving silk. The value and quality of the Dutch gouaches with this subject matter are comparable to other famous collections around the world, for example, in the V&A in London, the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, the British Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. In the Netherlands, these kinds of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gouache sets, with opaque watercolours, can be found in the collections of the Ceramics Museum Princessehof, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, and Museum Volkenkunde.²⁸ I will deal with them in more detail in the following section on genres with a Chinese subject matter.

In addition, The Hague Museon owns a cohesive set of twenty watercolours of one- and two-wheeled (covered-) wagons, sedans, mules,



Fig. 4.8. Set of 4 (former) fans, anonymous, oil on Bodhi tree leaf, c. 1850-1900, inv.nos. clockwise: KA 12523: 26 x 13.5 cm (incl. small stick); KA 12524: 15.2 x 14.2 cm; KA 12525: 16.8 x 14.8 cm; KA 12526: 18.5 x 15.5 cm, Amsterdam Museum.

peddlers and horses, painted by Zhou Peichun, a late nineteenth-century export artist from Beijing.²⁹ Although Peichun was not a Cantonese export painter, he is still worthy of mention, because his work was so informative and was always signed with a red wax seal (*Zhou Peichun hua*: painted by Zhou Peichun).³⁰ As is visible on the Figures 4.9. and 4.10 all of the images of the Museon set, made between 1880 and 1910, have an explanatory text, describing what the purpose of the vehicle is. We can deduce from this that the painting was meant for a Western buyer. Zhou's explanatory texts were his 'selling points', as Ming Wilson calls them.³¹ With these lines of text, which often began with 'this is the Chinese way of ...' Zhou made many typical Chinese customs and habits comprehensible for Western customers. We know from the observations of contemporary eyewitnesses that horses and wagons were a part of daily life in Beijing. While he stayed in Beijing in the 1860s, Robert Fortune (1812-1880) recorded that "horsemen were galloping about, carts were jolting along the dusty streets, [...]. As on the way out, long trains of donkeys and camels were met and passed on the road, many of them laden with coal."³² Despite the fact that photography was already well known in China at the end of the nineteenth century, Zhou's detailed and realistic paintings still sold well on the Beijing export market. According to Wang et al., there are at least 2,000 such paintings in Western collections, "representing a last flourish of Chinese export paintings."³³ Like the famous Bretschneider albums, with images of aspects of daily life in nineteenth-century Beijing, and the books by Western engravers William Alexander and George Henry Mason about daily life in



Figs. 4.9. and 4.10.
Paintings of one-wheeled carts (from set of 20), inscriptions recto in Chinese: This is an image of a small cart for luggage transport (4.9.), and This is an image of a small grain cart for transport (4.10.)
Zhou Peichun, watercolour and ink on paper, 1880-1910, 34.5 x 26.5 cm, The Hague Museon, inv.nos. 11887 and 11880.

25 Inv.nos. KA 12523 to KA 12526.

26 Till and Swart 2015, 117.

27 Ibid.

28 Ceramics Museum Princessehof, inv.nos. NO 5485 to 5512 and NO 5513 to 5524. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.nos. NG 1981-12-A to 1981-12-D. Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P4423Museum Volkenkunde, inv.nos. 4796-1 to 6.

29 Inv.nos. 11877 to 11896.

30 Wilson 2000, 90. Ming Wilson is senior curator, Asian Department, Victoria and Albert Museum. She has organised exhibitions and written books on a wide range of topics in Chinese art, including export paintings (2003), jades (2004), books (2006), Imperial robes (2010) and the history of Chinese art in Britain (2008 and 2014). Her recent research is on Sino-British diplomatic gifts. Zhou Peichun was active between 1880-1910 and he had a workshop close to the Dazhi bridge, just outside the Shuzhi gate, also called the Xuanwu gate, in Beijing. All The Hague paintings have a small, red wax seal and are framed.

31 Ibid., 91.

32 Fortune 1863, 371 and 387. Robert Fortune was a Scottish botanist, plant hunter and traveller, best known for introducing tea plants from China to India.

33 Wang et al. 2011, 29.



Figs. 4.11. and 4.12.
Two paintings (from set of 10), inscriptions recto in Chinese: Sail watching the ferry (4.11) and Moon holding the boat (in the arm) (4.12.), anonymous, gouache on silk, 19th century, 49.1 x 81.5 cm (closed), 49.1 x 162.9 cm (open), Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.nos. P4419 and P4420.

eighteenth-century China, Zhou's watercolours not only have an aesthetic value, but also an important ethnographical and historical function.³⁴ The combination of image and text on daily life in the China of yesteryear makes them more than simply attractive items.

The transfer, in 2013, of many artefacts from the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam to the collection of the Maritime Museum Rotterdam, enriched the latter's collection of Chinese export painting with a number of valuable sets and albums. Among other objects is a set of gouaches on silk with ten images of an imperial tour by the emperor along a river, purchased by the Wereldmuseum in 1967 from a private collector. Figures 4.11. and 4.12. show this very detailed work depicting life along the river. These images are unique in the Dutch collections. All the scenes carry a description in Chinese script of the location and activity. The text on Figure 4.11. says 帆船观渡, (*fēng fān guān dù*), which literally means 'sail watching the ferry', and the one on Figure 4.12. reads

夜月挽艘 (*yè yuè wǎn sōu*), 'moon holding the boat (in the arm)'.³⁵ A red seal is visible on some of the paintings. This set, however, is quite distinct from the characteristics of other Chinese export paintings. The images do not carry the integrated features that are so typical for Chinese export paintings. This notwithstanding, I would like to highlight this set because of its artistic beauty and its Chinese-ness. These two aspects are very likely the reason why the first Dutch owner purchased this set.

Sets of single-sheet watercolours on (pith) paper are primarily found in the collections of the three ethnology museums in the Netherlands: Tropenmuseum, Museum Volkenkunde and Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. Given their bad conservational state, we can surmise that some of them, especially the many excellent series in Museum Volkenkunde, were probably cut out of their original albums, discovered at the time of the so-called Deltaplan in the 1990s.³⁶ Figure 4.1 shows details of their numbers and the

34 Solonin 1995. The Bretschneider albums were collected by the Russian doctor Emil Vasilyevich Bretschneider (1833-1901) during the years that he was employed at the Russian Embassy in Beijing (1866-1884). He was a keen collector of prints depicting daily life. In the 1995 published work with reproductions, 302 paintings are presented full page in this oversize volume (25.4x33 cm) with brief explanatory captions. The albums with the original paintings are stored in the archives of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. K.Y. Solonin is an affiliated research fellow of this institute. The original works of Alexander (1805) & Mason (1804) are translated, reproduced and brought together in Govers 1988.

35 With thanks to Guan Shu, Chinese language teacher at Leiden University Academic Language Centre, for the translation.

36 Single sheets of watercolours on pith paper in sets with 10 to 40 images in Museum Volkenkunde are inv.nos. 328, 360-352, 360-364, 360-7515 to 7517, 1239-378, 380 and 383, 1299-8 and 9, 1948-39, 2133-1 to 6, and 5464. In the 1990s there was a big renovation of the Museum Volkenkunde building and its collections. As we can read in the paper by Jaap van der Burg, project manager Deltaplan, which he presented at the conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Edinburgh in 1996: "In 1988 the Audit Office made a report about the conditions of the Nations Cultural Heritage. In this report the stores of the National Museum of Ethnology [Museum Volkenkunde] were named as an example of how bad it had all become. As a result, the Minister of Culture thought it necessary to launch a plan, which would improve the conditions of the Dutch National musea with one big injection. This was called the Deltaplan." This project, for the preservation of cultural heritage, took all museum artefacts into account. The handling tasks consisted of unpacking the artefacts, making a condition report and a label, dusting the object, photographing and digitally storing it in the computer, preparing it for storage and location registration.



Fig. 4.13. Hua Miao. *Huang Qing zhigong tu* (Qing Imperial illustrations of tributaries), detail, 1759-1765, National Palace Museum Taipei Taiwan, Republic of China.



Figs. 4.14.a. to 4.14.d. Images of male and female representatives of different ethnic groups in some the Royer albums, a Miao couple and a Tartarian couple, anonymous, watercolour on Chinese paper, 1773-1776, 27 x 28.5 cm, Royer Collection, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-360-378-L/12 and RV-360-378-D/4.

location where they are kept; this information can also be found in Appendix 1.

- Sets of albums

The most prominent and remarkable set of albums within the Dutch corpus is the vast and rather rare collection of so-called Royer albums.³⁷ This eighteenth-century set of 92 albums with 2,960 watercolours on paper is regarded as the earliest collection in the Netherlands. It is likely that, at that time, Royer viewed the albums in his The Hague 'museum' as documentation material. This visual source material was clearly not intended to be ordinary home decoration; rather, Royer saw it as valuable documentation about China, sometimes in combination with or

in addition to other objects in his collection. Earlier research by Van Campen shows that the Royer Collection, following the conveyance of a major part of this collection from the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1883 to Museum Volkenkunde and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, can be considered the earliest sets (or series) of albums with watercolours on paper.³⁸ Some of the early Royer sets in the Leiden museum, especially those depicting images of professions, street peddlers and portrayals of the aboriginal people of the southern Chinese provinces Guangdong, Guizhou, Guangxi and Hainan, share several compelling stylistic and content traits with the early ethnic minorities album genre, which generally depicted non-Han

37 Inv.nos. 360-376 to 360-383.

38 Van Campen 1995, 2000, 2000a, b, c, 2002, and 2010. The oldest constituent part of the China collection of Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden consists of objects collected by Royer in the eighteenth century. The same applies to the collection of the Asian Art Department of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The mainly Chinese objects in these old files of both museums belonged to a legacy from the widow of Royer, which was accepted by King Willem I (1772-1843) in 1816.

Fig. 4.15. Opera personage, Chinese warrior from Baoqing, the Imperial reign from 1225 to 1227 of Emperor Lizong of the Southern Song dynasty, anonymous, watercolour on Chinese paper, 1773-1776, 29.9 x 34.2 cm, Royer Collection, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-378-D/4.



Fig. 4.16. Picture seller, anonymous, watercolour on Chinese paper, 1773-1776, 29.9 x 34.2 cm, Royer Collection, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-378-H/8.



peoples of south China, extensively studied by historian Laura Hostetler.³⁹ Some personages appear to be borrowed directly from *Huang Qing zhigong tu* (Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributaries), an eighteenth-century (1757-1761) illustrated 'catalogue' (handscrolls) with ethnographic illustrations of the dress and customs of minority peoples and foreign nationalities, painted during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor.⁴⁰ Like the Royer albums, male and female representatives of each ethnic group living in frontier regions, and individuals of different ranks, shown in a variety of activities and professions, are rendered in vivid colours in the gongbi zhongcai (fine line/heavy colour) style. As Figures 4.13. and 4.14. show, natural scenery does not appear in the backdrop, although accessories, like agricultural implements, looms, musical instruments or weapons, are sometimes included. I follow Wei Dong's idea that these pictorial records not only "provided useful information for the Qing court, that could serve as an aid in the formulation of national policy towards foreign and minority peoples," but also "provide invaluable records of the historical background, customs and international contacts of the minority peoples of the Qing period."⁴¹

The ethnic minorities illustrations in the Leiden album sets are combined with images of historical figures from the Ming dynasty historical novel *Romance of the Three*

39 Hostetler 2001, 81-211, Plate 2 and 3, following 108. In *Qing colonial enterprise*, Hostetler shows how Qing China (1636-1911) used cartography and ethnography to pursue its Imperial ambitions. She argues that far from being on the periphery of developments in the early modern period, Qing China both participated in and helped shape the new emphasis on empirical scientific knowledge that was simultaneously transforming Europe (and its colonial empires) at the time. Museum Volkenkunde: Inv.nos. 360-377-a to 377j (ten albums with each 32 images) and 360-378a to 378l (twelve albums of each 24 images).

40 Wei 1995, 23. The book is a geographical description of foreign countries and non-Chinese peoples within the borders of the Qing empire (1644-1911). It is 9 *juan* 'scrolls' long and was compiled under the supervision of Fuheng. A first draft was finished in 1759; an additional part was added six years later. In the first *juan*, foreign countries are described with whom the Qing court had a kind of official relationship, especially Korea, Japan, England, France, the Netherlands, and Russia. The other scrolls give an account on peoples that were not Chinese but who were incorporated into the Qing empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other peoples in the northeast and the provinces of Fujian, Hu-Guang (modern Hunan), Guangdong, Guangxi, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou. More than 600 illustrations in two scrolls, made by Jin Tingbiao, give a deep impression of both the minority peoples of Qing China, and its view of foreign countries and their representatives. Source: <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/Literature/Science/huangqingzhigongtu.html>, in its turn cited from: Liu Ruzhong, 'Huang-Qing zhigong tu'. *Zhongguo da baike quanshu, Zhongguo lishi*, vol. 1. Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1992, 402.

41 Wei 1995, 24. Wei Dong is the pen-name of Jin Weidong, a researcher in the Paintings Department of the Palace Museum in Beijing and a specialist in Chinese genre-painting.

42 Van Campen 2010, 47-50.

43 Van Campen 2000, 2000-a, b and c.

44 Van Campen 2000-b, 116.



Fig. 4.17. Mandarin, anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 1851-1856, 27 x 18.5 cm, SAB-City Archives and Athenaeum Library Deventer, inv.no. DvT V.2.KL(7).



Fig. 4.18. Mandarin, Youqua, watercolour on pith paper, 1850-1860, 33 x 25.5 cm, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, inv.no. 191673.

Kingdoms, mythological figures, Taoist deities, arts and crafts practitioners, street performers, beggars and sick people, bandit-like characters, such as those from the book *Water Margin* by Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), and famous male theatre personages from the Tang, Song and Ming dynasties. As Van Campen has previously noted, the, in total, 608 illustrations in these album sets do not form a cohesive series in terms of subject matter, but they do, however, correspond in terms of form, colour use and style.⁴² (Figures 4.15. and 4.16.) It seems clear to me that these albums, full of characters and professions, are not devised or conceived from Western painting conventions, but rather that this genre originates from the Chinese visual tradition (see below: Genres – Scenes of daily life – Professions, peddlers and street performers). In the case of the Royer albums, this idea is supported by our knowledge of who Royer the person was, namely someone who wanted to find out everything about China by collecting

‘real’ Chinese objects.⁴³ From well-kept records and descriptions, we know that Royer was primarily interested in images that reveal something about life in China.⁴⁴ For him, the artistic painterly beauty of the paintings was secondary. Questions regarding precisely which Chinese images the album leaves are based on, or which descriptive texts form their antecedents are worth future research. *Made for Trade* focuses on the valuation aspects of the corpus Chinese export painting in Dutch collections. Therefore, I do not discuss the question about written or visual sources that may have formed the basis of these images.

Secondly, the Deventer SAB-City Archives and Athenaeum Library collection consists of a strikingly beautiful collection of mid-nineteenth albums with watercolours on pith paper, depicting images of flora and fauna (butterflies, flowers and insects), Chinese dignitaries and their servants, and men and women in colourful costumes with accessories. (Figure 4.17.) The

Figs. 4.19. and 4.20.
Images depicting
theatre play and
travelling elite group,
anonymous,
watercolour on pith
paper, 1850–1860,
24 x 35 cm,
Wereldmuseum
Rotterdam,
inv. no. 29476–5.



former Governor General of the Dutch East-Indies, Albertus Jacobus Duymaer van Twist (1809–1887) assembled this set of albums while staying in Batavia from 1851 to 1856.⁴⁵ The Deventer library received these masterfully executed paintings in 1896 through a legacy by ‘Vrouwe Maria Joanna Beck, Douairière Mr. Duymaer van Twist-Beck’.⁴⁶ The lustrum publication *Stads- of Athenaeumbibliotheek*



Fig. 4.21. Duck boat (from
album with 7 images),
Sunqua's studio), water-
colour on pith paper,
1830–1865, 23.5 x 33 cm,
Tropenmuseum/
Nationaal Museum van
Wereldculturen,
inv.no. TM-A-778oe.

45 Inv.nos. DvT V.2 KL, V.4.KL, V.5 KL, V.9 KL. Duymaer Van Twist also assembled two portfolios with loose-leaf watercolours (DvT V.17 and V.19).

46 Smelik, 2007, 110. The legacy of Mrs Duymaer van Twist was distributed on 30 May 1896 according to her ‘holografische uiterste wil’ (last will and testament), which she had given custody of to a notary in 1875. A ‘holografische uiterste wil’ is a handwritten testament kept in a sealed envelope and deposited with a notary as a short deed.

47 Koch 1985, 82.

48 Inv.nos. 29476–1 to 5.

Deventer: 1560–1985 states questionable that these albums are considered: “of direct use (utility), at least for the one interested in colonial history.”⁴⁷ Although they do not carry a studio mark, their style and execution is similar to those documented as works by Youqua present in the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam. (Figure 4.18.) Youqua was active in the years 1850–1860, so it is well possible that Duymaer van Twist in his Batavia period acquired watercolour albums from (or after) Youqua.

Lastly, around 1830, Jacobus Isidorus Lodewijk Levien (J.I.L.L.) Jacobson (1799–1848), a Dutch, Rotterdam-based tea taster in Canton, (who had been responsible for the successful early cultivation of tea on Java), assembled a set of five albums with watercolours on pith paper with a variety of subjects.⁴⁸ One of his descendants, Edward Jacobson (1870–1944), realised their value and importance for future audiences. Consequently, in 1928, he donated this worthwhile collection of four silk-covered albums to the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. Each album features twelve images of local vessels, the tea production process, and mandarins and high-ranking women and their servants. There is one black lacquer-covered album with twelve images of various Chinese scenes (theatre performers, travelling elite groups, scenes of judicial procedures and punishments). (Figures 4.19. and 4.20.) All the images are of the same size, are executed in the same style and colour application, and are identically ‘framed’ with a silk blue ribbon. Thus, we can safely conclude that they were produced in the same Cantonese painting studio. Currently, the albums are in a bad conservational state and seem to be consigned to oblivion in a desolate depot in Rotterdam Alexanderpolder. I would argue that revivification is certainly possible if time and energy are spent on archival research concerning their material complex. Given the prominence of the first owner, this set of albums has an interesting, documented provenance. Writing a cultural biography of this valuable Jacobson collection of fine paintings is one of my future goals, after which the albums should be restored



to make them appropriate for display and viewing sessions.

- Single albums

In addition to the most important collections with 'sets of albums' in the Dutch collections, as described above, a number of single albums must be mentioned. They are valuable because of the artistic execution of the images, the fact that they carry a studio mark of a famous Chinese export master painter, their subject matter, the way they are bound, or their social history. I will examine some examples here. Firstly, the Tropenmuseum owns some treasures in this regard: a valuable Sunqua-signed album with masterly painted watercolours on pith paper of Chinese local vessels (Figure 4.21.); an album with twelve watercolours on pith paper, glued on European paper, with women playing various musical instruments (Figure 4.22.); and one bound album featuring 41 very well-executed watercolours on pith paper. The use of a rich colour palette, the composition and the

depiction of a broad range of subjects, including 23 of the consecutive steps in the silk production process, make this latter red leather-covered album outstanding.⁴⁹ (Figure 4.23.a. to 4.23.d.)

Secondly, I would like to highlight a unique and rare album that belongs to the Royer Collection in Museum Volkenkunde. This late eighteenth century album, with fourteen watercolours, on paper, of animals and mythical creatures in cartouches, encircled by floral scrolls and set in a black background, differs from the previously mentioned Royer albums.⁵⁰ (Figures 4.24.a. and 4.24.b.) As Van Campen posits in his article on Royer's Chinese albums and paintings in *Aziatische Kunst*, these latter kinds of images with cartouches were primarily meant to be decorative and were not designed to be a source of information about Chinese daily life, as many of the other Royer albums were.⁵¹ Their artistic value and their curiosity lies mainly in the different EurAsian 'layers' integrated in these images.⁵² Historical Chinese and European artistic print and book illustration practices or familiarity with the Chinese wallpaper painting tradition probably inspired their painters.⁵³ An unused piece of Chinese wallpaper from Penrhyn Castle, Gwynedd, Wales, presented at the conference *Chinese wallpaper: Trade, techniques and taste* on 7 and 8 April 2016 in London, makes this evidently clear. This remnant piece of wallpaper showed a remarkable similarity to some of the paintings in this album. (Figure 4.25.)

Fig. 4.22. Woman playing a flute with her maid (from album with 12 images), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, glued on European paper, 19th century, 34 x 22 cm, Tropenmuseum/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-3728-483.

Figs. 4.23.a. to 4.23.d. Four images of the silk production process (from set of 23 images in album with 41 images of various subject matter), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 25 x 24 cm, Tropenmuseum/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. TM-3728-490 to 3728-513.



49 Inv.nos. Tropenmuseum respectively: A-7780e, 3728-483, 3728-484 (album) with images of silk making, inv.nos.3728-490 to 513.

50 Inv.no. 360-376.

51 Van Campen 2010, 46.

52 Grasskamp 2015, 363-399.

53 Van Campen 2010, 46. Wappenschmidt 1989, 28-29. Clunas 1984, 74.

Fig. 4.24.a. and 4.24.b.
Two images of a leopard
and a horse (from
album with 14 images
of animals and mythical
creatures in cartouches),
anonymous,
watercolour on paper,
1773-1776,
29.9 x 29 cm (painting),
34 x 32 cm (album),
Museum Volkenkunde/
Nationaal Museum van
Wereldculturen,
inv.no. RV-360-376.



Finally, it is valid to mention three mid-nineteenth-century single albums owned by the Maritime Museum Rotterdam. ‘Valid’ because of their use value as both commodities and artworks: One album features particularly high quality painterly renditions of the scenes depicted and also has noteworthy maritime (geographical) subject matter. The other two albums are remarkable because of their voluminous size. All three albums likely allowed their first owners to ‘sail’ back to China in their memories. The first mentioned is a well-conserved album with twelve colourful depictions of: the quay at Canton; Whampoa reach; Bocca Tigris; Macao’s Praya Grande; Hong Kong; Honam; Golden Island (Nanjing); a city view of Old Shanghai; two river scenes near to Ningbo; and views of Chusan and Amoy (Xiamen). (Figure 4.26.) It is unusual to find images of Chinese harbour cities in an album of

watercolours; at least, this is the case for the Dutch collections. The other two, transferred in 2013 from the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, are, admittedly, of a lesser artistic quality, but are still valuable because of their depiction of daily life. One album, entitled *Dschunken, Kostüme, Strafvollstrekungen und einige andere Szenen a.d. Leben Chinas*, has 72 images of street professions and peddlers, processions, rituals, boats, punishments/tortures, etc. (Figure 4.27.) The second (loose-leaf) album shows 36 sorts of local vessels, suggesting that they all once sailed in the watery environment of Canton.

Having outlined the images of the most important sets and albums in the Dutch collections above, the next section deals with the variety of genres with different Chinese subject matters found in the Netherlands.

Genres

It is possible to classify the paintings with Chinese subject matter into certain groups by dividing them by genre. Images that belong to the same genre, states Rose, “share certain features. A particular genre will share a specific set of meaningful objects and locations.”⁵⁴ The Dutch corpus can be regarded as a large dataset of painted media with a limited variety of genres with Chinese subject matters. I have devised ten genres to categorise the paintings. When making up categories for a future digital database, to code the paintings, Rose warns that these categories “must have a number of characteristics regardless of their putative status as descriptive or interpretive.”⁵⁵ The genres I have devised originate from content analysis and technical and compositional examination of the

Fig. 4.25. Unused section from the Chinese bird-and-flower wallpaper hung in the Lower India Room at Penrhyn Castle, near Bangor, in the early 1830s. The unused sections have been kept in store at Penrhyn ever since and retain their original, almost shockingly bright colours. ©National Trust/Andrew Bush.



54 Rose 2007, 15.

55 Ibid., 65.

paintings. The results of this research broadly fit the globally recognised and widely agreed genres (categories), of course guided by the specificities of the Dutch situation. It is noted that, for example, the manner of cataloguing Chinese export watercolours in Dutch museums can generally be compared with the practice in the UK, as sketched by Clunas, where the following subject headings and descriptions are employed: 'domestic and other scenes illustrating Chinese life'; 'miscellaneous subjects'; 'the costume of China'; 'natural history'; and 'trades and occupations'.⁵⁶ According to Clunas, this system suggests that Chinese export watercolours in the nineteenth century were valued principally for their illustrative worth, "with any intrinsic artistic merits being less regarded."⁵⁷ Whether these paintings can intrinsically be called 'art' or not, is not my main concern for this research, which principally focuses on various facets of the value-meaning of the Dutch corpus as both artworks and commodities.

The images under consideration are 'coded' exhaustively (every aspect of the paintings is covered by one genre) and exclusively (the genres do not overlap) where possible. Although the distribution of the 'codes' appears unequal, I was able to make a theorised connection between the genres and the broader cultural context in which they are produced and consumed. I have divided the Dutch corpus into the following overarching genres:

- Maritime subjects (harbour views and ship portraits);
- Scenes of daily life (professions, peddlers and street performers, and local vessels);
- *Figurine* painting (women and men, dignitaries and their attire);
- Chinese flora and fauna (including bird-and-flower painting);
- Production processes of silk, porcelain, tea and rice;
- Landscapes (winter views and river scenes);
- The imperial court;
- Interior and garden scenes;
- Portraits;
- Punishments and torture.

Figure 4.28. shows the range of genres in the Dutch collections with their corresponding quantities.

All these artworks were produced as a result



of cultural and trade relations, at work across thousands of kilometres, between the Netherlands and their trade zones all over Asia, specifically in China and Indonesia. The various genres shaped an (distorted) image of those countries, then and today. Most of them were tailor-made for Western customers. Before the genres are dealt with below, I recall the notion that, generally, the scenes are constructed, copied and reconstructed, and sometimes even creatively devised by the Chinese painter. When taking these aspects into consideration, we must evaluate the discourse on Chinese export painting with great caution, especially when it is presented as a veritable historical source.

Maritime subjects

(harbour views and ship portraits)

Oil paintings on canvas or as reverse glass painting with maritime subjects like harbour views and ship portraits make up a substantial part of the Dutch collections. Maritime-, ethnographic- and art museums in the Netherlands own harbour views (singulars and

Fig. 4.26. View of Golden Island (Nanking) (from album with 12 images of Chinese harbour cities), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, c. 1850, 25.3 x 34.7 cm (image), 25.7 x 35.2 cm (album), Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P1711-07.



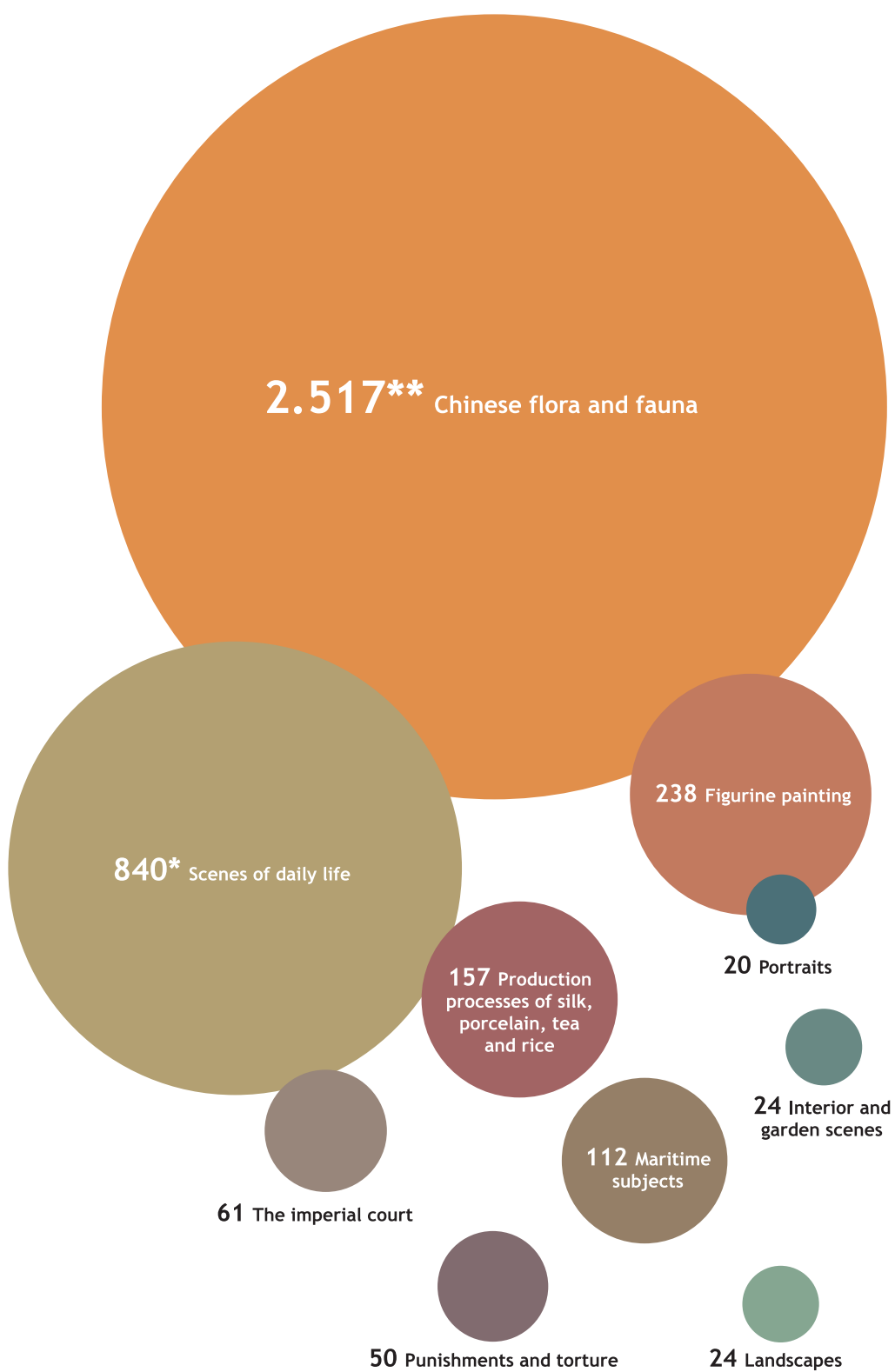
Fig. 4.27. Image of procession (from album with 72 images of various subject matter), anonymous, watercolour on Chinese paper, c. 1850, 38 x 46 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P4411-40.

⁵⁶ Clunas 1984.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 99.

Fig. 4.28.
© Rik van Schagen.

Genres of Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections



*Including Royer Collection (576 images)

** Including Royer Collection (2.372 images)

sets) and ship portraits.⁵⁸ The representation of Chinese harbours and anchorages in the Chinese Pearl River delta – essential locations for transcontinental trade – that, in addition to being sites for the circulation of goods, were also breeding grounds for the exchange of knowledge and ideas, was a popular theme for Chinese export paintings the world over. Between 1752 and 1842, all the foreign trade to and from China, except for that of Russian and Japan, was centred in Canton.⁵⁹ From the middle of the nineteenth century, after the first Opium War (1839-1842), harbours such as Hong Kong, Amoy (Xiamen), and Ningbo also became popular trading ports. (Figure 4.29.) Before the opening of these so-called Chinese treaty ports (Treaty of Nanjing, 1842) a group of four harbour views were especially popular among Western buyers. This foursome consisted of images of Macao, Bocca Tigris, Whampoa and Canton. Figures 4.30 to 4.33. show depictions of



Fig. 4.29. View of Amoy (from album with 12 images of Chinese harbour cities), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, c. 1850, 25.3 x 34.7 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P1711-12.

Fig. 4.30. The roadstead of Macao, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1845, 45 x 79 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. A.1947(02).



Fig. 4.31. The mouth of the Tiger river(?) near Canton; Bocca Tigris, inscription verso: De monding van den Tiger; Een schip de Bocca Tigris uitzeilende (from set of 4), anonymous, oil on copper, c. 1790, 11 x 15 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. A.3229(04).



Fig. 4.32. The roadstead of Whampoa, inscription verso: De Reede van Macao vanaf de Zuidelijke Oever der rivier (not correct), anonymous, oil on paper, glued on canvas, c. 1845, 46 x 60 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P1914.

Fig. 4.33. View of the quay of Canton, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1850, 44 x 77 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. A.1425.

58 Maritime Museum Rotterdam: inv.nos. P1235, P1339, P1729, P1745A, P1913 to P1916, P1985, P2331 and P2332, P3807, P3815, P1711, and P1868; National Maritime Museum Amsterdam: inv.nos. A.1425, A.1642(01) and (02), A.1710(02)1 to (02)3, A.1854, A.1947(01) and (02), A.2068(06)a to (06)b, A.3229(01) to (004), S.0173(03), S.1388, S.1730(02), (03)b and (03)d, and S.4217; Dutch Navy Museum Den Helder: inv.nos. A/001/046 and A/001/086; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: inv.nos. NG-1052; SK-C-1722 to 1724; Tropenmuseum Amsterdam: inv.nos. O-394, A7222, A-7224, A-7225, A-7227, 1754-2 to 1754-11, and 2034-1 to 2034-12; Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 360-1142, B3-1 to B3-4 and B125-1, 360-1115, 360-1116 and 6166-6 to 6166-8; Westfriesmuseum Hoorn: inv.no. 12159; Groninger Museum: inv.nos. 1990.0470 and 1990.0471, and 1978.0366. Maritiem Digitaal (www.maritiemdigitaal.nl) is the largest online database of maritime objects and literature in the Benelux, including pictures of harbour views and ship portraits present in Dutch maritime museums.

59 Van Dyke 2004, 45.



Figs. 4.34.a, b. and c. Carl Gustav Ekeberg, 1773, engravings by Olof Jacobsson Årre (1731–1809), Canton, Whampoa and Bocca Tigris, 26.7 x 41.9 cm.



Fig. 4.37. Hong bowl with a view of the English and Dutch factories in Canton, anonymous, porcelain, c. 1769, Salem (MA), Peabody Essex Museum, inv.no. 81404.

these locations, differently dated between circa 1790 and 1850. The structure of the Canton trading system was arranged in such a way that these places were important stops for all foreign vessels.⁶⁰

Paintings of ports and anchorages frequented by Western ships can be viewed as representations of places where the first buyers had lived or had done business for years. However, to describe such paintings merely as souvenirs does not do justice either to their quality, which was often high, or to the context in which they were acquired. These paintings played an important role in revealing ‘China stories’ to their families at home. Indeed, they exert a cultural claim to represent ‘reality’. “A certain measure of visual truth-value was crucial to the desirability of Canton trade

paintings,” as Winnie Wong argues in her dissertation *After the copy: Creativity, originality and the labor of appropriation, Dafen Village, Shenzhen, China (1989-2010)*.⁶¹ Wong explains that these images served not simply as a body of seemingly empirical representations, but also as a means of communication and translation amongst linguistically limited populations. The representational and social function of a Chinese export harbour view might, therefore, be thought of as its use value. Much of this value lies in its representational subject matter.

Regardless of the technical quality or pictorial content, possession of these paintings also conferred a special status on their owners. To those who were in a position to buy an export painting, the picture would commemorate an arduous sea journey to Asia, a major commercial enterprise with immense rewards and contact with the great empire of China, either personally or through relatives who were there. Ownership of a Chinese export painting indicated that you had been in contact, to some extent, with fascinating and highly esteemed China, a place that many people at that time viewed as, to quote Conner, “a source of limitless wealth.”⁶² For a Western merchant, there was no better metaphor for his China voyage than a harbour view or a portrait of the pre-eminent sailing carrier of his lucrative commodities. In this sense, recalling the theories of Graeber and Van Binsbergen on the notion that things, in *casu* paintings, are used to confirm identities, and that the relation between commodities and the marking of identities is generally accepted, (as treated in Chapter 2), these paintings functioned as identity-reinforcing objects.⁶³ As such, they were significant in the context of trading adventures. It goes without saying that, once back home, the proud and tall tales told, based on a Chinese harbour view, may well have inspired future and potential seafarers.

In the nineteenth century, practically every sea trader who visited Canton returned home with a painting of a port city. By 1849, while visiting the painting studios of Lamqua, Lavollée found:

[d]ans la partie la mieux éclairée de la boutique de Lam-qua, quelques jeune Chinois peignaient sur toile et à l’huile des vues de Macao et de

60 Van Dyke 2007, 19–33.

61 Wong 2010, 141.

62 Conner 1996, 9.

63 Graeber 2001, 79–81. Van Binsbergen 2005, 23, 30, 40.



*Canton ou de scènes d'intérieur: ce sont de tableaux d'un nouveau genre que les Européens achètent en grand nombres. [...] Il n'est pas d'Anglais qui, à son retour en Europe, ne rapporte une vue de Canton.*⁶⁴

In terms of concrete examples that formed the basis of images of South Chinese harbours, often by anonymous Chinese painters and made on commission, we know that engravings and prints were found in Cantonese studios. Examples include copper engravings made from sketches done by artists aboard Western East Indiamen (ships of the European trading companies), such as those by the Swedish captain and draughtsman Carl Gustav Ekeberg (1716-1784), who made twelve journeys to China between 1742 and 1777 and in 1773 published his *Ostindiska Resa* with images of Chinese port cities.⁶⁵ (Figures 4.34.a to 4.34.c.)

In the 1760s, images of the quay at Canton were part of the elongated scroll paintings depicting the landscape of the Pearl River. Both

the Tropenmuseum and the Rijksmuseum have such early paintings in an elongated format in their possession.⁶⁶ (Figures 4.35. and 4.36.) As the research of, among others, Kee Il Choi Jr. indicates, from 1760 – the year that the activity radius of Western traders was limited specifically to Canton – the quay, with its flags and Western factory buildings, was increasingly the symbol of the historical China trade and the wharf itself increasingly appeared on diverse expressions of export art in various media, among them large porcelain bowls from the early 1760s.⁶⁷ (Figure 4.37.)

In general, there are a number of indications that date the depictions of these kinds of harbour views: the flags of the ships at Whampoa, on the churches in Macao and in front of the factories in Canton; the architectural elements of depicted buildings; the fences on the quay and the accretion of land; the establishment of the Protestant church on the quay at Canton in 1847; the rendition of the skies; the types of ship and the number of

Fig. 4.35. Quay of Canton, anonymous, watercolour on silk, c. 1775, 100.8 × 303 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-A-7525.

Fig. 4.36. View of the Pearl River and the city of Canton, anonymous, watercolour on silk, 1771, 95 × 368 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-1052.



64 Lavollée 1853, 362. Translation: In the most illuminated part of the Lamqua studio, several young Chinese were painting, in oil on canvas, views of Macao and Canton or interior scenes: they are paintings of a new genre that Europeans are buying in large numbers. There is not an Englishman who, on his return to Europe, does not take back a view of Canton.

65 Osbeck 1771. Choi Jr. 2003. Carl Gustav Ekeberg, 1773, engravings by Olof Jacobsson Årre (1731-1809).

66 Van Campen & Hartkamp 2001, 69-71. Rijksmuseum inv.no. NG-1052; Tropenmuseum inv.no. A-7525.

67 Choi Jr. 1998-a, 429, and 2003, 67.

Fig. 4.38. Bark Pantalon at the roadstead of Hong Kong, inscription recto: Pantalon. Kapt: H: I: Van: Geyt ter Reede. Hongkong april: 1866, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1866, 45.5 x 77.5 cm, National Maritime Museum Amsterdam, inv.no. S.1388.

Fig. 4.39. Three-master Cornelia, sailing near to (opium smugglers) island Lintin, anonymous, oil on linen, 1860–1862, 45.5 x 59.4 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P3815.

Fig. 4.40. Dutch screw steamer at the roadstead of Hong Kong, inscription Zr. Ms. Schroefstoomschip Vice-Admiraal Koopman ter reede van Hongkong, July 1863, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1863, 39 x 58.8 cm, Dutch Navy Museum Den Helder, inv.no. A/001/086.

vessels.⁶⁸ Note: these indications, however, say nothing about the production date of the painting. Because this subject has been repeatedly copied, the representation of, say, Macao, Canton or Whampoa, can be of a situation from an earlier date and therefore can deviate from the period when the painting was actually made. In this sense, harbour views are absolutely not indexical. There is no evidence to suggest that a set of harbour views will always have the same date. It is likely, however, that Westerners never bought outdated views of Canton or Macao, because these views changed almost yearly. Architectural elements of the *hongs* in Canton and the houses on the Praya Grande, new remarkable landmarks in the cityscapes, land reclamation, and the sort and quantity of vessels in front of the quay, were some of the aspects that determined a view of Canton or Macao up to date or not. A representation of the more static views of Bocca Tigris and Whampoa, however, from a year ago would not have been a problem.⁶⁹

Besides visual geographical records of ports, quays, wharfs and anchorages, a portrait of the ship also became increasingly important to the individual mariner. This subject is the ultimate example of a personal record, significant in the context of the buyer's own enterprises. In the nineteenth century, new emphasis on the achievements of the individual merchant-entrepreneur encouraged (visual) documentation of his exploits. The navigators themselves became potential patrons of art and were ready customers for Chinese goods and (stereotypical) scenes of China. As a result, we find, as Baird states in *Liverpool China traders*, “paintings that no longer simply conformed to fashions prevalent in Europe, but which would stand as records of their travels, personal and significant in the context of their own enterprises.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, as Baird posits: “the painting of his ship became a very popular export product; her faithful image was as personal a portrait as a man could look for.”⁷¹ The details of national and company flags – as visible in Figure 4.38,



waterfront architecture and ship design were carefully recorded as they were of particular interest to the ship owners, private merchants and their families, who were likely purchasers. It is known that ships portraits, often depicting a Western barque in full width, were painted

68 The word ‘factory’ came from the Portuguese ‘*feitoria*’, and meant an establishment or agency for factors or merchants doing business in foreign lands. Often, a factory consisted of buildings with multiple functions (warehouse, office and living space). In terms of the treatment of the skies, in general, we can say that between 1760 and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, they all had a low horizon and were depicted as sleek and bare. In many respects, they are reminiscent of the engravings of Western harbour views.

69 Dating aspects of paintings with a geographical and maritime topic is not relevant for *Made for Trade* and, therefore, I do not elaborate on this issue. The research results of Connor (2009) and of Van Dyke & Mok (2015) provide accurate information about the dating of these kinds of paintings.

70 Baird 2007, 106–107.

71 Ibid., 110.

especially after 1815.⁷²

During his stay in Canton in the 1870s, the Scottish photographer Thomson observed, “the best works these painters do are pictures of native and foreign ships, which are wonderfully drawn.”⁷³ In the nineteenth century, these sorts of paintings were frequently produced via the well-known modular- and mass production. Many ships portraits feature decorative backdrops, such as Lintin Island – where, in the nineteenth century, vessels with names like ‘scrambling dragons’ or ‘fast crabs’ transported vast quantities of opium – or the anchorage at Whampoa, or the harbour of Hong Kong. (Figure 4.39.)

The ships portraits in the Dutch collections are all dated between 1836 and 1866. Although it is known that in the Chinese export painting practice paintings are often copied, we may assume that inscriptions like *De Planter van Amsterdam leggende ter Reede van Whampoa in China den 13 november 1836* (Figure 2.2.) or *Henriette Kapt. J. Van Loenen 1858* are reliable production date markers. That the screw-propeller steam ship, third class, bobbed around in Hong Kong harbour in 1863 is apparent from the inscription *Zr.Ms. schroefstoomschip Vice Admiraal Koopman ter reede Hongkong 8 juli 1863*. This imposing souvenir piece (Figure 4.40) was gifted to the Dutch Navy Museum in Den Helder in the period 1962-1978. Other date indicators could very well be documentary written records, fluttering ships flags and the type of ship (East Indiaman, barque, steam corvette, paddle steamer, three-mast clipper or screw-propeller steam ship).

In addition to written records, from the moment of production until today, paintings with this maritime subject matter had their own agency and, in turn, their depictions produced social effects on audiences every time they were and (still) are looked at. With their accompanying meaningful and multilayered narratives, they often surpass the value conveyed by textual records. Most of them operate as far more valuable items than just some artworks

from China. The painting that adorns the cover of this dissertation, in the collection of the Rotterdam Maritime Museum since 2006, serves as a good example. The Dutch captain Van den Kerckhoff (1832-1897) became the first owner of this ship portrait in the 1860s, while sailing to ‘the East’ at the helm of the barque *Wilhelmina*. The item was cherished and handed down through several generations. As an artwork, its value was multifaceted, culminating in this image being used as a thank-you note following the funeral of one of Van den Kerckhoff’s descendants. The symbolic value of this painting, a real identity-reinforcer, with this image of the ship forever connected with the descendant who passed away, transcends the meaning of any written words about the artwork. (See Chapter 5.3. for its concomitant story.)

Scenes of daily life (professions, peddlers and street performers, and local vessels)

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, scenes of ordinary people in their everyday life were a popular genre. Indeed, this genre – which includes, for example, sixty etchings of *The itinerant street trades of the city of Venice*, published in 1785, and William Marshall Craig’s *Cries of London* prints, published in 1804 and featuring itinerant traders and street hawkers – was familiar to a Western middle class, a culturally-educated audience, and were perceived as ‘picturesque’.⁷⁴ In addition, a series with 66 drawings, known as *Straatwerken*, by the Golden Age artist from Delft, Leonard Bramer (1596-1674), provide vivid images of seventeenth-century professions and street trades in the daily life of a Dutch city. We can assume that a private individual commissioned this series of drawings, however, it is no longer possible to discover the exact circumstances.⁷⁵

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the port cities of South China, images with scenes of daily working-class life were appreciated by foreign visitors particularly for their illustrative information about the weal and woe of the ‘ordinary Chinese’. On the one hand,

72 Crossman 1991, 117.

73 Thomson 1873, vol. I.

74 Burke 2001, 110. See more on: <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-cries-of-london#sthash.KP3cC8ro.dpuf>.

75 The drawings belong to the Special Collections of Leiden University (<http://www.bibliotheek.leidenuniv.nl/bijzondere-collecties/bijzondere-collecties/bramer.html>). For more information on Leonard Bramer, see the research by Donna Barnes. She has previously organised four seventeenth-century Dutch art exhibitions at the Hofstra University Museum, including *People at Work* (1988); *Street Scenes: Leonard Bramer’s Drawings of Dutch Daily Life* (1991), *The Butcher, The Baker, The Candlestick Maker: Jan Luyken’s Mirrors of Dutch Daily Life* (1995), and *Playing, Learning, Working in Amsterdam’s Golden Age: Jan Luyken’s Mirrors of Daily Life* (2004).



Figs. 4.43.a, b. and c. Scenes from daily life, street peddlers (from album with 12 images), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 33 x 22 cm, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, inv.nos. 4899.2., 4899.9. and 4899.11.



Fig. 4.41.
a. Lithograph after Dong Qi, Congee seller from *Taiping huanle tu*, pictures by Dong Qi, text edited by Xu Zhihao. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2003, 18.
b. Zhou Kun, Barrel maker from *Album of paintings of life in a village town*, Palace Museum, Beijing.

the big demand for this painting genre that was partly inspired by Western prints brought with it a well-organised mass production system. On the other hand, the fact that this genre also found its way from the Chinese tradition to the Cantonese export painting studios can be deduced from, among other things, the early series of Royer watercolour albums in Museum Volkenkunde. This valuable treasure of visual material confirms this view in a convincing and tangible way. Moreover, research by Koon also suggests that the ‘open circuits’ of images of Cantonese daily street life can also be analysed by “widening the scope of analysis to include this circuit’s domestic market.”⁷⁶ Koon’s work convincingly shows the historical connections between export paintings of this genre and the representations of daily life and social customs aimed at a local audience.⁷⁷ Her study includes the convergence of different pictorial styles and influences, as demonstrated by the set of images by Puqua (act. 1780-1800) for the export market, alongside albums of street characters; amongst others: Huang Shen’s (1678-1772), *Album of figures with street entertainers and beggars*, 1730; Zhou Kun’s (act. eighteenth century), *Album of paintings of life in a village town*, undated; Dong Qi’s (1772-1844), *Album of happiness in an age of peace*, 1828 and 1831; and Su Liupen’s (act. c. mid-nineteenth century), *Album of street characters*, circa 1843. Figures 4.41. and 4.42. give some examples of pictures circulating in the ‘open circuits’. Koon uses Clunas’ terms ‘closed’ and ‘open’ to describe the iconic artistic circuits of early nineteenth-century Guangzhou. A closed circuit was characterised by a limited circulation, where the use of cultural goods was socially delineated to establish ‘boundaries’. In contrast, an open circuit, allowed for a greater circulation of artistic products, including paintings, and for a

much wider audience (social and cultural).⁷⁸

These examples circulating among a socially and culturally broad audience with similar subject matter (daily life and social customs in nineteenth-century Guangzhou) show the attractiveness of this genre for Chinese and Western buyers alike. Furthermore, convergence of pictorial conventions (Chinese and Western) and of the attitude of two different consumer groups (both attracted to this genre) makes the distinction professional-amateur or export-literati painters unnecessary. The fact that only a few Westerners were happy to operate in the Chinese artistic ‘open circuits’ is the reason, unfortunately, that they hardly ever (never?) saw original Huangs, Zhous, Dongs and Sus at that time. The Dutch, certainly did not bring them home.

In the Dutch collections, the paintings with scenes of daily life are, almost without exception, executed in watercolours on pith paper, on silk, or on ordinary Chinese paper. (Figures 4.43. and 4.44.) The subtopics, which for this study I have put under the heading ‘daily life’ are: professions, peddlers and street



Fig. 4.45. Cover of one of the 12 albums with each 24 images from the Royer Collection, anonymous, 1773-1776, 34 x 37 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-378-A/1 to 378-L/12.

76 Koon 2014, 24.

77 Ibid., 59-68.

78 Clunas 1997, 46-48.



performers, and local vessels. Foreign visitors, passing through on their travels in 'the East', witnessed such scenes of daily life frequently; at the same time, such images were a world away from their lives back home.

- Professions, peddlers and street performers

The Chinese saying, 'There are 360 professions, each produces its own consummate master' (*sān bǎi liù shí háng, háng chū zhuàng yuán*) is an idiom relating to the plethora of diverse street professions in Chinese cities and to the idea that each profession (field) has a most brilliantly talented person.⁷⁹ In circa 1830, the famous Cantonese export painter Tingqua, who ran a successful painting business in the 1830s, portrayed 360 street professions of Canton in a series of ink drawings.⁸⁰ The set that contains these drawings is now in the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem. Also in their possession, and in that of London's V&A, is a set featuring 100

export gouaches with the same subject matter, painted by Puqua at the end of the eighteenth century (circa 1786 and 1790). It is possible that the Cantonese export painters were inspired by prints of the etchings showing street professions in London and Venice, brought by Western sailors or artists who spent some time in this city. I posit that the topic 'street professions' did not originate only in the West and argue that Chinese export painters had various sources of inspiration with which to 'play' freely. Besides the street professions of Canton, this may have included particular images in order to conform to the expectations of European buyers. An excellent example of this is the previously mentioned Chinese series of Royer albums featuring professions, peddlers and the aboriginal people of the southern Chinese provinces.⁸¹ Van Campen's research demonstrates that although the Royer albums featuring professions, in the collection of Leiden Museum Volkenkunde, are similar to the well-known engravings by the Englishman George Henry Mason, entitled 'Pu-Qua, Canton, Delin' and based on illustrations that he had bought in Canton in 1790, the albums do not contain a single image that corresponds to the engravings.⁸²

Furthermore, we can assume, also because the handwritten Latin and Chinese notes on each album page make it clear, that this early series can be dated to the years 1773-1776.⁸³ With 22 albums consisting of, in total, 610 images, the entire set of Royer albums surpasses the American and English collections, not only in its uniqueness of execution (distinct colour-use and detailed rendition), in their antecedence and their earliness of production, but also in number. (Figures 4.45. to 4.47.)

With regard to their trade, it is thought the painters in Canton were well aware that Westerners were curious about what the ordinary Chinese did for a living. Albums and sheets with this subject matter (daily business of ordinary men and women) sold like hot cakes. Some scholars, like Wilson, argue that these representations of the working class had to portray a peaceful society, a society that could only exist under an enlightened emperor.⁸⁴

Figs. 4.44.a. and b.
Scenes from daily life, street peddlers (from album with 10 images), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 19 x 26 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-1239-380d and RV-1239-380i.



Figs. 4.42.a. and b.
Reprints of lithographs after Dong Qi, vegetable seller and butcher from *Taiping huanle tu*, pictures by Dong Qi, text edited by Xu Zhihao. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2003, 38 and 72.

79 Huang & Sargent (eds.) 1999, 13. The words *zhuàng yuán* also refer to someone who scored the highest rank of the Chinese Imperial examination system.

80 Huang & Sargent (eds.) 1999.

81 Inv.nos. 360-377a to 377j and 360-378a to 378l. Van Campen 2010, 38-54.

82 Van Campen 2010, 42.

83 Van Campen 2000-1, 77-79. In 1773-1776, Royer had contact with the Chinese Carolus Wang, whose handwriting of the Latin translation is clearly recognisable in the albums.

84 Wilson 2000, 90.



Figs. 4.46.a. and 4.46.b.
Sellers of New Years
accessories and
fireworks, anonymous,
watercolour on paper,
1773, 29.9 x 34.2 cm,
Royer Collection,
Museum Volkenkunde/
Nationaal Museum van
Wereldculturen, inv.no.
RV-360-378-E/5.

Figs. 4.47.a. and 4.47.b.
Funeral/memorial
scrolls seller and
women with fish in a
basket, anonymous,
watercolour on paper,
1773, 29.9 x 34.2 cm,
Royer Collection,
Museum Volkenkunde/
Nationaal Museum van
Wereldculturen, inv.no.
RV-360-377-D/4.

In this sense, these images served a propaganda purpose. In order to demonstrate that all was well in his empire, in 1780, during one of his inspection tours in Jiangnan, south of the Yangtze River, Emperor Qianlong's vassals gave him an album with exactly these kinds of benign images. The album, titled *Taiping huanle tu* (Pictures of peace and joy) was a gift to flatter the emperor, who was well aware of the saying 'peaceful society – enlightened emperor'. Returning to the Royer images, it is quite possible that this *Taiping*-album inspired the Chinese painters working on the albums for their Dutch commissioner. Many decades later, well into the nineteenth century, the records of William C. Hunter (1812-1891), a resident of Canton from 1825 to 1870, and a partner in the American firm of Russell and Co. in that city for many years, recalled that Canton swarmed with peddlers. In *Bits of Old China*, he writes:

[T]here were sellers of pickled olives, ground nuts, pastry, tea, congee (hot rice water), with a host of other eatables and drinkables, but never

any liquid stronger than tea [...] Then again, a dealer in comic songs, to which, after spreading them on the ground, he would call attention by singing one of them in a loud falsetto voice, with frightful quavers, which created a great hilarity amongst his hearers. [...] There were cobblers patching the veriest of old shoes, tailors at work on garments whose lustre had long disappeared, and regenerators of paper umbrellas, while another wove strips of rattan in great round and shockingly bad hats.⁸⁵

- Street performers

The performances by itinerant theatre- and acrobatic groups, dangerous-looking sword dancers and smart jugglers captured the imagination of Western visitors to Canton. Also, opera performances, with music and lyrical dramas were regular features of Cantonese street life. In 1849, the American Osmond Tiffany, Jr. wrote about a performance that made an impression on him:

[T]he actors screamed and bawled at the top of their voices, and seemed to lash themselves into the most furious excitement. There was a vast deal of fighting, and on the least pretence, the heroes of the piece drew their swords and hacked at each other without mercy; and every moment the orchestra would come in with an awful crash, and nearly drive one frantic by the din of gongs, the squeak of stringed instruments, and the shrill shrieks of fifes.⁸⁶



This spectacle was so different from anything at home that often it was easier to convey in pictures than in words. We find these sorts of images mainly in the collections of major Dutch ethnographic museums, such as the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, and Museum Volkenkunde. See Figures 4.48. to 4.51. and 3.24.

⁸⁵ Hunter 1885, quoted in Ching & Cheng (eds.) 2001, 108.

⁸⁶ Tiffany, Jr. 1849, quoted in Ching & Cheng (eds.) 2001, 173.



by the foreigners they were always referred to as chop-boats.⁸⁸

The range of boats was huge: transport boats for all kinds of trade and people, floating shops, day- and night ferries, duck boats, fishing boats, river cruisers for longer distances, seaworthy junks, boats for 'ladies of pleasure' (so-called flower boats) and those of their pimps, vessels with music- and theatre companies, etc. After arriving in the Pearl River delta, and once their ship had anchored off Whampoa, Westerners were allowed to come up to Canton on 'liberty days'.⁸⁹ These strictly rationed trips to the city were invariably accompanied by days of planning how to spend money on, among other things, "ricepaper [sic] paintings [...]"⁹⁰ It was inevitable that such a subject would make it home in the form of a souvenir; boats were omnipresent. There has long been a tendency to use these images now as important source material for understanding water transport and commercial activities in Guangdong province during the reign of the Qing rulers. But, as is known today, it is very much recommended to not just consider products of visual culture to reconstruct history, but include the study of written sources too. There are comparable, practically identical boat albums in all ethnographic museums of the Netherlands and in the collection of the Maritime Museum Rotterdam.⁹¹ Figures 4.52.a. to 4.52.d. and 3.11. show some examples.

It is believed that, in addition to the historical documents from that time, this daily-life-in-Canton genre could offer access to aspects of an informal economy, about which official sources

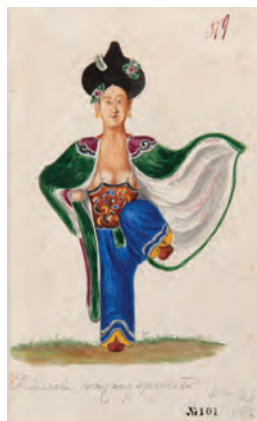


Fig. 4.48. Theatre scene (from set of 3), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 32.5 x 22.5 cm, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, inv.no. 4126-1.

Fig. 4.49. Sword dancers (from set of 4), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 22 x 14 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-54-40-A.

- Local vessels

Another daily and vitally important subject for visitors and residents of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Canton was boats. Local vessels surrounded Western merchants who did business in Canton. Lord George Macartney, the first British ambassador, on a diplomatic mission to the imperial court, remarked during his stay in Canton in 1793 that:

*[t]he river of Canton is quite covered with boats and vessels of various sorts and sizes, all, even the very smallest, constantly and thickly inhabited.*⁸⁷

Some decennia later, while staying in Canton in the years 1825-1844, Hunter wrote, that:

[t]he boats in which they conveyed were of a peculiar build, with circular decks and sides, and from their resemblance to a melon they were called 'watermelons' by the Chinese, but



Fig. 4.50. Chinese puppet player, anonymous, watercolour on paper, n.y., 21 x 12.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-02-841.

Fig. 4.51. Theatre scene, anonymous, watercolour on pith paper (loose sheet), 19th century, 31 x 23.5 cm, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, inv.no. 29476-3.

87 Macartney 1793, quoted by Ching in Wilson & Liu (eds.) 2003, 50.

88 Hunter 1882, 34-35.

89 I came across the term 'liberty days' in Conner 2009, 66. See also Hunter 1911, 3.

90 Hunter 1882, quoted in Conner 2009, 66.

91 Tropenmuseum: inv.no. A-7780e; Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 328-4a to 4l, 2133-2a to 2l and 2133-3a to 3l. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam: inv.no. 29476-1; Maritime Museum Rotterdam: inv.nos. P4411, P4412, P4413 to P4422, and P4424 to P4426.

Fig. 4.52. Chinese riverboats, watercolour on pith paper

- a. From album with 7 images, Sunqua, 1830–1865, 23.5 x 33 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-A-7780e–i.
- b. From album with 36 images, anonymous, 19th century, 38 x 46 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P4412–09.
- c. and d. From set of 15, anonymous, 1830–1865, 21.5 x 30.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-328–4g and 4c.



of the past offer little information. At the time of their production, most of the images in this genre alluded to a 'truthful' view of the country. We know better now: caution is the watchword in any analysis of these visuals.

Figurine painting (women and men), dignitaries and their attire

Besides images of the country (harbour views and landscapes), the Western visitor to 'the East' was also interested in images of Chinese people

and the clothes they wore. A look at the extant copies within this genre in the Dutch collections tells us that Dutch China-goers also had an interest in this.⁹² *Figurine* paintings are characterised by a great degree of uniformity. You can find exactly the same paintings in which the only difference is a change in the colours. This means that is likely that a great deal of work was done with templates or tracing techniques. More frequently, however, rather than tracing a model precisely, drawings were

Fig. 4.53. Chinese ladies with musical instruments, watercolour on pith paper

- a. From album of 12, anonymous, 19th century, 34 x 22 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-3728–483.
- b. From album with 12 images, anonymous, 1851–1856, 28 x 19.5 cm, SAB–City Archives and Athenaeum Library Deventer, inv.no. DvT V.9.9.KL.



done freehand within a standard repertoire. The outline of the position and accessories of a Manchu prince (chair and footstool), for example, was often repeated. As shown in Figure 3.9., the colouring and the details differed, allowing us to distinguish compositional differences. In addition to the clothing, it is also the associated attributes, for example a musical instrument, that determine this genre. (Figures 4.53.a. and 4.53.b.)

The inhabitants of China were categorised by Western clientele into different social classes. Thus, an album depicting, for example, Mandarins and aristocratic women belonging to the Chinese elite, was a separate category.⁹³ (Figures 4.54.a. and 4.54.b.) The *figurine* images featuring these kinds of men and women showed their richly decorated clothing and head- and hair adornments in detail. (Figures 4.55.a. and 4.55.b.) As the journal citations of contemporary eyewitnesses suggest, these images sometimes coincide with textual sources. Downing wrote in 1836:



*The rice-paper drawings of the grand Mandarins and their ladies are considered the best of their kind, and great pains are taken to give them the highest degree of finish. Their colouring is, for the most part, very beautiful and true to nature, with the exception of that of the skin, the tints of which are too uniform, and without that mixture and blending of one into the other on which its main beauty depends.*⁹⁴

In 1844, Tiffany, Jr. (1823-1895) also dedicated several passages in his diary to these kinds of sets and albums, including: “Or you may order a set comprising the emperor and empress, and the chief Mandarins, and court ladies, in the most significant attire, and finished like miniatures, for eight dollars.”⁹⁵

Furthermore, Eliza Jane Gillett Bridgman (1805-1871), an American educational

Fig. 4.54. Chinese Mandarin women with their servants, watercolour on pith paper
a. From set of 12, anonymous, 19th century, 20 x 28 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-1948-39j.
b. Anonymous, 19th century, 29.5 x 17 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-3728-489.



Figs. 4.55.a. and 4.55.b. Figurines, anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 1851-1856, 27 x 18.5 cm, SAB-City Archives and Athenaeum Library Deventer, inv.nos. DvT V.2.4.KL, V.2.6.KL.

92 Tropenmuseum Amsterdam: inv.nos. 54-42, A778Of (Sunqua) and 3728-483; The Hague Royal Academy of Fine Arts: inv.nos. Z53(1) and Z53(2); SAB-City Archives and Athenaeum Library Deventer: inv.nos. DvT V.2 KL, DvT V.5 KL and DvT V.9 KL; Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 360-7515a to 7515p (Youqua?), 1299-8a to 8l, 2133-6a to 6l (Sunqua?), 1948-39a to 39l (Youqua?); Wereldmuseum Rotterdam: inv.nos. 19166 and 19167.

93 Mandarins were China's educated elite. An image of a Mandarin with a blue button indicates that this was a high-ranking, third- or fourth-grade Mandarin. Those with a red button belong to the second Imperial grade (Van Campen 2000-c, 135). As thanks for services rendered, the emperor regularly rewarded his civil servants up to the fifth rank with a peacock feather. This was widely seen as a symbol of honour. Sometimes, several overlapping feathers were worn: the more peacock eyes, the greater the honour (Garret 1997, 38). Chinese men could become a Mandarin by participating in the state exams. There were nine ranks. They were usually divided into three groups: civil, military and censor. The censor class did not undertake any civil or military functions, but exercised a controlling power over the Mandarins. The civil Mandarins of a certain rank had a higher status than military Mandarins of an equivalent rank. The status of Mandarin was coveted, because passing the exams guaranteed a job in the administration of the empire. There were no female officials in China. There were, though, honorary titles for the wives of some high-ranking officials and some went to school. However, they did not participate in any of the civil service exams for posts that they could not get anyway. Women in well-to-do families were referred to using respectful terms such as *furen*, but not as 'Madame Mandarin'.

94 Downing 1838, facsimile 1972, 107-108.

95 Tiffany, Jr. 1849, 84, quoted in Crossman 1991, 20.

missionary to China, provides a detailed description of the appearance of the first wife of a Cantonese salt merchant, on a visit to their home:

[t]he lady of the house, or 'number one wife' did not make her appearance, until a little time had elapsed. At length she entered the room, and the others gave place, while she received her visitors and refused to sit herself until every one of her guests was seated. She was a beautiful young creature, not over twenty-one years of age. Here hair was arranged in their usual tasteful manner, and adorned with flowers, pearls, and other ornaments. She was attired in a simple dress of grass-cloth, tight about the throat, with large sleeves, exposing a beautiful hand, and wrist full of bracelets. Underneath her grass-cloth tunic, she wore an embroidered skirt that nearly concealed her little feet. [...] The Chinese lady in the better class is not without attractions; her toilet is often arranged with taste and beauty; though her decorations are often profuse and gaudy. Her dress is well adapted to the season. In the heat of the summer her attire is simply grass-cloth; as the weather becomes cool, this is exchanged for silk and other richly embroidered material.⁹⁶

This quote indicates that, in Bridgman's eyes, the attire of the Chinese merchant wife was strikingly elegant, tasteful and, especially different ("beautiful young creature", "usual tasteful manner", "the Chinese lady in the better class is not without attractions", and so on).

Typically, the figures in these paintings usually 'floated' against a blank background, lacking any context of the world that they belonged to. The question is whether this was just a Western imagination. Both Clunas and Tillotson write

about the fact that Chinese export painters were apparently prepared to misrepresent aspects of their own culture.⁹⁷ "These paintings reflected less real life than Western preconceptions about China – preconceptions which were easily impressed upon the Chinese artist, who was willing to pander to his ignorant foreign patron, even at the expense of misrepresenting his own country."⁹⁸ According to Clunas, "the early views of Canton street traders attempt a degree of realistic observation, while views of grandees do not."⁹⁹ We know that this realism was not the case. Yet, this unrealistic image was sent into the world 'without problem' in order not to disillusion Western buyers, making these kinds of illusionistic images what Tillotson calls 'articles of knowledge'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Western knowledge about China was principally shaped by these images.

Some decades later, the colourful Chinese costume and elegant appearances of Chinese women still gave food for records in travelogues and diaries of Westerners. In *De Gids* of 1896, the Dutch writer and interpreter of Chinese, Henri Borel (1869-1933), published an account of a trip he took in 1894 with the river steamship *Hankow* from Hong Kong to Canton. His record of his visit to one of the flower boats on the Canton river shows how he compared the 'living' reality with the decorations on Chinese porcelain and images on pith paper:

I looked at the strange, incredible creatures around the table. They were all so small and fragile in the sparkling pink and sky-blue robes embroidered with delicate flowers, birds, pink seamed with blue, and red with gold, and pale green with bright yellow, everything brilliant and shimmering in the intense light, wide short robes over wide trousers, that every now and then give

⁹⁶ Bridgman 1853, 23-24 and 26-29.

⁹⁷ Tillotson 1987, 65. Clunas 1984, 68.

⁹⁸ Tillotson 1987, 65.

⁹⁹ Clunas 1984, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Tillotson 1987, 65.

¹⁰¹ Borel 1896, 191-192, 194. "Ik keek naar die vreemde, ongeloofelijke wezentjes om de tafel. Ze waren allen zo klein en broos in de fonkelende rose en hemelsblauwe gewaden met teëre bloemen en vogels daarover geborduurd, rose omzoomd met blauw, en rood met goud, en helgroen met fel geel, alles schitterend en tintelend in 't intense licht, wijde korte gewaden over wijde broeken, met vage, vermoede vormen er héél even doorkomend. En dan die gezichten, allen zoo poederwit en bloemenrood, en die ópgaande wenkbrauwbogen, en die kleine zwarte amandeloogen die niet schijnen te zien wat om hen heen is, maar enkel vage, verre mysterieën! De slanke droomwezentjes van porseleinen vazen en van op zijden waaiers en schermen en bizarre teekeningen. En alles even sterk uitkomend van kleur, als rijstpapier zoo intens, kleuren alleen in China te zien. [...] En toen ik weer in de donkere sampan zat en over de doodstille, duistere rivier gleed, had ik moeite te gelooven, dat ik de schitterende, kleurige poppetjes van de oude vazen en rijstpapiereen plaatjes werkelijk levend had gezien, en dat alles misschien niet enkel een vertooning meer geweest was op dat immenze tooneel, dat China is."

*a vague hint of form. And those faces, all so powder white and rosy red, and the raised, arched eyebrows, and the small, black almond-shaped eyes that do not seem to see what is around them, but rather only vague, distant mysteries! The slim fairy tale creatures of the porcelain vases and from silk fans and screens and bizarre drawings. And all equally colourful, like rice paper, such intense colours that are seen in China. [...] And when I was back in the dark sampan, gliding over the silent, murky river, I could hardly believe that I had seen the brilliant, colourful dolls from the old vases and rice paper pictures in real life, and that maybe everything was no longer just a projection of in that immense theatre, that is China.*¹⁰¹

It is clear from the large number of sets and albums stored around the world and in the Dutch collections that the audiences (buyers, consumers) accrued use value to this subject matter. The otherness of what these members of the Chinese elite looked like, the detailed painterly execution, the clear colour-use, the velvet-like appearance of the paintings on pith paper, and the fact that they were often published in handy, portable sets and albums, are all aspects that lend this genre a high material and artistic value.

Chinese flora and fauna (including bird-and-flower painting)

Scientific interest in countries where Western nations operated expressed itself in, among other things, the demand for botanical images and drawings of native fauna. In China, in the nineteenth century, many watercolours of Chinese plants and animals were painted, some of them commissioned. These pictures already circulated readily in and out of China during the nineteenth century. In her study of the flow of prints and other images in the early modern period, in and around multilayered circuits between Europe and China, Wang makes clear that “the cross-cultural circulation of some images of fauna in the early modern period also brings into relief the issue of a globalized court culture that connected China and Europe.”¹⁰² Wang, a specialist in early modern and modern

Chinese art at the Academia Sinica, recalls the research of Lai Yu-chih, in which she argues that these kinds of pictures with European perspective and featuring precious species from afar “helped bolster the heavenly mandate of emperor’s Qianlong’s reign.”¹⁰³

Cantonese painters were asked to “depict all that is curious in vegetable nature,” according to Giles Eyre, quoted in *Plants of South Asia* in relation to a commission given to a local painter in 1803 by an East India Company servant.¹⁰⁴ The colourful images of many different insects, dozens of birds, shells, reptiles, and mammals, and hundreds of different kinds of plants – particularly ornamental varieties – and images of flowers and fruits, were a much better indication of the natural colour than the real dried samples collected.¹⁰⁵ In *British naturalists in Qing China*, Fa-ti Fan examines the collection of natural history drawings by the English naturalist John Reeves (1774-1856), which number more than one thousand and thus, according to Fan, form the largest collection of its kind.¹⁰⁵ It is clear that Fan is not aware of the Royer Collection in Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, which contains, amongst other things, many ‘flora and fauna’ paintings. Indeed, the more than 2,350 images on this specific topic that are in the Leiden Royer Collection far exceed the numbers in the Reeves Collection.

Given the many written records on this subject, it is generally known that the beautifully rendered plants and animals impressed Western contemporary botanists and merchants. The most cited observer of that time (1830s), Downing, also wrote about these kinds of paintings with admiration:

*[T]he way in which they [the artists] work to produce that extreme fineness of detail, which is so conspicuous in the best specimens of these drawings. The fine down or rather feathers on the back of a butterfly are often so perfect, that it would appear almost as if they had been counted for the purpose. Although a great part of this effect is produced by the natural texture of the rice paper [sic], still a considerable portion of merit is due to the way in which the colours are laid on.*¹⁰⁷

102 Wang 2014-b, 382.

103 Ibid.

104 East India Company officer (no name, no year), quoted in *Plants of South China* 1982, 2, in turn, quoted in Tillotson 1987, 57.

105 Crossman 1991, 57. Fan 2004, 49.

106 Fan 2004, 40-57.

107 Downing 1838, facsimile, 1972, 99-100, quoted in Claypool 2015, 31.

Fig. 4.56. Loquats and a mountain bird, anonymous, watercolour on silk, album leaf, Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), 28.9 x 29 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing.



Fig. 4.57. Fruit plant (from set of 12) anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 21 x 32.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-328-ii.



[t]he drawings of birds on Chinese fans, screens, &c. are all more or less good representations of birds which exist in reality. Were the Chinese artists to pay more attention to minute detail, their drawings would give us a good idea of the ornithology of the country.¹¹¹

The tradition of painting Chinese flora and fauna, as researched by, among others, Clunas and Lisa Claypool, goes back to the time of academic painting in the Song dynasty, when this subject became known by the elite for its woodblock printing, both in black-and-white and in colour.¹¹² Paintings like Figure 4.56. were popular amongst the gentry and scholar-officials of the Southern Song (1127–1279). Moreover, thanks to an old tradition of illustrating pharmaceutical handbooks with botanical descriptions and images and the experience of local artists in terms of drawing so-called ‘bird-and-flower paintings’, it was generally not a problem for export painters to draw the requested plant with ease. The outcome was thought to be an excellent technical illustration of an unfamiliar Chinese specimen. Although most Westerners agreed on the successfully combined demands of aesthetic pleasure and scientific information, Mildred Archer’s observation about the Chinese paintings of plants in *Natural history drawings in the India Office Library* proffer a dissenting opinion: “from a botanical point of view [...] over-stylised and inaccurate.”¹¹³ To meet the demand of their clients, they often introduced an extra element to the drawing: the plant was depicted in all possible phases of growth and maturity. Both the underside and the topside of the leaves and even plant diseases were illustrated. (Figure 4.57.).

According to Clunas, paintings with this subject – like less stereotypical landscape paintings – were mostly painted by one hand, from the start of the design to the finished results.¹¹⁴ This contrasts with my own field survey and also with Karina Corrigan, when she writes that almost all of these kinds of painting developed via the ubiquitous system of modular- and mass production.¹¹⁵ The *Painting manual of*

Furthermore, the praise for the scientific value of Chinese plant drawings is clear from, among other things, quotes such as: “the plants painted by the Chinese, even in their furniture, are so exact & so little exaggerated as to be intelligible to a botanist,”¹⁰⁸ “the brilliancy of the Chinese colour for painting, &c. has often been very highly extolled as being superior to the European,”¹⁰⁹ “the [Chinese artists] paint insects, birds, fishes, fruits, flowers and the like, with great correctness and beauty; the brilliancy and variety of their colors cannot be surpassed,”¹¹⁰ and the conclusion of a British correspondent of the Zoological Society of London, that

108 From Dawson Turner Copies London, vol. 14, f.66, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), quoted in Fan 2004, 50.

109 Bennett (1804–1894) 1834, 61, quoted in Fan 2004, 50.

110 Wines 1839, 81, quoted in Claypool 2015, 30.

111 Proceedings of the general meetings for scientific business of the Zoological Society of London, 1862, 220.

112 Clunas 1984, 84. Claypool 2015 29–38. Lisa Claypool is associate professor of the History of art, design and visual culture at the University of Alberta.

113 Archers 1962, 59, quoted in Clunas 1984, 86.

114 Clunas 1984, 84.

115 Corrigan 2004, 92–101.



the mustard seed garden (*Jieziyuan huaazhuan*) from 1679, for example, provided all kinds of woodblock prints of plant motifs that export painters could use. The individual modules enabled the painter to create endless variations of different plants in a decorative manner.¹¹⁶ This idea is affirmed by much of the Leiden Royer Collection, with its images of rock, stones, grasses, herbs, minerals, waters, reed, plants, flowers and fruits. The examples presented in the Figures 4.58.a. to 4.58.d. have many similar ‘colleagues’ in the identical composition of some of the albums. Hands-on research gave me the strong impression that modules were used to produce duplicates or to design new scenes according the painter’s own taste.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the demand in China for scientific illustrations of the natural history of China decreased and they were usurped by, in particular, ink paintings. The production of export paintings with this subject matter, by contrast, continued at a rapid pace, albeit in what appears to be more trivial versions

that were especially appreciated for their decorative value, their design and their high painterly quality. In other words, as Claypool argues in her article on the scientific gaze in modern China, this subject matter is “an artistic genre evolved by twists and turns from a scientifically motivated genre of empirical description in early science.”¹¹⁷ When, for example, analysing the insects paintings of Gao Jianfu’s (1879-1951), like Claypool did, his paintings, are “filtered and shaped by art practices and modes of seeing in his [Gao Jianfu] hometown [Canton],” this genre reveals “a basic truth about the ontological status of these kinds of images, where any assumed opposition between pictures for trade and local representations of insects is completely undone.”¹¹⁸ (Figure 4.59.) I certainly support the idea that the traditional Song ‘bird-and-flower’ painting genre has evolved as a modern science. This idea is legitimate as far as early works are concerned, i.e. botanical drawings

Figs. 4.58.a. to 4.58.d. Images of diverse plants, rocks and trees (from set of 12 albums with each 100 images), anonymous, watercolour on paper, 1773-1776, 34 x 37 cm, Royer Collection, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. clockwise: RV-360-383-A/1, 383-B/2, 383-L/12 and 383-C/3.

¹¹⁶ Ledderose 2000, 204.

¹¹⁷ Claypool 2015, 30.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

bought by members of scientific expeditions of Western horticultural societies and ethnographic and natural history museums. But the bulk of the later paintings, commissioned by individual Western customers, with their imperfections and creatively applied colours, and additions of insects and butterflies, were not accurate and surely did not represent actual species. (Figure 4.60.) They had nothing to do with science, but were purely decorative and fanciful depictions and “of little scientific value to entomologists.”¹¹⁹

Fig. 4.60. Mandarin ducks (from set of 12), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 1830–1865, 22 x 34 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-1239-378e.



Fig. 4.59. Cotton roses and Mandarin ducks, Gao Jianfu (1879–1951), ink on paper.



Production processes of silk, porcelain and tea

Amongst the Dutch collections are idealised paintings that depict the production of silk, porcelain and tea, the major products of the China trade. The representation of the manufacturing trajectory of Chinese trade goods, divided into the individual steps of their production, was one way that Westerners sought and, at the same time, organised knowledge of China. The subject was relevant to almost everyone sailing to China in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are a number of special sets in Dutch museums too.¹²³ Thanks to, among other things, the observations of the French missionary d'Entrecolles (1664–1741) regarding the porcelain town of Jingdezhen, it is clear that the representation of





these labour intensive work processes did not chime with reality.

*Aussi l'on dit communément qu'il y a plus d'un million d'ames, qu'il s'y consommé chaque jour plus de dix mille charges de ris, et plus de mille cochons. [...] King te tching est l'asyle d'une infinie de pauvres familles qui n'ont point de quoi subsister dans les villes des environs. [...] à l'entrée de la nuit on croit voir une vaste ville toute en feu, ou bien une grande sournaise gui a plusieurs soupiraux.*¹²⁴

For the Western client, ignorant about what exactly happened in the business of this lucrative merchandise, the different production phases were rendered as colourful and idyllic, but had little to do with the truth. Clearly, these kinds of images were constructed.

The scholar, poet and imperial painter Lou Shu had already made paintings with images of rice- and silk production in the Song dynasty



Fig. 4.62. Flora and fauna, anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, SAB-City Archives and Athenaeum Library Deventer
a. From set of 5, 1851-1856, 28 x 19.5 cm, inv.no. DvT V.19.1.KL.

b. From album with 12 images, 27 x 18.5 cm, inv.no. DvT V.4.12.KL.
Fig. 4.63.a. and 4.63.b. Butterflies, insects, flowers and fruits (from set of 12), anonymous,

watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 24.2 x 20 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. TM-3728-514 and 3728-525 (in album TM-3728-484).

119 Till 2015, 116.

Fig. 4.61. Birds and fishes, anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen

a. From set of 12, 1830-1865, 21 x 32.5 cm, inv.no. RV-328-3g.

b. From set of 6, c. 1800, 32 x 36 cm, Royer Collection, inv.no. RV-360-352-b.

c. From set of 12, 1830-1865, 29 x 20 cm, inv.no. RV-2133-5a.

d. From set of 9, 1830-1865, 19 x 26 cm, inv.no. RV-1239-378L.

120 Museum Volkenkunde, Royer Collection: inv.nos. 360-352a to 352f, 360-379a to 379l, 360-380a to 380l, 360-381a to 381l, 360-382a to 382l, and 360-383a to 383l (total: 2358). Other paintings: inv.nos. 02-842 to 846, 87-1, 328-1a to 1l, 328-2a to 2l, 328-3a to 3l, 360-7516a to 7516f, 1239-378a to 378l, 1239-383l to 383t, 2133-1a to 1l (Sunqua?), 2133-4l to 4l (Sunqua?), and 1299-9a to 9k. The comprehensive Royer Collection warrants a research project in its own right. Royer's fish drawings equals the Reeve's fish drawings collection existing of more than 80 species and in the Museum of Natural History, London. Read more on Leiden University NWO funded research A new history of fishes: A long-term approach to fishes in science and culture, 1550-1880' on: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/new-history-of-fishes> and <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/didi-van-trijp>.

121 Inv.nos. DvT V.4.KL, DvT V.17, and DvT V.19.

122 Inv.nos. 3728-514 to 3728-525.

123 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: inv.nos. NG-1981-12-A to 12-D; Tropenmuseum Amsterdam: inv.nos. 3728-490 to 513, and 3728-514 to 525; Ceramics Museum Prinsessehof: inv.nos. NO 5485 to 5512, and NO 5513 to 5524; Zeeuws Museum: inv.no. 3600-Z-8073; Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 328-5a to 5l, 4796-1 to 6, 360-1125, 360-1126, 360-1128 en 360-1130; Maritime Museum Rotterdam: inv.no. P4423; Wereldmuseum Rotterdam: inv.nos. 4900-1 to 12, and 29476-2.

124 D'Entrecolles 1712, 262-267. Translation: It is also commonly reported that more than a million souls live here who daily consume more than ten thousand loads of rice and more than a thousand pigs. [...] Jingdezhen is a refuge (asylum) for countless poor families, who cannot find a way of living in the surrounding towns. [...] As night falls one seems to see a vast town all in flames, or a great furnace with many exhalations.

Figs. 4.64.a to 4.64.d. Images of the silk production process (from set of 23), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 25 x 24 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. clockwise: TM-3728-492, -498, -504 and 3728-506.



(960-1269).¹²⁵ He inscribed these images, titled *Pictures of tilling and weaving* (*Gengzhi tu*), with poems around 1145. The original poems are lost, but they were all engraved in stone, so that they were preserved for posterity and could be reprinted and, indeed they form a veritable genre.¹²⁶ According to Roslyn Lee Hammers, the author of *Pictures of tilling and weaving: Art, labor and technology in Song and Yuan China*, the true nature of these drawings reveals a great deal.¹²⁷ She notes “although Lou Shu’s work appears to have a primarily practical purpose – to show how to cultivate the land or weave silk – the images lack technological content. Rather, they show a concern for the well-being of farmer families and the relations

between rulers and ruled.”¹²⁸ The non-technological and non-didactic content of these prototype-images of stages in the agricultural processes of the production of rice and silk, with their detailed and precise brushwork combined with poems, says something crucial about the understanding and meaning of its genre. This subject matter entails, above all, social and political nuances centred on the presentation of agricultural processes and common people at work. Already at the time of the Song dynasty and again, when the Manchu emperors were ruling in the Qing dynasty, picturing prosperous farmers in peaceful and idyllic surroundings was closely intertwined with the well-being of the state and the ruling emperor. In any case, the

¹²⁵ Swiderski 1990, part 2, 107.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Hammers 2011.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

subsequent reproductions of these paintings, fascinated Western buyers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During the Qing dynasty, two sets of paintings of the rice-, silk and porcelain production were commissioned by the emperor, titled *The illustrated treatise on plowing and weaving* (*Yuzhi gengzhi tu*) on the agricultural and sericultural aspects of the growing and selling of rice and silk, and *Illustrations and explanations of ceramic production* (*Taoye tushuo*) about the manufacturing of porcelain.¹²⁹ Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) gave the imperial order to commission *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* in 1696. This set consists of 46 prints, 23 of which depict the process of the weaving of the silkworm. Later versions, including those for the export market (Figures 4.64.a. to 4.64.d.), always followed these prototypical sets closely, but through the input of the export painter, were given additional components or a different composition.¹³⁰ In order to cater to the tastes of Westerners, export painters would exchange or add a print. For example, a depiction of European merchants was never part of the original *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* set.

The sets of export paintings of the porcelain production are based on Tang Ying's *Taoye tushuo*, a set of twenty paintings of the manufacture of this 'luxury ceramic' in Jingdezhen.¹³¹ Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795) commissioned this original work in 1743. The sets that were made for the West often consisted of more than twenty images. According to Ellen Huang, "as images with a global trajectory, these pictures truly are world historical."¹³² Generally, there were four or more images added of the journey, across the mountains and rivers, from Jingdezhen to Canton. All the steps in the process were represented, from digging the clay, to the glazing and to the sales in the office of the company. By depicting a sequential process and linear temporality, I agree with Huang that these images enabled "an imagining of material process that in turn shaped a universal viewing experience."¹³³ For the first owners who bought

these sets, and who might have been porcelain collectors too, this specific genre presented identifiable reference material that presented porcelain as art. This can be seen in one of the sets present in the Ceramics Museum Princessehof in Leeuwarden (Figures 4.65.a. to 4.65.d.) Export painters romanticised images of the production of porcelain, as if it was made in idyllic, peaceful, rural surroundings, rather than in the polluted industrial town that Jingdezhen actually was. (Figure 4.66.) Furthermore, the images in *Taoye tushuo* were arranged in a specific order. The process of producing porcelain pots, as Huang states, was "anything but linear in a production centre like the eighteenth-century Jingdezhen kilns, where thousands of specialists worked simultaneously."¹³⁴ As we can read in her article 'True as photographs: Chinese paintings for the Western market', Wilson suggests that such an idealistic representation was not necessarily about misleading Western buyers, but simply because the painter followed the models produced by the imperial painters.¹³⁵ They had to portray an industrious and happy workforce for their client in the original set of 1743.



Figs. 4.65.a. to 4.65.d.
Images of the
porcelain production
process (from set of 12),
anonymous, gouache
on paper, c. 1790,
35.5 x 44 cm,
Ceramics Museum
Princessehof,
inv.nos. NO 5516, 5518,
5522 and 5523.

129 Wilson 2000, 89.

130 Xiang 1976, 168-171. See more comparative studies on different copies of Gengzhi tu: Laufer, 1912, 97-106, Hirth and Nakamura. I have not yet seen their works; these studies are mentioned in Xiang's article.

131 Read more about the origination of the pictorial motif Taoye tu and the historical conditions in which the ceramic production visual genre emerged in Huang's article on Jingdezhen porcelain production as global visual culture (Huang 2012).

132 Huang 2012, 117.

133 Ibid., 118.

134 Ibid., 132.

135 Wilson, 2000, 89-93.

Fig. 4.66. Image of an idyllic, peaceful and rural surrounding of Jingdezhen, anonymous, gouache on paper, 18th century, 45 x 55 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-4796-4.



Fig. 4.69. Westerners rowing up the Yangtze River from Whampoa anchorage to Canton, signed with two red seals of the artists' workshop and description inscribed in characters of black ink, watercolour on paper, late-eighteenth century
a. From set of 32 images of the tea production process, 31 x 30 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.no. P4423

b. From set of 34 images of the porcelain production process, 30.5 x 29.2 cm, Martyn Gregory Gallery, London.



Emperor Qianlong commissioned this set of paintings to glorify the work, not to inform the viewer about how porcelain was made exactly. Idealisation of the visual content, then, was legitimate. That said, the sets were sometimes described as instances of 'industrial espionage', and, as we can read in *From China to the West*, the 2012 catalogue from the Martyn Gregory Gallery, "some of them did indeed find their way to the Sèvres works and to other European manufacturing centres."¹³⁶

The only image in the Dutch collections that shows some of the plumes of smoke from the hundreds of porcelain kilns hang above the town, is shown in Figure 4.67. This gouache, entitled 'Aardewerkoven in Steenbaai' (ceramic oven in Stone bay), is part of a beautiful late eighteenth-century set of twelve images of the Chinese porcelain production process. In 1931, Nanne Ottema, former director of Ceramics Museum Princessehof, purchased this set at the Hiersemann auction in Leipzig. The paintings

¹³⁶ Gregory 2012, 5.

¹³⁷ Inv.no. P4423. Conveyance from Wereldmuseum Rotterdam per 1 January 2014.

¹³⁸ Gregory 2012, 68, says that comparable series illustrating the production of porcelain have been recorded. One is in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (inv.no. Oe. 104 Res), and another was sold at auction in 2002.

date from circa the 1790s and their provenance goes back to the Richard Stettiner (1865-1927) collection in Hamburg, Germany.

The different stages of tea production in imaginative and idealised surroundings are beautifully rendered in a set with watercolours on paper in the Rotterdam Maritime Museum.¹³⁷ The 32 images, with a red seal on each painting detailing the name of the artists' workshop and with brief descriptions inscribed in black ink, present the massive commercial endeavour that was the tea trade – which engaged hundreds, if not thousands of workers as tea planters and pluckers, tasters and stevedores – as calm and well-organised. See Figures 4.68.a. to 4.68.d. We can assume that the reality of this industrious trade practice was rather different than these images lead us to believe. Rendering these tea production images with a 'romantic' flavour encouraged people back home to believe that their relative in 'the East' had a good time in this colourful and peaceful environment. This relative, in turn, liked to remember this 'exotic' atmosphere, more than the harsh times he, without doubt, experienced during his tea trade mission. At a global level, this set is stylistically and compositionally comparable with other famous sets with this subject matter (or those on the porcelain production process) that are currently sought after at auctions and art galleries.

The diverse activities in these vivid and often fanciful and detailed sets, depicting the main Chinese export production goods, were sometimes composed of more or less identical figure groups and show remarkable similarities (but always with variation in details and colour rendering). Thus, in the set about tea production in the Maritime Museum Rotterdam there are several almost identical images to those found in a set about the production of porcelain in a private collection in London.¹³⁸ The Figures 4.69.a. and 4.69.b. show one image of both sets.

Although images in a set suggest 'truthfulness' in respect of the sequential and chronological steps in the different production processes, the use value of such sets lays not so much in their use as a reliable historical source, but especially in their commodity/export and artistic values. The function of this distortion was clear: an attractive looking set of exotic prints sold better.

Landscapes (winter views and river scenes)

As we know of from the research of Shang, a specialist in China trade paintings of the South China coast, and the scholarly contributions of Wang on the Sino-European flow of prints in multiple directions and the highly



Fig. 4.67. Image with plumes of smoke from some kilns, (from set of 12), anonymous, gouache on paper, c. 1790, 35.5 x 44 cm, Ceramics Museum Prinsessehof, inv.nos. NO 5524.

Figs. 4.68.a. to 4.68.d. 31 x 30 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.nos. clockwise: P4423-04, P4423-21, P4423-28 and P4423-29.



commoditificated Suzhou prints, it seems that for centuries the Cantonese studios were supplied with Western-style engravings or landscape prints, which painters then copied for these types of representations. As we learn from Shang's article in *Arts of Asia* and Wang's article in *The Art Bulletin*, the characteristic European landscapes and figures in the prints were switched for specific Chinese landscapes with Chinese figures.¹³⁹ In Chapter 6, I examine a set of ten rare and unique winter views in the Leiden Museum Volkenkunde more thoroughly, as a result of which it becomes clear that this narrative painting set can be seen as a textbook example of transcultural artwork. Because I provide a detailed treatment of this Leiden set (Figures 6.1. to 6.10.) later in this dissertation, this section only briefly discusses the way in which winter views and river scenes are meaningful and popular as subject matters for Chinese export painting.

- Winter views

Winter was (and still is) a favourite season to paint among Chinese painters. Thus, this subject matter, besides being a genre under the heading of Chinese export painting, has been a recurring feature of the Chinese domestic painting market.¹⁴⁰ In China, winter was interpreted as the end of the annual cycle. This meant that, at the same time, winter was interpreted as the beginning of all ideas and life. The catalogue

accompanying the *Special Exhibition of Winter Landscapes (Dongjing Shanshui hua te Zhantulu)* at the Palace Museum in Taipei in 1989 explains that:

*[f]or the Chinese artist, snow is an important component of four seasons, as human minds perceive winter as the end of an annual cycle, and in it observes bleakness in all form of life. Throughout the centuries, painters have keenly observed nature, and thereupon expressed many features which are characteristic of the winter season: spring's flowering, summer's shade, autumn's textures and colors, and winter's bones. The latter refers to the barrenness of branches after the leaves have withered and fallen, and the solemnity with which dried and lifeless trunks stand after cold winter has settled over the surface.*¹⁴¹

In addition to this explanation of the importance of representing winter, the same catalogue tells us that winter landscapes were being painted as early as the fourth century, while the path to the first Chinese snow landscape painting leads back to the sixth century.

Although snow and ice were not regular annual meteorological phenomena in Canton, some historical sources suggest, as Shang posits in his article 'Rediscovering views of Northern China. Late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century winter scenes' in *Arts of Asia*, that they did occur sporadically.¹⁴² So sporadically, in fact, that Cantonese painters could not have had enough time to observe these types of landscapes and reproduce them in their paintings. The winter views referred to in this study, therefore, must primarily be a product of the circulating (Western) printed examples or, secondly, have emerged from the imagination of the Cantonese painters. Besides the importance of painting 'winter' in the Chinese classical (literati) painting practice, another reasonable explanation for this subject matter finding its way into Cantonese export studios is the idea that it was the result of a link between Chinese court painters and missionary painters in northern (and snowy) Beijing and export painters in Canton. It is known that Western missionaries worked together with Chinese court painters on a number of large-scale official art projects

Fig. 4.70. River scene, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1820s, 72 x 102 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-1135.



139 Shang 2005, 95. Wang 2014-b, 386-387.

140 Shang 2005, 95.

141 Special exhibition of winter landscapes, 1989, 73-74.

142 Shang 2005, 95; *The Chinese Repository*, 8 February 1836.

(*hebi*).¹⁴³ These collaborative projects, in turn, provided a chance for Cantonese painters to see the work of the court painters in Beijing, whose working methods (with master painters and apprentices, using templates and grids, dividing the labour and module-production) were comparable to the situation later in the Canton export painting studios. Moreover, in the early years of the nineteenth century a new class of art collectors emerged in China.¹⁴⁴ This was primarily a rich middle class, including salt and textile merchants from Yangzhou, which paved the way for Western-style prints and paintings (including winter landscapes) from Beijing to Chinese coastal towns and the south of China.¹⁴⁵ It is known that among the woodcuts from Suzhou, landscapes that applied the Western central perspective were already found in the Qianlong period (1736-1795) and such prints sometimes featured an inscription or a seal saying 'former imperial painter' or '*taixi*' (Western).¹⁴⁶ This latter term appears, according to Wang, to indicate their stylistic connection with Western pictures, "a mark that would have increased the value of these prints and attracted potential buyers who were interested in exotic things."¹⁴⁷ It is certainly imaginable that, ultimately, prints of landscapes arrived in the southern port city of Canton via this northern route.

Because winter views perhaps reminded Westerners too much of the winter back home, this genre was apparently taken back less frequently than were, for instance, harbour scenes. The fact that they did sell has to do with the fact that the landscapes exuded a typical Chinese atmosphere, which the Westerner was



happy to show off back home. Although they depicted imaginary, composed landscapes, most of the export winter views faithfully expressed what Westerners thought wintry Chinese landscapes should look like.

- River scenes

River scenes have long been a favourite theme in Chinese painting practice. However, similar to winter landscapes, Chinese life on the river and in the countryside was a subject that was not collected in great numbers in the Netherlands. The river scenes from the Cantonese painting studios often represent members of aristocratic families strolling in a garden, picnicking or wandering along the banks of the Pearl River, or in the environs of Macao or the quayside at Canton. A few paintings, such as the examples in Museum Volkenkunde and the Tropen-

Fig. 4.71. River scene, anonymous, watercolour on paper, sepia drawing washed with ink, 19th century, 18 x 24.5 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. TM-1574-2.



Figs. 4.72.a. and 4.72.b. River scenes, Sunqua' (s studio), watercolour on paper, 1830-1865, 18.4 x 25.8 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-1239-383a and 383j.

143 Shang 2005, 98. A known collaborative project is Castiglione's work *Suite des seize estampes representant les conquêtes de l'Empereur de la Chine*. This was 16 copper engravings that arrived in Canton in 1776. Other Western missionaries also had groups of Chinese painters with their works (amongst others Jean-Denis Attiret, 1702-1738; Ignatius Sichelbart, 1708-1780).

144 Ibid., 100.

145 Kobayashi 2006, 262-286. Shang 2005, 100.

146 Hironobu Kohura quoted in Ter Molen 1990, 99.

147 Wang 2014-b, 389.

Fig. 4.73.a. Landscape, Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630), oil on oak panel, 1622, 28 x 34 cm, Private collection.

Fig. 4.73.b. River scene, Salomon van Ruysdael (c. 1600-1670), oil on panel, 1633, 61.5 x 100.5 cm, Museum of Grenoble.

museum, portray simple peasants with their cattle or at work in a pastoral setting or on the waterfront.¹⁴⁸ (Figures 4.70. and 4.71.) A set of watercolours of river scenes in the Leiden museum collection, by contrast, shows clean river settings with a single boat, along quiet and orderly village-like spots around Canton.¹⁴⁹ (Figures 4.72.a. and 4.72.b.)

River scenes, like mountain landscapes, Buddhist symbols of good fortune or pavilions, pagodas, figures of *zotjes* and *lange lijzen* (shaved-bald children and elongated women figures, the so-called long elizas), dragons and phoenixes, and similar scenes, were often also painted on export porcelain. Cantonese export painters were thus apparently well aware that the river landscape was a favourite subject for Westerners as well. An observation by Downing in his *The Fan-Qui in China in 1836-7* reads:

What a different appearance it has to what you had imagined! The idea which is conveyed to you by seeing those pictures which in England are said to represent Chinese scenery, and the like of which are painted by the natives on their porcelain, would make you imagine that the whole country was laid out as a parterre, with gravel walks and grottos; that you could not move one step without danger of running against a crockery-ware pagoda, or into a canal, filled with gold and silver fish.¹⁵⁰

The American missionary Benjamin Couch Henry (1850-1901), who collected plants on his missionary itineraries in the 1850s, recalled the wetlands scenery in the Pearl River delta.

The delta of the Pearl River is one of the most remarkable in the world, in the richness of its soil, of its varied products it annually gives forth, and in the density of its population. Its apex is at San-shui (Three Rivers), the point where the West, North, and Pearl Rivers mingle their waters. [...] The whole extent of this district is so intersected by canals, as to render every point easily accessible by water, and the incessant lines of boats of all shapes and sizes



add life and variety to the scene.¹⁵¹

Henry Borel (1869-1933), who was in China and Indonesia from 1892 to 1898, describes the river landscape of Canton as follows:

On the other side of the wide, broad river, full of sampans and other barges, a separate city of little boats on the water, crawling with people and the din of shouting. A tributary bends left, inland, an enormous silver stripe, glittering through the far plains, with here and there a huge golden sail, glorious in the sun.¹⁵²

In the realm of composition and technique, Chinese landscape painting is, according to Crossman, often also a reflection of English and Dutch painting traditions.¹⁵³ There are indeed a number of Dutch and Flemish landscape painters who, in terms of their atmosphere and subject matter might have served as sources of

148 Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 360-1135, 3654-65 and 66. Tropenmuseum: 1574-2.

149 Inv.nos. 1239-383a to 383k.

150 Downing 1838; facsimile, 1972, 66-67.

151 Henry 1886, 56 and 63.

152 Borel 1896, 183. "Aan de andere zijde de wijde, breede rivier, vol sampans en andere schuiten, een aparte stad van bootjes op het water, vol wriemelend van menschen, en rumoer van schreeuwen. Links buigt zich een zijstroom landinwaarts in, een enorme zilveren streep, schitterend v r door de vlakte, met hier en daar een groot gouden zeil glorieus in de zon."

153 Crossman 1991, 163.

inspiration for Chinese river landscapes. Among them are Salomon van Ruysdael (c. 1600-1670), Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682), Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709) and Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630). Certainly, these seventeenth-century painters were never in China themselves, but their style and choice of subjects – the river, the trees that dominate the riverscape, cattle, boats and the riverbanks – correspond closely to those in the Chinese export oil paintings on similar themes. Recall that art historians recognise that, generally, both Van Ruysdael and Van de Velde did not produce true-to-life renderings of existing landscapes. They sought, as was usual in the seventeenth century, to surpass reality with their Italianate fantasy landscapes and river scenes.¹⁵⁴ (Figures 4.73.a. and 4.73.b.) We have no evidence for it, but it is well possible that prints derived from landscapes by these painters ended up in China, or that Western river scenes on *Chine de commande* (porcelain) products were connected to those on the paintings.

In addition to Western-style prints at the Qing court, there were many more channels in China that resulted in mutual Sino-European artistic interaction. Indeed, the multiple contact zones that existed between China and Europe were mostly established, as Wang states, “through Catholic missionary work and the trade system that allowed European goods to enter China through Canton.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Wang’s article traces a European landscape print (Figure 4.74.), revealing the subject and style of the lost original or similar pictures that came from the West. This woodblock print, entitled *Perspectival picture of the West* (*Xiyang yuanhua*) is a convincing trace of the body of prints that entered China and were used by the Jesuit priests. The print by Sun Yunqiu (c. 1630-c. 1662) appeared in the book published ca. 1680, *History of Lenses* (*Jingshi*) as an example promoting the viewing device with the special lenses designed for seeing linear perspective. I concur with Wang that this print “seems to be a revised version of some European images, revealing the subject and style of the lost original or similar pictures that came from Europe.”¹⁵⁶ The composition of the river scene with the clearly Western-style (Dutch?) architecture

shows trees in familiar spots to the right and left edge of the image, creating a repoussoir effect. The deployed stylistic characteristics, the displayed chiaroscuro and the black frame make the image unmistakably different from the traditional Chinese-style prints. I will leave the quest to comb the various print cabinets for predecessors of these river landscape paintings for future research. My aim for this study is to shed new light on Chinese export paintings and show the specific use value of the Dutch collections, characterised by their commodity/export value with connected biographies, their materiality, and their historical and artistic value.

The imperial court (reception in the palace garden and the emperor’s audience, inspection)

The court and imperial scenes on copper engravings, enamels, porcelain, lacquerwork, reverse glass paintings and oil paintings generally show figures in gardens with pavilions. In addition, since the eighteenth century, military victories and ceremonies at the court in China



Fig. 4.74. Perspectival picture of the West, Sun Yunqiu, *History of Lenses* (*Jingshi*), woodblock print, 21 x 13.5 cm (artwork in the public domain).

¹⁵⁴ Many Dutch seventeenth-century painters were fascinated by the sun-drenched Italian countryside. That southern land was the subject of their paintings: landscapes bathed in warm sunlight, with mountains and ruins. The landscapes often features staffage figures as travellers, shepherds and cattle. These kinds of landscapes are called ‘Italianate landscapes’.

¹⁵⁵ Wang 2014-b, 379-394, 386.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.



Left:

Fig. 4.75. Reception in the palace garden (companion piece of 360-1139), anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1820s, 72 x 102 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-1136.



Fig. 4.76. Reception in the palace garden (from set of 19), oil on glass, anonymous, 1785-1790, 52.5 x 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-1121.

Right:

Fig. 4.77. The emperor's audience (companion piece of 360-1136), anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1820s, 72 x 102 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-1139.



Fig. 4.78. The emperor's audience (from set of 19), oil on glass, anonymous, 1785-1790, 52.5 x 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-360-1122.

had been recorded in the Western tradition by Jesuit painter at the court of the Chinese emperors, Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), and others, whose Western painting techniques were then passed on to Chinese court painters. The oil paintings in Museum Volkenkunde fit well in this context, with a scene of a reception in a palace garden, and an image of the emperor's audience with an inspecting of his military troops.¹⁵⁷ (Figures 4.75. tot 4.78.)

Although, according to Crossman, the subject of an imperial audience was one of the most ambitious themes a painter could execute, the theme of this specific imperial audience scene was reproduced many times.¹⁵⁸ It is possible that the compositional arrangement was reproduced from a prototypical Western print of a similar subject matter. This idea is supported by the fact that a black painted frame encloses the scene in the same manner as early European prints were executed. This was a traditional way of framing a print in the West. It should be noted, however, that at that time (early

nineteenth century) painted frames like this were never used on European oil paintings.¹⁵⁹

Alternatively, it is also reasonable to assume that the depiction of an emperor's consort receiving visitors in the palace garden could also be based on one of the classics of Chinese literature or on a historical event. In addition to the depicted women, this subject matter also often gave a good impression of architectural elements of the pavilions at the court. As we learn from Shan Guoqiang's research, it is known that so-called 'gentlewomen paintings' in the imperial ateliers during the time of the three most important Qing emperors Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-1735) and Qianlong (1736-1795), was a separate genre that made use of Western painting techniques.¹⁶⁰ According to Shan, it is possible, therefore, that images by famous court painters ended up in Canton, and that these compositions were subsequently reproduced by export painters.¹⁶¹

The scene representing the emperor, of him holding court and inspecting his military

157 Van der Poel 2007, 66-73.

158 Crossman 1991, 165. I am aware of six remaining paintings with the theme: two in the collections of Museum Volkenkunde (inv.nos. 360-1122 and 360-1139), an example in the V&A Museum London (reverse glass painting, inv. no. P.II:1, 2-1936) and three in private collections: via Martyn Gregory Gallery London (cat. 64, 1994; cat. 69, 1996; cat. 77, 2001).

159 Ibid., 163. Later in the nineteenth century the French painter Georges-Pierre Seurat (1859-1891) used painted frames in his oil paintings.

160 Shan 1995, 56-59.

161 Ibid.

companies, could well be of a place in Jehol, the imperial park, now called Chengde. Emperor Qianlong often granted audiences of this sort there. Despite the fact that it is the emperor who is represented here, the Chinese export painter took the unusual step of depicting him on the left side of the painting, looking directly at the officer and the Mandarin in the middle of the composition. As a general rule, paintings depicting the emperor would show him in a somewhat exaggerated size, and always placed at the centre of the composition, or higher than the rest of the figures.¹⁶² In his *Anecdotes concerning paintings (Tuhua jianwen zhi)*, Guo Ruoxu (c.1020-after 1075), a scholar in the Northern Song period (960-1126) recorded, that: “in depicting personages one must differentiate between the images of the noble and the base, and pay attention to the attire of the dynasty. [...] Emperors and kings should be elevated as sagely images of Heaven itself.”¹⁶³ In export paintings, however, the artists did not have to follow these rules so strictly, and the emperor could be depicted to the right or left.

These two images were frequently painted and sold as companion pieces in a set of two. Both an imperial garden reception and an emperor’s audience were subjects that typically fascinated Westerners. The fact that there are two almost identical examples of both images in Museum Volkenkunde, both executed in two different media – as a reverse glass painting and as an oil painting on canvas – is very special. On one hand, this says something about their commodity/export value with this genre painted again and again, while individually executed on various media. On the other hand, this subject

matter represents a Chinese particularity that makes the depicted scenes in demand among Western buyers of artworks while doing their trade in the Pearl River delta. The value accrument for this kind of theme is primarily to do with the elegance, dignity and authority of the imperial ambiance, a stately and mysterious world belonging to Chinese society, but fascinating for a Western audience. After all, such an image offered a glimpse of the ever-closed palace life and thus was a coveted window on an ‘exotic’ world.

Interior and garden scenes

The images of figures in Chinese interiors and on garden terraces were often, so is believed, meticulous representations of the living conditions of Chinese families. Given that most Westerners never gained access to the houses and gardens of the Chinese, these images, which represented especially the grandeur of aristocratic families, were popular. Moreover, we know that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was the height of fashion to have something ‘exotic’ at home.¹⁶⁴ The kinds of scenes like those shown in the Figures 4.79. to



Figs. 4.79. to 4.81.
Three interior and garden scenes (from set of 19), oil on glass, anonymous, 1785-1790, 52.5 x 81 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-360-1131, 1119 and 1129.



¹⁶² Ibid., 94. Yu 1995, 42-50.

¹⁶³ Guo, quoted in Yu 1995, 42. Yu is a research and curatorial associate at the Palace Museum in Beijing, specialising in classical paintings. The *Tuhua jianwen zhi* is also known as *Experiences in painting (Tu-hua chien-wên chih)* An eleventh century history of Chinese painting, together with the Chinese text in facsimile. (Kuo Jo-hsü, and Alexander Coburn Soper, Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951).

¹⁶⁴ Crossman 1991, 159.

4.81. embody this trend. In a picturesque atmosphere on the terraces along the banks of the Pearl River in around Canton and Macao, with exotic flowers and birds, the Chinese elite waited for their servants, drank tea, smoked their pipes, listened to music or played the Chinese famous board game go.

Interior scenes, according to Clunas, had more to do with Western genre painting than with the native Chinese painting tradition, in which this theme rarely appeared.¹⁶⁵ In the Netherlands, the The Hague collector Royer saw the informative value of images with this subject matter and he had his personal contacts in China bring him paintings, which can be approached as a shared cultural repertoire. In his collection, now kept by the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, there are 14 paintings with this subject, in enamel, copper and porcelain.¹⁶⁶ (Figure 4.82.) While we know that the

immediacy of these scenes is an illusion, looking at these paintings evokes a certain sense of entering the stylishly furnished Chinese houses. This artistic genre should, so Burke argues, “be approached as a genre with its own rules for what should or should not be shown.”¹⁶⁷ The represented interiors, full of details of material culture and architectural information may also distort the reality. The Rijksmuseum enamel paintings are most suitable examples of innovative and integrated artworks, EurAsian in all their aspects, entangled with various ‘layers’, emerged from transcultural encounters, artistic results of interpretation and inspiration.¹⁶⁸

During his third visit to China from 1853 to 1856, the Scottish botanist, Robert Fortune (1812-1880), recorded narratives of scenes and his adventures in *A residence among the Chinese: Inland, on the coast, and at sea*.¹⁶⁹ He recalls his visit to the Chinese hong merchant Howqua’s house and garden as follows:

He now led me into a nicely furnished room, according to Chinese ideas, that is, its walls were hung with pictures of flowers, birds, and scenes of Chinese life. It would not do to criticise these works of art according to our ideas, but nevertheless some of them were very interesting. [...] In order to understand the Chinese style of gardening it is necessary to dispel from the mind all ideas of fine lawns, broad walks, and extensive views; and to picture in their stead everything on a small scale – that is narrow

Fig. 4.82. Interior scene (from set of 4), anonymous, enamel on copperplate in low relief, 1770–1775, 37 x 48.5 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. AK-NM-6620-A.



¹⁶⁵ Clunas 1984, 53.

¹⁶⁶ Inv.nos. AK-NM-6611-A and B, AK-NM-6612-A and B, 6614-A to 6614-D, 6619-A and B and 6620-A 6620-D. According to Jan van Campen, curator of Asian export art Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, it is questionable whether these artworks were initially meant for the export market (Van Campen, 2002, 3-27). As stated in Kaufmann, 2014, 219-220, the technique of enamel painting was probably first intended for the Imperial court itself. There are numerous examples still visible in the successor collections of those of the emperor, now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei and in the National Palace Museum in Beijing. Kaufmann got this information from Shi Ching-fei, ‘Evidence of East-West exchange in the eighteenth century: The establishment of painted enamel art at the Ching court in the reign of Emperor K’ang-hsi, in: The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly, vol. 24, 2007, 45-78 (English summary, 78). Also, Xu Xiaodong (Berg et al. 201592-106) shows that this enamel painting technique, initially brought from Europe, then reconfigured in Chinese porcelain and export-ware goods, gave rise to a new dissemination of the technique and design in Europe. The contents of the images, however, appear more frequently on paintings that were explicitly produced for the export market. The paintings could well have been exotica for both the Chinese market and the export market. For this reason, I have included these paintings in the overview of export paintings in Dutch museum collections in Appendix 1. Also, the Rijksmuseum owns two mirror paintings with this subject matter, inv.nrs. BK-16726-A en B.

¹⁶⁷ Burke 2001, 88.

¹⁶⁸ For a multi-level image construction and decoding of the different EurAsian ‘layers’ of the Rijksmuseum paintings, I refer to the article by Anna Grasskamp, entitled ‘EurAsian layers: Netherlandish surfaces and early modern Chinese artefacts’ in the *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* (Grasskamp 2015, 374-383).

¹⁶⁹ Fortune 1857. Robert Fortune was a Scottish botanist, plant hunter and traveller, best known for introducing tea plants from China to India.

*paved walks, dwarf walls in all directions, with lattice-work or ornamental openings in them, in order to give views of the scenery beyond; halls, summer-houses, and alcoves, ponds or small lakes with zigzag walks over them – in short, an endeavour to make small things appear large, and large things small, and everything Chinese.*¹⁷⁰

Fortune's writings clearly direct a Western gaze on the things he observed, full of Eurocentric superiority about his ideas about what is nice, what is art, and what are the right criteria for considering something to be beautiful. With such recordings, Fortune gave voice to his haughty and disdainful attitude towards his Chinese host and his premises.

The clean, airy and colourful Chinese interior scenes in the Dutch collections present, in particular, houses and buildings belonging to the Chinese elite. Museum Volkenkunde owns five late eighteenth-century reverse glass paintings featuring this subject that, in 1883, were conveyed from the Royal Cabinet of Rarities and which belong to a larger set of nineteen copies. In addition, two companion pieces, on long-term loan from the so-called Leembruggen Collection from the mid-1850s (Figures 4.83. and 4.84.), and one late nineteenth-century reverse glass painting, gifted by the heirs of Reinders Folmer (more in Chapter 5.3), are present in this Leiden museum.¹⁷¹

Portraits

In the eighteenth century, portrait art in Europe was at its peak. To sit as a model for a portraitist was appreciated as a self-aware and prestigious thing to do. Later, in the nineteenth century, a (self-) portrait was more representative of the social-political status of the person depicted and created the 'portrait gallery' phenomenon. In China, by contrast, portrait art was already an important practice in the Han Dynasty (206 CE to 221). However, as Vinograd indicates in *Boundaries of the self, Chinese portraits, 1600-1900*, the majority of surviving portraits date from after 1600.¹⁷²

Portraits of Western merchants and ships officers and those of Chinese hong merchants (Mowqua, Howqua, Mingqua, Fatqua, Keying, to name a few) were mostly executed as oil



paintings by Chinese export painters.¹⁷³ Until approximately 1850, most people portrayed had to sit for the master; then, with the advent of photography in Canton, everyone could supply a daguerreotype or a photograph, which could then be competently copied by one or more export painters in oil.

It is known that Guan Zoilin (Spoilum, act. 1765-1805) had been painting portraits of Westerners or their family members in Canton since 1774. In *Voyages made in the years 1788 and 1789 from China to the North West coast of America*, John Meares (c. 1756-1809), a British

Figs. 4.83 and 4.84. Two garden scenes with two women at a veranda (companion pieces), anonymous, oil on canvas, 1845-1855, 60.5 x 46.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-B3-9 and 10.

170 Fortune 1857, 75-76 and 218.

171 Reverse glass paintings: from set of 19 (1785-1790): inv.nos. 360-1119, 360-1123, 360-1127, 360-1129 and 360-1131; from Reinders Folmer heirs (1860-1900): inv.no. 6166-6. Oil paintings Leembruggen: inv.nos. B3-9 and B3-10.

172 Vinograd 1992, 15.

173 Crossman 1991, 35. Downing 1838; facsimile, 1972, 114. Borget 1845, 56-58. Lavollée 1853, 358-364.

Fig. 4.85. Portrait of Catharina Cornelia Geertruida van Braam Houckgeest and her daughter Françoise, after an engraving of Thomas Burke (1749–1815), after a painting of Angelika Kauffmann, Lady Rushout and her daughter Anne, anonymous, oil on glass, c. 1795, 63.5 x 49 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. AK-RAK-2007-6.



naval officer, navigator, and pioneer fur trader, gave an account of Tianna, a Hawaiian prince of Atooi Island, who, during a stay in Canton in 1787, sat as a model for Spoilem: “But of all the various articles which formed his perfect wealth, his fancy was the most delighted with a portrait of himself, painted by Spoilem, the celebrated artist of China, and perhaps the only one in his line, throughout that extensive empire.”¹⁷⁴ We know from another valuable reference in the diary of the business agent Ralph Haskins of Roxbury, Massachusetts (1814-1855), who had his portrait painted by this master export painter in 1802, that “while nothing else could be done I went to Spoilem and sat two hours for to have my portrait taken. He was 10 dollars each and does a great deal of business in that line. I was surprised to see how expert he was in doing it.”¹⁷⁵

Another famous Chinese portraitist was

Lamqua (act. 1820-1855), the ‘English and Chinese painter’ or the ‘handsome face-painter’, as the most celebrated Chinese painter was often described in the many diary entries of visitors to his studio.¹⁷⁶ An account by Tiffany Jr. of a visit to his studio in 1844, indicates that his accomplished portrait skills were generally recognised by Western visitors:

*The prince of Canton limners is Lamqua, who is celebrated throughout China, and is indeed an excellent painter. He takes portraits in the European style, and his coloring is admirable. His facility in catching a likeness is unrivalled, but wo [sic] betide you if you are ugly, for Lamqua is not [a] flatterer.*¹⁷⁷

The portrait genre is seldom seen in the studied Dutch corpus. An exception is the portraits of the family members of Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739-1801) in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (Figure 4.85.) and the three watercolours on pith paper in a red leather-covered, gilt-edged album (book) in the collection of the Tropenmuseum.¹⁷⁸ (Figures 4.86. to 4.88.)

As we know from Crossman, the collections of Chinese export paintings outside of the Netherland testify to the fact that the English and Americans let themselves be portrayed demonstrably more.¹⁷⁹ My own field work research in the Hong Kong Museum of Art (2007), the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (2007), and the Peabody Essex Museum (2010), and my familiarity with diverse catalogues also indicate that a number of English and American collections of Chinese export painting are well supplied with portraits of officers, captains and important merchants from the historical China trade era.

I encountered portraits of Chinese women and men, more than portraits of European men or women, in a number of Dutch museum

Figs. 4.86. to 4.88. Three portraits of westerners (in album), anonymous, watercolour on pith paper, 19th century, 11 x 8.7 cm, Tropenmuseum/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. TM-3728-485, 486 and 487.





Figs. 4.89.a. to 4.89.d.
Four portraits of
Chinese dignitary
women, seated on a
chair, side table with
vase with flowers, fan
in left hand, bound
feet, anonymous, oil
on glass, 19th century,
60.5 x 45.x cm
(2 paintings) and
70 x 51 cm (2 paintings),
Wereldmuseum
Rotterdam,
inv.nos. 3954 to 3957.

174 Meares 1790, 8, quoted in Lee 2005, 77.

175 Haskins 1803, 85 and note 6, quoted in Crossmann 1991, 43, in his turn quoted in Lee 2005, 78. Haskins' diary is privately owned.

176 Crossman 2001, 72-105. Lee 2005, 107-143.

177 Tiffany, Jr. 1849, 85, quoted in Lee 2005, 149. A limner is a painter, especially of portraits or miniatures.

178 The Rijksmuseum owns two portraits of the wife of Van Braam Houckgeest, produced by Spoilum, according to Crossman (1991, 35; inv.nos. AK-RAK-2007-6 and AK-RAK-2003-7). The VOC employer and chief of the Dutch factory Van Braam Houckgeest lived in Canton on and off from 1758. He was a member of the VOC embassy to the court of the Qianlong emperor in Beijing in 1794-1795. Read more on the acquisition of the portraits of the family members of Van Braam Houckgeest: Van Campen 2005-a and -b. I am not aware of any self-portraits of Dutch merchants or family members painted in China in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

179 Crossman 1991, 35-91. Tillotson 1987.

Fig. 4.90. Portrait of a Chinese woman, leaning on a table with a book in her right hand, anonymous, oil on canvas, 19th century, 58 x 45 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-02-461.



Figs. 4.91.a. to 4.91.d. Five portraits of famous Chinese persons (Yue Liang, Prince Kewing, Hsien Feng, an empress, and Taiping Wang; single sheets in album, anonymous, watercolour on paper, 1850-1860, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, inv.no. 29476-3.

collections.¹⁸⁰ I agree with Tillotson that these kinds of portraits were not painted from a live model, but rather were copied from earlier works.¹⁸¹ See Figures 4.89.a. to 4.89.d., and 4.90. Further, they did not represent any individual aristocratic Chinese figures, rather they refer to a concept of a definition the Chinese elite. For the European client, it must have been an exciting thought to have such an idealised, typically Chinese portrait hanging on the wall. The depicted small 'lily' feet of the ladies, their demure or suggestive positions or the come-hither looks were major reasons to bring these paintings home. Moreover, "handling the feet during lovemaking was an important factor" and Westerners knew the connotation of bound 'lily' feet with courtesan-prostitute.¹⁸² Imagine the bucko stories of the nineteenth-century 'tough' seamen to their male friends back in Europe.

The Wereldmuseum Rotterdam has five loose sheets that reference 'real' Chinese people.¹⁸³ Tucked away in their storeroom, in a silk

covered album with images of mandarins and dignitary women with their servants, the watercolour sheets have inscriptions in Chinese with its English translation like 'Yue Liang [...] of the ambassador who [...] with Lord Elgin', 'Prince Kewing, regent-emperor', 'Hsien Feng 1851-1861, deceased emperor', 'An empress', and 'Taiping Wang, head of the rebels'. (Figures 4.91a. to 491.d.) They belong to the sets of albums with watercolours on pith paper collected in the 1850s by the Jacobson family, Rotterdam tea tasters and traders in other goods from 'the East'. These watercolours are very detailed in their execution, and are unique in their sort among the portrait paintings in the Dutch collections.

In closing this section, I can conclude that the Dutch collection of portraits are not as impressive as those in our neighbouring United Kingdom. What does this say about the Dutch? That fewer of them sat as models in the Lamqua or Spoilum studio than English officers and seamen? That they did not bring in a daguerreotype of their beloved wives or daughters to the Cantonese painting studios to be transferred onto an enlarged colourful oil painting? Clearly the nineteenth-century Dutch man preferred not to be a sitter himself; instead, he liked to bring back portraits of 'different' Chinese people, for the sake of a more interesting narrative. And indeed, there were stories to tell about these colourful paintings of Chinese ladies with bound feet and in elegant, seductive poses, or about Chinese princes and princesses and Mandarins in full dress.

Punishments and torture

The 'fascinating', but particularly morbid Chinese methods of punishment and justice form a separate category in export painting. Mostly executed in watercolours and purchased in sets, these prints of chained and tortured prisoners were less popular and less suitable for taking home than harbour views or images of Chinese daily life in all its facets. Yet, they can still be



found in the collections of Museum Volkenkunde and the Maritime Museum Rotterdam.¹⁸⁴ (Figures 4.92. to 4.97.)

As Zeng Yuan posted on the Sheridan Libraries Blog:

[T]hese images depicted various forms of judicial torture and punishment in the Qing Dynasty as well as torture apparatuses, including flogging, bastinado, finger squeezing, cangue, shackling, torment on the rack, and beheading. In Imperial Chinese law, torture was a blanket term that consisted of two forms of legally sanctioned physical violence: torture as an investigative tool used in the course of a legal proceeding and torture as corporal punishment meted out to culprits after conviction.¹⁸⁵

In the Chinese legal system, there was a different punishment for every crime.¹⁸⁶ According to Mason (1804), the images and descriptions of punishments for big and small crimes caused unwarranted feelings of disgust in Westerners about the cruel Chinese approach. They were, said Mason, misled and the world-renowned moderation and wisdom of the Chinese court was undermined by these kinds of prints.¹⁸⁷ According to Downing, too, who resided in Canton from 1836 to 1837, Chinese punishments were totally different from what the paintings made for the West suggested. His observations from the time indicate that:

[M]any of the painters at Canton make a great deal of money by drawing terrific pictures on rice-paper, and selling them to the foreign visitors, who are ready enough to believe the natives capable of any kind of cruelty. [...] The barbarous torments depicted on the rice-paper, and which have often been supposed in Europe



Figs. 4.92. and 4.93. Punishment (torture) and beheading scene (from set of 18), anonymous, watercolour on paper, 19th century, 26 x 32 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-624-2 and 18.

Figs. 4.94. and 4.95. Image of two prisoners (from set of 9), anonymous, watercolour on paper, 1876-1878, 10.8. x 7 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-518-21-B and D.

Figs. 4.96. and 4.97. Torture scene and prisoner (in album Dschunken, Kostüme, Strafvollstreckungen und einige andere Szenen a.d. Leben Chinas with 72 images of daily life, processions, rituals, boats, and punishments/tortures), anonymous, c. 1850, 38 x 46 cm, Maritime Museum Rotterdam, inv.nos. P4411-54 and 68.

180 Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 02-461 and 02-462, 3654-62 and 3654-63, 3654-64; Wereldmuseum Rotterdam: inv.nos. 3954 to 3957.

181 Tillotson 1987, 93-94.

182 Jackson 2010, 108. More research on footbinding in China: Wang 2000 and Ko 2005.

183 Inv.no. 29476-3.

184 Museum Volkenkunde: inv.nos. 518-21a to 21i en 624-1 to 18. Maritime Museum Rotterdam: P4411-50 to 68.

185 Zeng 2011.

186 Mason 1804, 1.

187 Ibid.

*to be the real tortures inflicted on unfortunate Chinese, are many of them well known to be entirely imaginary, and founded upon the religious notions of the natives.*¹⁸⁸

Europeans believed, so Downing let us know, that because of their reputation for ingenuity in all kinds of areas, the Chinese showed the same talent in the making of their torture devices. According to him, the barbaric torture instruments may have been used in an earlier time, but that was certainly no longer the case in the time that he stayed in Canton (1830s).¹⁸⁹ As a foreigner, however, he had no access to the centre of town and the courts, so he could not possibly be well-informed about the exact punishment and torture practices. That severe punishments and torture were going on in late-nineteenth-century Canton is attested to by the recordings of Hunter (1812-1891) in his *Bits of Old China* that was first published in 1885. He witnessed the public beheading of a number of prisoners in that same year:

The prisoners were brought out from the city in baskets, with their hands tied behind them, each one having thrust in his hair a small, narrow slip of wood, on which was written his name, his age, and where belonging, as well as the crime for which he was to be punished. Being removed from the baskets, they were placed in rows of four, with their faces turned from the seats prepared for the Mandarins, who are always present on such occasions. Lying on a broad plank attached to the wall referred to, were several thick heavy swords and short knives, which we examined, and close to them stood the executioners [...] The paper being read, the latter struck the table with a small square of heavy wood, crying out 'Shat' (Behead). Like lightning the sword fell on the outermost prisoners. [...]

¹⁸⁸ Downing 1838; facsimile, 1972, 258-259.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Hunter 1911, 164-166.

¹⁹¹ Emants, 1894, 532, 536. Translation: Canton is overweldigend. [...] In een donker voorkamertje liggen een paar kerels, met het lampje tusschen beiden, verzonken in de heerlijkheid van een opiumroes. Een derde zit er bij en toont ons dadelijk, smakelijk lachend, de kleine voorbereidende folterwerktuigen, waarvan hij naar hartelust gebruik mag maken, als een dubbelen bamboestok en een eveneens dubbelen leeren lap om de wangen mee te slaan. [...] Er zijn op 't oogenblik weinig gevangen; maar toch zitten zij in enkele muffe, duistere hokken opeengedrongen als koeien voor een slachthuis. De meesten hebben ijzer om de voeten; sommigen bovendien nog breede houten kragen om de halzen; anderen zijn samengeklonken in onmogelijke houdingen en wanneer iemand de getraliede deur of een getralied luchtgat nadert, dringen zij jankend als uitgehonderde beesten naar voren en wringen zij de magere, vuile armen bedelend door de bouten heen. Er zijn ook jammerende leprozen en giegelende vrouwen en onder de laatsten, welke vrij rondloopen, is de vrolijkste een ter dood veroordeelde, die haar man heeft vermoord en nu op de doorreis van een hoogen mandarijn wacht om tot vermaak van dien gast te worden gevierendeeld.

*The more frightful penalty is inflicted called 'Lingche', or cutting into small pieces. This punishment is also imposed in cases of parricide or matricide, and no substitute allowed.*¹⁹⁰

One decade later, Marcellus Emants (1848-1923), a Dutch eyewitness, wrote in 1894 about his visit to a notorious Cantonese jail, when, as a consequence of the Dutch consul in Hong Kong, he took a trip with the paddle steamer *Fatchan* to the South Chinese harbour city.

*Canton is overwhelming. [...] Lying in a dark front room are a couple of guys, with a small lamp between them, lost in the glory of an opium haze. A third man sits and, smirking, immediately shows us the small preliminary torture devices, which he can make use of to his heart's content, his double bamboo cane and a double leather rag used to hit the cheeks. [...] There are at this moment few prisoners; but still, there are a few sitting in musty, dark corners huddled like cows in front of a slaughterhouse. Most have irons on their feet; some also have wide wooden collars around the neck; others are tied together in impossible positions and when someone approaches the barred door or a barred air vent, they push forward, whining like starving beasts and squeezing their skinny, dirty arms, begging, through the bolts. There are also wailing lepers and hysterical women and among the latter, who walk about freely, the merriest one is sentenced to death, she killed her husband and now awaits the arrival of a high Mandarin so that she may be quartered for his entertainment.*¹⁹¹

His visual writing meant it was only too easy for his contemporaries back home to imagine the grim situation of that time. Furthermore, the earlier (original?) torture devices that are

currently on display in the Chinese prison-, torture- and ancient government museums bear silent witness to the fact that such things did exist.¹⁹²

Finally, the Chinese authorities did not forbid the publication of these kinds of ghoulish images; on the contrary, according to Hunter, it was as if the Chinese mandarins actually applauded their distribution, in the hope that these types of images would inspire awe among foreigners and that they could thus constrain them.¹⁹³ For this reason, paintings with this macabre subject matter, to be kept in an album or box, could be ‘read’ by nineteenth-century audiences as moralistic. They will be ‘read’ differently by contemporary consumers. That Western clientele bought these horrific scenes at that time as collectors’ items, explains the change in thinking about China, according to Clunas: from an impressive and mystical country where there was still much to learn, to a state full of exotic savagery.¹⁹⁴ Although, in nineteenth-century Europe harsh punishments and tough prison circumstances were commonplace and torture and violations of human rights were not shunned, still these paintings amazed their European clientele.¹⁹⁵ It seems that the subject of ‘the punished body’, just like the themes of daily life and *figurines* were just another souvenir of an ‘exotic’ Chinese subject. Moreover, for some, these images provided strange and peculiar narratives.

4.3. Conclusion

As the historical China trade community only had the terms of trade in common, during the period of the westward movement of Chinese export paintings, the field of vision – that is, the conveyed image of China – was directed by the trade practice and partly framed by Chinese export images as bearers of information. Notwithstanding the role played by Chinese painters in the creation of these paintings, the undoubted power of the depicted images was read and interpreted in the eye of the Western beholder. The various representations of ‘exotic’ Chinese subject matter appealed to a kind of immediacy and fascination. Although an image is generally worth a thousand words it also veils things or guides our interpretations of a certain image, in this case nineteenth-century China. Another question comes to the fore in this

respect. Are Chinese export paintings produced and fabricated as part of an organised production and distribution of visual representations of China for the consuming eyes of seafaring and trading foreigners worldwide or as a result of that same consuming vision? I agree with Poole who says that “it is necessary to abandon that theoretical discourse which sees ‘the gaze’ and hence the act of seeing – as a singular or one-sided instrument of domination and control,” opting instead for analysis of “the intricate and sometimes contradictory layering of relationships, attitudes, sentiments, and ambitions.”¹⁹⁶ What matters, then, is who gained from the exchange of Chinese export paintings and what roles the different actors in this field played and still do? Firstly, the power of its subject matter brought the phenomenon of Chinese export painting to prominence. Secondly, Chinese painters, as both producers and distributors, were influential on a scale from ‘everything to nothing’ in terms of mediating their own artistic export painting style. However, this seems less important than the fact that they made good money from their work. Thirdly, the foreign traders were keen to buy these paintings, sold by the producers as their own artwork, presenting a view of China. Fourthly, the consuming vision concerning the Dutch collections varies from museum to museum and is sometimes contradictory. The social contexts along the trajectory of production to the current and future consumption of Chinese export paintings affect and are affected by a range of motivations, responses and interpretations. The case studies in the next chapters demonstrate that the spheres along this trajectory are not separate.

Despite the social use value of Chinese export paintings, offering ‘reliable’ evidence of a Chinese past, we can assume quite reasonably that the veracity of some subject matters is a more straightforward proposition, considered in terms of its likely commercial success, and/or for the researcher’s analyses. After all, the different themes represented only what Western customers demanded. Harbour views, ship portraits, daily life scenes and the subjects of tea, silk and porcelain, to name a few, were in great demand and still viewed by many people around the world as ‘articles of knowledge’. Here, the term ‘ambiguity’, as used at the end of Chapter 3,

192 For example: Pingyao Ancient Government Museum and Jiangsu Torture Museum.

193 Hunter 1911, 164–166.

194 Clunas 1984, 92.

195 Read more on representation of torture in popular Western (British) narrative: Forman 2013.

196 Poole 1997, 7, quoted in Sinervo & Hill 2001, 137.

comes to the fore. Like the variety of subject matter, there is also a variety of uses, with, again, a variety of concerns. On the one hand, by providing evidence for aspects of social reality, the testimony of the depicted images has enriched our knowledge of the historical China trade, a period lacking primary written sources. The subject matter of the early paintings of daily life, i.e. ordinary people in their natural habitat, help us to construct a ‘history from below’. They purported, as Koon states when she writes about the image of Canton that emphasised a hybrid Guangdong cosmopolitanism, “in parallel with travel stories and personal diaries, to be eyewitness accounts of the city.”¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, it is known that the depicted people, scenes, landscapes, harbours, and ships, are less realistic and distort social reality, rather than reflect it. However interesting an in-depth study into the processes that cause the ambiguous nature of these genres, in *Made for Trade* I leave this for what it is, because my research concentrates on the confluence of the different use value aspects of these paintings as export commodities – as *actants*. And it focuses on how these works accrued value or how this value dwindled over time, between their time and place of production to today. The ambiguous character of Chinese export painting seems to have little influence per se on the evaluation of this phenomenon along the trajectory of their social life. There were many other mechanisms responsible for this, as discussed in Chapter 2 and as will be shown in Chapter 5.

We must ask ourselves, why are these genres painted – for what purpose, and what was the intended use of a (set of) painting(s) or album? Were they meant to portray cultural disparities between East and West at that time? Or, did the iconography of nineteenth-century China or that of the Netherlands in this period influence the kinds of subjects that could be painted? Or were there more opportunistic motives behind the choice for certain subjects, namely, the games of supply-and-demand and making money? Do the paintings serve as a window onto cultural or cognitive realms, as Olsen asks in relation to the interpretively legitimate role of North

Scandinavian rock carving sites?¹⁹⁸ It is certainly possible that some of the painted subjects have potential symbolic significance, but not necessarily. This approach, while being attentive to and respecting the integrity and otherness of Chinese export paintings, includes the right of these paintings “not to be meaningful in the dominant interpretive sense.”¹⁹⁹ In this sense, we must not confuse meaning with symbolic or metaphorical meaning, but rather allow the depicted scene or painting in question to be valuable in and of itself. The potential to be appraised as artworks with an interesting narrative to demonstrate must be taken into account. The worth of this shared cultural repertoire, then, can be accrued from the outset.

To return to the question of whether Chinese export paintings can be considered as reliable eyewitnesses in terms of reconstructing the past, we must be aware that there will be always problems, as Burke recalls when he writes about using the evidence of images safely, in terms of “context, function, rhetoric, recollection (whether soon or long after the event), secondhand witnessing and so on.”²⁰⁰ The same ‘problems’ occur when using textual records for this purpose. Here, it is adequate to understand that these paintings were produced by someone of a specific class (professional (trade) painter), in a particular situation and place (transcultural encounters, different points of view, export specific goods on the market place, commissioner-master-apprentice-relation, vibrant harbour city as a melting pot with a strong local and, at the same time, cosmopolitan identity), and at a particular moment in world history (globalisation, (trading) interest in ‘mysterious’ China, upcoming Western powers with megalomaniac ideas). For instance, in general, we can say that the early paintings, depicting daily life, bird-and-flower paintings, costumes, arts and crafts scenes (silk, porcelain and tea production), and some maritime subjects, allude to being relatively reliable pictures with an apparent truthfulness.²⁰¹ The very detailed rendering of the subject matter is mostly trustworthy in relation to small elements, so that it can be understood in its original social

197 Koon 2014, 68.

198 Olsen 2012, 222.

199 Ibid., 223.

200 Burke 2001, 15.

201 The concepts ‘truth’ and ‘visual verisimilitude’ were absent from Chinese art criticism until the beginning of the twentieth century. Gu Yi states in her article on photography and the reinvention of visual truth in China, that the legitimacy of verisimilitude (realism, naturalism, or lifelikeness) since the 1910s suddenly became a crucial concept in the discussion of all visual production. Gu 2013, 120–121.

contexts. This use value aspect of the painting genre is artistic and historic alike. We know that these export commodities, featuring subject matter outside the Western tradition, sold like hot cakes, even though their reliability as witnesses was questioned later in the nineteenth century. The bright colours and the ‘exotic’ appearance of the represented topics made the images all the more valuable. There is, then, the question of what Burkes calls “degrees or modes of reliability” and “reliability for different purposes.”²⁰² It is becoming increasingly clear that in the nineteenth century and beyond, the paintings were, primarily, acquired and cherished not for their historic and informative value, but because of the longing for the exotic and romantic image of ‘the East’.

The precision with which many of the paintings were executed, however, is still seen by many scholars as an important element in terms of their significance as historical documents and as being useful for China historians, “either as a type of source and discourse, or as a potential instrument for the expression of historical knowledge.”²⁰³ There is likely a wealth of (other) information to be mined from them. It is possible, as Henriot and Yeh contribute, to unfold a narrative from one image that will help to question both how a painting came into the hands of the researcher and how it facilitates the investigation of historical questions.²⁰⁴ As a researcher of Chinese export paintings, I too need to filter my own inquiry and locate the painting in its appropriate social context. Henriot and Yeh provide the insight that allows me to address these works of representation “with embodied viewers and responses, rather than merely seeing transparent reflections of a fictional ‘real’.”²⁰⁵ Thus, as Graeber also acknowledges, any description we produce of a real painting will necessarily be partial and incomplete.²⁰⁶ In this view, the positionality of the researcher is another point that must be taken into account. To make a statement about the meaning of the depicted scenes, it is important for us to understand that

the paintings were produced about 200 years ago and that my interpretation of these images takes place today. The contemporary Chinese material environment has changed dramatically and is very different from the old one; in many cases, the latter has entirely disappeared. This changed local material cultural context is problematic: “The ‘old’ practices related to the objects (that is, the representations of subjects on the paintings) in the collections can no longer be documented”, to cite the observation on Engganese old material culture by Ter Keurs in *Condensed reality*.²⁰⁷ The same limit applies to my research. It is impossible to study former daily life in Guangzhou in reality. We must rely heavily on literary descriptions and images as recorded acts of eye witnessing. Neither can we experience the steps taken in the processes of, for instance, the production of tea, or find the geographic spots of the represented harbours and ships, and so on. This situation places a severe limitation on this search for interpretation of specific contents. This is another reason to throw off the yoke of interpretation. In addition to this limit, it is actually beyond the bounds of possibility to identify one or more ‘material complexes’ in Cantonese export paintings that can serve as suitable entrances to a better understanding of Chinese culture. Indeed, there are no, or hardly any, primary or secondary sources about production or consumption (value accrument to the paintings) by Chinese contemporaries.

My research for *Made for Trade* with Dutch museum collections as a valuable starting point, focuses on the consumption side (audiences) along the particular trajectories of Chinese export paintings, after they travelled beyond the Cantonese trading context to that of a Dutch museum collection. As will be seen when I treat some cultural biography issues of specific paintings in the next chapter, dealing with consumers’ ideas and inspirations alike, this focus provides many more opportunities to disclose a number of active mechanisms in value accrument in the course of their ‘social’ afterlife.

202 Burke 2001, 184

203 Henriot & Yeh 2013, xiii. A major other reference in the field of ‘visual culture’ regarding the subject is the project *Visualizing Cultures of MIT*, with, amongst others, its unit: *Rise & fall of the Canton trade system*. This is a proper example of image-driven scholarship. *Visualizing Cultures* has positioned itself as a nexus between the institutions that house image collections and the scholars who would like to use them for research purposes. Publishing on MIT’s revolutionary OpenCourseWare *Visualizing Cultures* has worked with many institutions to negotiate online publication of images for educational purposes using a creative common license.

204 Henriot & Yeh 2013, xiii.

205 Ibid.

206 Graeber 2001, 53.

207 Ter Keurs 2006, 133.