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

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Chapter 5

Cultural biographies

Value matters and material complex issues

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5.1. Introduction

Chinese export paintings had a strong appeal to foreign powers active in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. This is evident in museums and private collections around the world today. As explained in Chapter 4, Dutch public collections comprising Chinese paintings include a substantial number of works representing maritime topics, such as harbour views and ship portraits. These export products were popular and this was clearly a demand that was supplied at every Chinese port.¹ Harbour views, like those of Macao, Bocca Tigris, Whampoa and Canton, are still signifiers of the China trade in our time. Understandably, they meant something special to those Westerners who were in China because of maritime trade. This important category of Chinese export paintings must be analysed not just as simple representations, but also as commodities whose value and meaning were accrued through specific and economically significant forms of exchange. Closer examination reveals that waterfronts and ports – essential places in the transcontinental movement of commodities – were significant and compelling in different ways. In some cases, we can trace the journeys of these artworks and detect their impact on patterns of consumption. Before exploring relevant theories with which to study these trajectories, it is important to ventilate thoughts about the use value or utility of paintings with this subject matter, brought back as important statements of the highly complex commercial relations between Chinese, European and North American traders.

When we consider their various social functions (commemorative, identity-reinforcement), it becomes clear that their value is not limited to the worth they accrue as representations seen (or

consumed) by individual viewers. Instead, the paintings also accrue value through the social processes of accumulation, possession, circulation and exchange. Appropriation enabled them to become extensions of the owner's self. Even today, these paintings gain respect, and not only because of their financial value. Proud, twenty-first-century owners of such paintings are still able to recount the manifold stories of their ancestors' adventures in 'the East'.² By studying the trajectories travelled by these paintings, from their production place to the Dutch museum storeroom, we will discover that the issue of class (status) is difficult to ignore. For *Made for Trade*, however, I did not go into this 'class-topic' any deeper than to ascertain that it is an issue worthy of a separate study. It is not clear whether a relationship can be established between the possession of oil paintings by a small, higher (elite) class and the ownership of watercolours by a large middle class in nineteenth-century Dutch society. Anyone who had these kinds of paintings in their possession was well off; indeed, these artworks from 'the East' were generally considered to be luxury goods.

This chapter focuses on the value accrue and dwindle of commodities and cultural biographies of Chinese export paintings. It will touch upon various topics related to the research possibilities for studying trajectories of harbour views brought back from China by Dutch private merchant-entrepreneurs in the era of historical China trade. Treating these works as transcultural art works with a commodity aspect and as active players in the networks that connect them to human practices and current ideas and concepts, requires us to follow the life story of the paintings themselves, for their meaning and use value are inscribed in their forms, their uses and their trajectories. By mapping a painting's cultural biography, as

1 Ayers 1980.

2 I was given this impression by a number of proud owners, who I was able to talk to during the research period.

Fig. 5.1. View of the waterfront of Canton, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1845–1855, 87,5 x 200 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-B3-1.

elaborated in Chapter 2, this chapter will illustrate the usefulness of approaching Chinese export paintings from a commodity perspective and highlight the journeys of some coherent sets of paintings in the Leiden Museum Volkenkunde, the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam, and the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

5.2. Glorious but overlooked value – a cultural biography³

From the mid-nineteenth century, the expansion of Dutch trade with China was closely associated with new ideas about collecting and selling works of art from unknown countries. In the early nineteenth century, the forerunners of the Dutch ethnographic museums had no collecting policy of the kind we know today. There were only curiocabinets, *Kunst and Wunderkammern*, and private collections, which were closed to the public. Institutional collecting by the Dutch government began with the foundation of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1816 and, subsequently, the national ethnological collection increased.⁴ Early collecting had strong links with the nineteenth-century cultural, political and social context, which had its roots in the Enlightenment.⁵ In the eighteenth century, many were convinced that this new age, enlightened by reason, science

and a respect for humanity, would bring scientific progress and societal transformation. These new views, in turn, led to the study and ‘education’ of faraway peoples, and to nationalism with an increasing desire for strong and influential nation states, from which colonialism derived. Thanks to the trade relations of the Dutch VOC and the Netherlands Trading Society (NTS) with Indonesia, China and Japan, *objets d’art* from these countries found their way to Dutch private merchant-collectors and ethnographic museums and galleries. Although the trade in paintings was mostly private and minuscule compared to the export of Chinese tea, raw silk and ceramics, “its scale and volume,” to acknowledge Wong’s statement about this trade, “would still jar with any conception of paintings as rarities.”⁶ The results of this practice are visible in the collections of the Dutch museums, where these paintings are not only found in large numbers, but also where the confluence of values (commodity/export, historical, artistic, material) makes them more than competitive with important collections around the globe. The Dutch paintings are as equally valuable as those among other collections in the Hong Kong Museum of Art, the Guangzhou Museum, the Macao Museum of Art, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the V&A.⁷



3 This paragraph, in a modified form, was previously part of the article ‘The westward movement of Chinese export harbour views: significant paintings with a social function’, in: *Shilin, Leiden University, Journal of Young Sinology*, (Proceedings of the first Rombouts graduate conference Globalization and glocalization in China held in September 2012 at Leiden University).

4 Effert 2003, II.

5 Avé 1980. Ter Keurs, 2005.

6 Wong 2011.

7 See Appendix 2 for an overview of public collections with Chinese export paintings worldwide.

Panoramic view of the waterfront of Canton

This chapter continues by revealing the trajectory of a panoramic view of the Pearl River and the quay of Canton in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden.⁸ (Figure 5.1.) This painting belongs to the so-called Leembruggen Collection. This is a collection of ten Chinese export oil paintings that comprises other harbour views of Canton and Macao, the Dutch folly fort in the Pearl River, two portraits of Chinese literati, two garden scenes with women and children on a veranda, and two (severely damaged) paintings of Tanka boat women in the style of the legendary English Chinese trade painter George Chinnery (1774-1852), who stayed in Macao from 1825 until his death in 1852.⁹ The cultural biography of this large painting may reveal something about its function and use value over the course of time. That is to say, from the moment of the (intentional) purchase by its first owner, Tonco Modderman (1813-1858), in the mid-nineteenth century in China (the material condensation process), through its overlooked life in the early twenty-first century as a long-term loan in the basement of this Leiden museum, to its future status as an educational and revealing object, accessible in its former glory for anyone who would like to learn about the past (the evaporation process, or, in other words: the dissemination of its narrative).

This remarkably wide panorama looks north from Honam, the island lying south of the city of Canton along the mainland, and encompasses the entire river frontage from the Western suburbs on the left to the French folly fort on the extreme right.¹⁰ Figure 5.2. shows the Dutch folly fort, enclosed by a thicket of banyan trees, to the right of the centre; beyond it is the old city of Canton, backed by White Cloud Mountain (*Bai yun shan*), with the French folly fort on the right. Visible on the skyline are the three landmarks of the Huai Sheng Mosque (or Mohammedan Tower), which was built in the Tang dynasty as a lighthouse, the Flowery (or Nine-storey) Pagoda and the Zenhai (or Five-storey) Observation Tower. Life on the Pearl River appears to play a more important role in this painting than do the Western trading stations. The river, with hundreds of boats, is depicted in the foreground. The quay and its



dwelling, as seen from the river, are depicted in the middle ground. Above this scene is a high sky, in which light cloud cover can be discerned. The Western trading factories can be seen left of the centre. From left to right the flags of these factories can be identified as those of France, United States – with a dense garden in front of the door and its flag just visible – and Great Britain, with the Red Ensign or Red Duster, the British merchant navy flag with the Union Jack in its upper left corner, which has been flying on British merchant ships since the seventeenth century.¹¹

It is impossible to see the representation of the depicted setting as real. When we detect the composition of this painting it is clear this constructed landscape combines different cultural conventions. On the one hand, because of its wideness and its multiple perspectives, this harbour view can be read almost like a Chinese handscroll, reading from right to left. On the other hand, the composition of this painting is typical for seventeenth-century European landscape art, with two-thirds of the canvas used for the sky, a low horizon line and a mainly bird's-eye perspective. In this way, this representation of the thriving port city of Canton on this transcultural artwork displays the interweaving of local and global knowledge on painting conventions. Application of this integrated, shared painting style accrued value to the painting as an artwork and commodity at the same time. Although many similar – but all slightly different – representations of this scene are known (commodity), in this case the individual authorship is recognisable and its historical and material value – the narrative makes this painting an interesting object to

Fig. 5.2. View of the waterfront of Canton (detail with Dutch and French folly forts), anonymous, oil on canvas, 1845-1855, 87,5 x 200 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.no. RV-B3-1.

8 Inv.no. B3-1.

9 Inv.nos. B3-2 to 10.

10 Van der Poel 2007, 29-31.

11 Crossman 1991, 436. Conner 2009, 182-185.

Fig. 5.3. View of the waterfront of Canton, Youqua, oil on canvas, c. 1845, 85.1 x 198.1 cm, Martyn Gregory Gallery, London.



exhibit – gives this Leiden Leembruggen painting a genuine art connotation.¹²

The painting offers a number of clues about its production date. The Dutch factory, together with the British station and the Creek hong, burned to the ground in December 1842. As we know from the studies of Crossman and Conner, in 1845 two new and imposing buildings were erected on this site, in the architectural style of the Western buildings in Shanghai and Hong Kong.¹³ These white, three-storey buildings are represented on this painting at the location of the three old stations. The French hong was in good enough repair in October 1844 for the old French consulate to be rented by the French envoy, Théodore de Lagrené.¹⁴ The fact that the French flag is visible would suggest that the painting dates to before January 1846, when De Lagrené's mission left; the consulate was then closed and the French flag removed.¹⁵ It is well known that in late 1847 a Protestant church was erected between the end of Hog Lane and the riverbank. This church does not appear in the scene. Next, if we consider that these kinds of paintings (of Canton) would be harder to sell if they were too out of date, we can conclude that our painting was produced shortly after 1845.¹⁶ Likewise, the painting style, the depicted scene and the size of the canvas (87.5 x 200 cm), give weight to our supposition that this painting was

produced at that time. This idea is also supported by the fact that other paintings, identical to this one (like the Youqua painting in Figure 5.3.), came onto the market around the same period. The famous Chinese export painter Youqua (act. 1840-1870) was a specialist in these kinds of harbour views. This fact, in turn, assigns value and prestige to the works painted in the style of Youqua.

So far, I have looked at the painting itself. Let us now look at the person who initially owned this work of art. Modderman was nominated by the NTS and, by a royal decree of 21 March 1843, was ordered to go to China as a reporter and investigate what the prospects were for the growth of trade between Holland and China, after the opening up of four more Chinese harbour cities following the Treaty of Nanking in 1842.¹⁷ He was not the Netherlands Consul as some people thought he was. On 30 January 1844, in a letter published in *Friends of China*, he told the editor: "I am in Macao on a special mission for the government of the Netherlands but I am not the Netherlands Consul as you say in your Anglo-Chinese Calender. Sgd Tonco Modderman Junior."¹⁸ Subsequent to this trading mission to China, in 1846 Modderman returned to his home in Batavia in the Netherlands East Indies, where he worked as an Inspector at the *Department of*

¹² I know of panoramic paintings like the Canton waterfront in Leiden in, among other collections, Greenwich Maritime Museum, Martyn Gregory Gallery, and Guangdong Provincial Museum.

¹³ Crossman 1991, 436.

¹⁴ Conner 2009, 184.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁶ Van Dyke & Mok 2015, xxi-xxii.

¹⁷ The National Archives reveal detailed trade information about this mission (National Archives The Hague, Netherlands Trading Society, 'Report Modderman', Verbaal 9-2-2846/18 Koloniën 1678 and Verbaal 4-6-1846/5, Koloniën 1712).

¹⁸ *Friend of China* 30.1.1844 edition. *A Peoples' History 1793 – 1844 from the newspapers, Chapter 35 – Hong Kong*: <http://www.houghton.hk> (consulted March 2016).

Middelen en Domeinen as a representative of the Dutch government. It was here that he married the Batavia born Angelique Ardesch (1831-1852) in January 1847. His resignation in 1848 was followed by employment as a partner in the Dutch international trading house of Reynst & Vinju, also in Batavia, and as an agent in India for Van Hoboken and Sons, a Rotterdam-based trading company. His wife died in this period, in November 1852, while on board a ship, the *Rotterdam*, bound for Holland.¹⁹ In the *Gedenkboek 1836-1936* of Reynst & Vinju is recorded “From St Helena, our staff member Modderman received the painful news, that his wife, who, in order to restore her health, left for Europe with her youngest child, died during the journey on the sailing ship.”²⁰ She left two children behind: Marie and Louise-Jacoba (1852-1875). During his last period of government service as a Dutch Consul he lived in Canton and Macao from 1854 to 1855. A letter in the Jardine Matheson Archive, written by Modderman in October 1854, indicates that he established himself in business in Canton as well as in Macao, alongside his official consular duties.²¹ (Figure 5.4.) He also offered his services as a trading agent to the Jardine Matheson Company. His failing health forced him to leave Macao in 1856 and return to Holland, where he died in 1858.

The exact conditions under which Modderman obtained this painting remain unclear and there are serious doubts about whether this mystery will ever be solved. Thorough analysis of records in the National Archives in The Hague and the Modderman family archives in Groningen, relevant documents (personal letters of Josine Ardesch (1836-1878) to Tonco Modderman in the period 1854-1855, other correspondence, private cashbooks, wills, notary deeds, prenuptial agreements) in Amsterdam and Leiden, personal conversations with the composer and the keeper of the family archive (respectively, the secretary of the Leiden Clos & Leembruggen factory and one of the descendants of the first owner) have all failed to yield any clear clues about the acquisition of the painting.²² Unfortunately, the documents are rather vague and the thoughts of Modderman himself about this painting, as well as his initial intentions regarding the commissioning and purchasing of this expensive and exceptionally large oil painting, are yet to be discovered. Fortunately, there are some archives still to be mined, leaving a few stones unturned and a chance to garner new information.²³

Hypothetically, it is highly possible that Modderman obtained this Canton harbour view either in the years spanning his second Chinese

19 In a letter of 21 November 1852 from Batavia, Tonco Modderman informed his uncle that, since 3 November 1852, his wife Angelique is on her way to Holland. She was very sick: “thrush, the most lethal illness that is not possible to cure in India.” Unfortunately, she died four days later on the 7th of November. This unhappy news had not reached her husband by the time he wrote this letter two weeks later.

20 Molsbergen 1935, 22.

21 Manuscripts Reading Room Cambridge University Library London: Letter Mr Tonco Modderman in the Jardine Matheson Archive. Business Letters: Canton, Manuscripts/MS JM/B7/2

<<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.jsp?idLEAD%2FGBR%2F0012%2FMS%20JM%2FB7%2F2>> .

22 City Archives Amsterdam: Notary deeds of Mr Tonco Modderman (30 October 1856. 5075. 5075, no. 554, Minute 105/126, Notary: Mr. Henri Antoine Jean Amija Esser, Amsterdam), Mrs. Louisa Jacoba Modderman and Mr Cornelis Leembruggen (16 January 1871. 22606, no. 583, Notary: Mr. Jan Willem Hendrik Herman Druyvesteijn, Amsterdam); Regional Archive Leiden: Company business archives textile factory P. Clos and Leembruggen. Archive no. 104; 0243, II, nos. 243, 545, 546, 547, 548 & 549; Groninger Archives: Family archives family Modderman. 2181. 2030_G450, nos. 67 & 105; Family Modderman, Mr Ewoud and Mr Tonco Modderman: email correspondence, Januari-Februari 2011; Ms Toos Zandvliet, Leiden and Mr Philip A. Leembruggen, Wassenaar: Family archive Leembruggen, letters, notary deed of Tonco Modderman (Akte van Scheiding) 7 April 1871, Judge Mr. Jan Herman van der Meer de Hijs, private cashbooks and various correspondence between 2007 to 2012.

23 Further research can be done to the inventory of H.J. (Henry) Modderman (brother of Tonco). In a letter dated 3 March 1871 to the couple Leembruggen-Modderman he wrote about ‘schilderijen’ (paintings): “Upon request, I will send you the paintings and books given to me together with the portraits of thy mother and thy grandfather.” Whether this refers to the paintings that form part of this research is unclear. Besides this search, a study of the life story and possible writings of P.W. (Piet) Modderman, brother of Tonco, who stayed together with Tonco in Macao in 1854-1855, will give a clue. The return letters of Tonco Modderman to Josine Ardesch from the period 1854-1855 are still unfound. They might stay at the family archive of the Ardesch family, or at that of the Biben family, as Josine married with W.A. Biben in 1857. Biben and Josine Ardesch were the legal guardians of the children of Tonco Modderman after he died in 1857.

Messrs Jardine Mathison & Co
Hongkong

anton, } the
Macao. }

of October 1854.

4040

Dear Sir

I beg to inform you that I have established myself in business at the above named places, under the style of

TONCO MODDERMAN & CO,

and intend availing myself of the permission to trade, which the Netherlands Government grants to its Consul in China.

Having been, during a period of nearly seven years, a partner in the house of Messrs. Reijnst & Vinju at Batavia and in that capacity one of the agents in India for Messrs. A. van Hoboken & Sons at Rotterdam, I have acquired the necessary experience in trade; and besides, having previously resided in China and possessing adequate means to afford also material security, I feel confident that I shall not disappoint those who may feel inclined to intrust their interest to my hands.

I intend to confine myself almost exclusively to general agency business and beg to assure you that the most assiduous care will be at all times bestowed upon the interest of those who will favor me with their patronage.

I beg leave to apprise you that I have given my general procuration to my brother Mr. P. W. Modderman and also to Mr. J. des Amorie van der Hoeven, who have both my entire confidence.

Recommending to your attention my new firm and the signatures as given at foot,

I remain

Dear Sir

Your Obedient Servant,

Tonco Modderman & Co

Signatures:

TONCO MODDERMAN JR.

Tonco Modderman Jr.

P. W. MODDERMAN

P. W. Modderman

J. DES AMORIE VAN DER HOEVEN

J. des Amorie van der Hoeven

and Macanese period in the 1850s, or in his Netherlands East Indies period in Batavia from 1846 to 1848, where he ran a household with his wife Angelique. As Michael North's research on the inventories of eighteenth-century Dutch colonial households in Batavia shows, "Chinese styles of decoration, by way of contrast, penetrated the European strata in Batavia from an early date, as Europeans bought and displayed Chinese cultural goods of many kinds."²⁴ Although North's research focuses on the previous century, this knowledge allows us, however, to hypothesise that in the nineteenth century imported Chinese paintings in Batavia were still readily available.

Nevertheless, given what we do know, we can form a cultural biography with some degree of certainty. At the same time, the ideas that formed this painting; that is, the condensation of ideas, the designation process, the material choices and the intentions in this work of art, probably tell yet another story. Does the painting communicate the artist's ideas independently of the subject matter of the work? Clunas states in *What about Chinese art?* that "the relationship between the picture, the maker of the picture, and the subject of the picture is much more of a shared enterprise. [...] It seems impossible seeing works of art exactly as their original makers and viewers did."²⁵ To gain insight into this shared enterprise, *Made for Trade* brings together these different spheres (painting, artist, subject matter) to get to know more about the meaning, the use value, of Chinese export painting. And, certainly, the story behind this Leembruggen painting can still be further constructed.

In general, it is known that the first owner attributed intrinsically personal value to the painting in the first phase of its social life. When we look at the cultural biography of the painting central to this research, we must point out the highly attractive Chinese export art market itself, as a first meaningful and decisive cultural marker. In fact, this market was so remarkable

that for this reason alone the painting was awarded a high use value as a commercial product (commodity) and was judged to be of great worth. Indeed, at the moment this expensive painting was obtained, as a token of status and prestige, its function, presumably, was to impress. Its size suggests that a successful enterprise preceded its acquisition; certainly, a business-like meaning can be assigned to it. We can imagine this painting hanging on the wall of a tastefully furnished 'European' house, located in a luxurious residential area of Batavia, in a richly decorated boardroom at the Jardine Matheson Company in Canton or in the drawing room of one of the luxurious expatriate houses near the Praya Grande in Macao.²⁶ Or, if the painting was used as barter, as a gift (we are reminded that we do not know the exact circumstances under which it was obtained) or as part of trading negotiations, the economic value of the painting comes to the fore. In other words, its saleability and exchangeability was highly significant, perhaps even its main feature. In its Chinese life, the painting fulfilled both the conditions associated with the commodity phase and those of commodity candidacy.²⁷ In addition, it could have accomplished a commemorative and decorative function and an important means of self-fashioning and self-expression, both during Modderman's time in the East Indies trade society or in Chinese commercial circles, and when he lived back in his home country. By analysing other cultural markers in the painting's biography, we notice a major change in its use value over the course of time as a result of various sociocultural and temporal aspects.

When Modderman passed away in 1858 it is likely that his daughter Louise Jacoba Modderman (1852-1875) inherited the painting, so emblematic of an elite status. In the notary deeds related to the division of the properties and estate of Tonco Modderman, appears the description of "various items of furniture and furnishing" that had been left to Louise.²⁸

Fig. 5.4. Letter of Tonco Modderman to Jardine Matheson Company, October 1854.

24 Kaufmann & North 2014, 14. North 2014, 111-128. Amongst other Chinese art objects, these goods included paintings, which, as early as in seventeenth century Batavia could be acquired directly from the Chinese and indirectly at auctions of Chinese estates. Only later on were these products traded by the VOC and its successors.

25 Clunas 1999, 127.

26 We know that Modderman spent some time in the house of J.A. des Amorie van der Hoeven, who lived in a significant Dutch house on the Praya Grande, where, on the top floor, the still studying future Chinese interpreters for the Netherlands Indies stayed. This house served as the Dutch consulate. In the letter of October 1854, in which Modderman offered his services as a trading agent to the Jardine Matheson Company, he had given his general procuration to Mr Amorie van der Hoeven. So he must have known him quite well.

27 Appadurai 1986, 13-15.

28 "Art. 6. Diversche voorwerpen van Inboedel en Meubilair. B". Deed of division, legacy Tonco Modderman, 7 April 1871, Judge Jan.Herman Van der Meer de Hijs, Amsterdam.



Provenance of *View of the waterfront of Canton*

First owner Tonco Modderman (1813-1858)
 1847: Marriage with Angelique Ardesch (1831-1852)
 Two daughters: Marie & Louise Jacoba
 1850s: Acquisition of the painting in China, Macao
 1858: Inherited by Louise-Jacoba Modderman (1852-1875)
 1871: Marriage Louise-Jacoba with Cornelis Leembruggen
 1875: Inherited by Cornelis Leembruggen (1838-1905)
 1904: Inherited by Willem Leembruggen (1871-1925)
 1905: Long-term loan Museum Volkenkunde/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
 2016: Revivification

Figs. 5.5. and 5.6. Father Cornelis Johannes and son Willem Adriaan Leembruggen, Hendrik J. Haverman (1857-1928), oil on canvas, 1900-1924, 73 x 58 cm (father) and 100 x 80 cm (son), private collection.

Fig. 5.7. Loan agreement of W.A. Leembruggen with director of 's Rijks Ethnographisch Museum Leiden (Museum Volkenkunde), of 8 August 1905.

Fig. 5.8. Inventory card of the oil painting on loan from the Leembruggen family, in the museum system of Museum Volkenkunde/Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

When Modderman's daughter Louise married, she took this heirloom with her to furnish the walls of the Leembruggen family house. She was married in 1871 to Cornelis Leembruggen (1838-1905), director of the successful international textile factory Clos & Leembruggen in Leiden, manufacturers of Turkish camlet, wool and flag cloth. (Figure 5.5.) At their marriage, the Leembruggen-Modderman family had their family house in Leiden at the Oude Singel 78, where the paintings must have had stayed until Cornelis died in 1905. In this year, his son, Willem Leembruggen (1871-1925), the then director of the family's Leiden textile factory (Figure 5.6.), inherited the canvas. In the same year, Willem moved from the huge family house in Leiden to another, much smaller house along the coast in Scheveningen; he subsequently donated the painting as a long-term loan to Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, where it has remained

²⁹ Kopytoff 1986, 82.

³⁰ Although most of Museum Volkenkunde's objects from China and Japan are stored in the main building in Leiden, this large Leembruggen painting is kept on a painting rack in one of the depot buildings in 's Gravenzande. This complex, some 40 kilometres from Leiden, mainly stores the collections from Insular South East Asia, including Indonesia, Central and West Asia, Africa and South Asia.

³¹ Paul Van Dongen, former curator China in Museum Volkenkunde (1984-2011), informed me (July 2011) that neither he, nor his predecessor, since the 1950s to 1984, has ever displayed this painting.

ever since. (Figures 5.7. and 5.8.)

This loan to the museum clarifies something about the private valuation put upon this work of art by its owner at that time and, consequently, the meaning 'evaporated' from the painting itself. On the one hand, to put it negatively, the work could have been too big (no wall space in the new house), too dark, or in need of a restoration. On the other hand, to put it more positively, Willem Leembruggen's donation was given due to the trustworthy character of Museum Volkenkunde and its curators. He might have thought that his collection of Chinese export paintings would be much better off in their care, rather than keeping them himself. In all cases, the upshot was the deliberate act of renouncing the painting, which subsequently accrued new use value. Appraised as an expression of wealth and trading successes of his ancestors with an individual meaning, the painting was assigned a different value by Willem Leembruggen. Instead of treating the painting as an ordinary and saleable commodity and putting it up for auction at the art market, it was still considered to be a valuable item, worth preserving for future generations. Moreover, the family must have felt that selling the painting was, as Kopytoff calls it "trading downward."²⁹ This idea springs from the notion that things called art or historical objects are superior to the world of commerce.

When looking at the total trajectory from production to consumption, this painting, now languishing in the storeroom of Museum Volkenkunde in 's Gravenzande can be considered 'frozen'.³⁰ After the painting had been absorbed into the museum collection, it probably underwent a simple restoration. There is, however, no living or institutional memory of the painting ever having been exhibited following its donation and it was soon removed to the storeroom.³¹ Indeed, for decades, the harbour view has sat in the racks of the museum's depot, where one can only enjoy the painting by appointment. One of the descendants sounds a critical note about the current status of this painting: "This painting is only ever in the depot. Something more needs to be done with it!" He wonders whether such a

painting could not be regularly exhibited somewhere, so that people can see it? “It is in good condition and at the moment is perhaps worth quite a lot.”³² Hopefully, this biographical approach to the understanding of the Leembruggen Collection in general, and *View of the waterfront of Canton* in particular, which argues that biographies of people and things are inseparable, will indicate current and future roles for this painting within the museum. The increasing knowledge about this painting must surely lead to a higher valuation of this artwork with a revivification back in circulation.

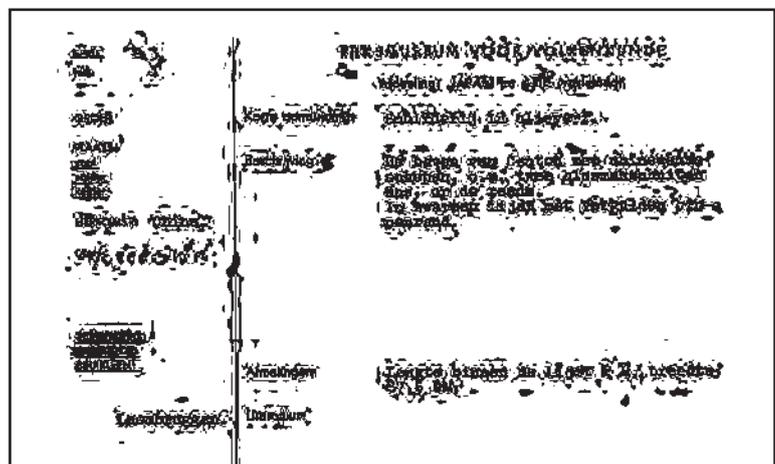
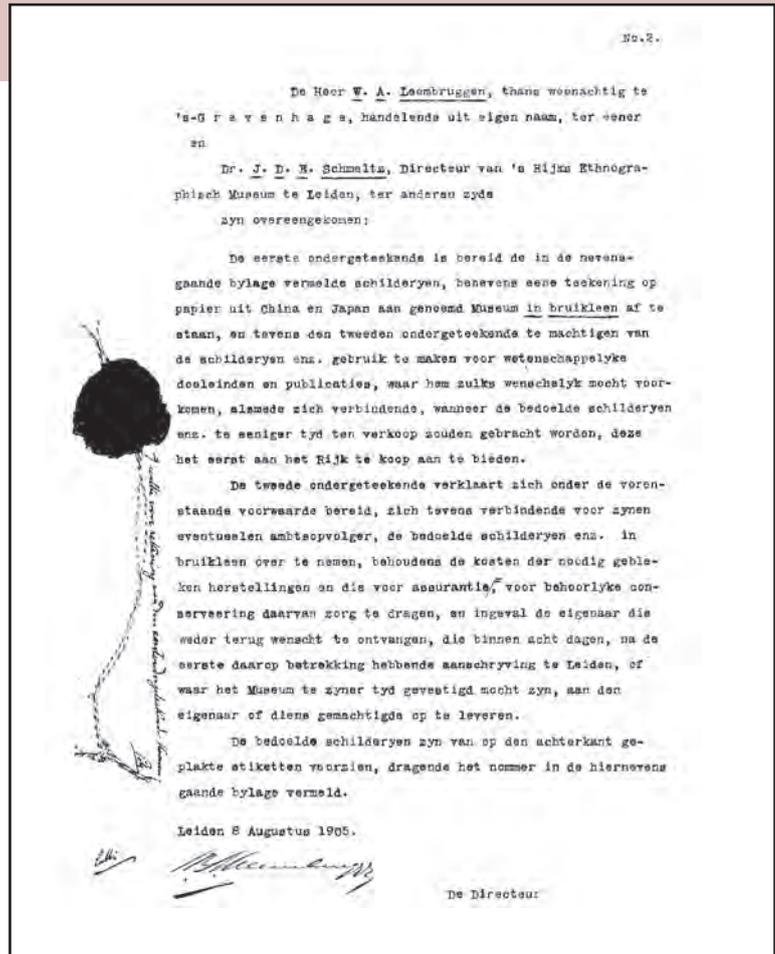
5.3. From ‘sentimental keepsakes’ to national cultural heritage

This section presents the social lives of two small, cohesive collections that can be considered ‘sentimental keepsakes’. Having disentangled their provenance, we can draw some careful conclusions about the degree of importance and, consequently, the extent to which we can notice any value accrument and/or dwindle of these sets of artworks in their lengthy afterlife. Firstly, a set of three nineteenth-century reverse glass paintings with two harbour views (the Bund in Shanghai and a view of Hong Kong) and one interior-garden scene from the Museum Volkenkunde collection are treated.³³ And, secondly, two Chinese ship portraits in the collection of the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam are discussed.³⁴

To learn more about the accrument or dwindle of value of these commodities, I contacted and have spoken with the descendants of their first owners.³⁵

Three reverse glass paintings in Museum Volkenkunde

First, the set of three reverse glass paintings with identical original hardwood frames, the last Chinese export paintings to be donated to



 32 Phone contact in April 2007 with Philip Leembruggen (1957), Wassenaar.
 33 Inv.nos. 6166–6 to 6166–8.
 34 Inv.nos. P3807 and P3815.
 35 For the information on the Leiden paintings I am indebted to Mrs. A. (Angela) Reinders Folmer (1948), I have spoken to on 24 November 2014 and with whom I corresponded (email 16 August 2015). The information about the two ship portraits in the Rotterdam collection comes from Mr. A.M. (Arnout) Steffelaar (1969). I am grateful for his time and for providing me data on the use of the paintings. Emails 3 and 14 December 2014 and 31 March and 3 August 2015, and personal conversation on 17 December 2014. I prepared the following questions: Where and when were the paintings obtained? Are there any stories known about the buying process and the time the first documented owner stayed in China or in the Dutch East Indies (diary, logbook)? Who inherited the paintings, or who owned them from the moment of their purchase to their location in the museum rack? Do you know what meaning or value was assigned to the paintings by consecutive heirs? Can we draw any conclusions from this information? How was the decision taken to donate the painting to a museum rather than take it to auction? As a donor, do you have any wishes with respect to the artworks? How would you describe their value to future generations?



Figs. 5.9.a. and 5.9.b. Garden scene with detail of the scroll painting, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 49 x 34 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-6166-6.



Fig. 5.10.a. and 5.10.b. View of the Bund in Shanghai with detail of the banner on the roof of the customs office, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 34.4 x 50 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-6166-7.

Museum Volkenkunde, is an object of study as a 'sentimental keepsake'. (Figures 5.9. to 5.11.) The depicted interior scene with three figures in an open room and on a garden terrace could be a scene from a story from Chinese classical literature: *Dream of the red chamber*, *The story of the Western wing* or *The romance of the three kingdoms*. On a paper strip, at the right of the painted painting on the wall, three characters are visible, 江山千 (*jiāng shān qiān*) (Figure 5.9.b.). This is only part of the text of the couplet; there should be another couplet on the other side of the painting. Furthermore, these three characters are only part of the text of the paper strip, with probably two more characters hidden behind the sitting woman, namely 古秀 (*gǔ xiù*). According to Guan, the whole sentence on this strip must be: 江山千古秀 (*jiāng shān qiān gǔ xiù*), which literally means 'the landscape is eternally beautiful'.³⁶

On the painting with a view of the Bund in Shanghai with foreign factories, four foreign establishments are pictured, along with the Shanghai customs office.³⁷ The inscription on the banner on the roof of these building reads 洋上海正 (*yang shàng hǎi zhèng*) (Figure 5.10.b.). As a whole, however, these four characters make no sense, suggesting that they are hand painted by a foreign painter or by an illiterate local artist.³⁸

The third painting shows a view of Hong



Kong harbour with white buildings and hills in the background.³⁹ At a glance, it is clear that it was not a master who produced the paintings. The colour palette used for the three paintings is sober. The overall execution of the paintings is quite limited. The Chinese painter tried to apply

³⁶ Email 10 June 2016.

³⁷ Inv.no. 6166-7. The fluttering flags on the roofs of the foreign trading houses indicated the countries that were established in Shanghai in this period. From left to right, we see the United Kingdom, (red flag with Union Jack in the top corner: the British red ensign), alongside the United States, next to which is a building depicted with a blue flag with a white diagonal cross. This is the Scottish Saltire. A flag with a slightly smaller cross is the house flag of the Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., from Aberdeen. On the far right, we see the French tricolore. Then, pictured in the foreground are three black screw-propellor steam ships with flags. From left to right: United Kingdom, with the red ensign, France, with the tricolore and a second white flag with red riangles in the four corners and two large black cursive letters 'WW'. This 'WW' is an inverted 'MM', indicating the house flag of the Cie. des Messageries Maritimes from Paris, and pictured on the front far right of the painting is a ship with a white, triangular flag with a red diagonal stripe. Alongside the steam corvettes, in the water in front of the quay of the Bund, a small clipper in full sail is visible. Source flags: Lloyd's book of house flags and funnels: <http://www.mysticseaport.org/library/initiative/ImPage.cfm>.

³⁸ Translation in English: Foreign (or ocean), Shanghai, principal (or main).

³⁹ Inv.no. RV 6166-8. On the buildings, painted in a repeating motif, 11 house flags flutter on the back row of foreign shipping companies. From left to right we can distinguish: 1. Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., Dundee & Newcastle Steam Schipping Co. Ltd., or Indo China China Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. London; 2. & 3. Both, United Kingdom with the Union Jack in the top corner: the British red ensign; 4. United States; 5. English house flag; 6. France; 7. Unknown; 8. R & C Allen, Glasgow of International Line Steamship Co. Ltd. (Christopher Marwood Whitby); 9. Denmark; 10. England; 11. Richard Irvin & Sons Ltd., Aberdeen, Eastern Shipping Co. Penang of Dolphin Steam Fishing Co. Ltd., Grimsby. In the foreground of the painting we can see three black British screw propellor steamships, recognisable from the flags: red colour with the Union Jack in the top corner, the red ensign, and their house flags fluttering in the top masts. In the middle is a ship with a flag divided diagonally into four quarters: white on the top, blue on the left side, red on the right side, yellow on the bottom (which colour has vanished). This is the house flag of the shipping compagny Peninsular & Oriental Steam Nav. Co., London, 1834.



a linear perspective in the paintings of Shanghai and Hong Kong, but did not succeed very well. Furthermore, the proportions and composition of the people, buildings and ships depicted are out of proportion with the elements (ships) on the foreground, rendered smaller than those supposed to be farther away (buildings). The quays on both harbour views are empty, which results in a rigidity and a feeling the painter had not finished his work yet.

The paintings belonged to the couple J.C. and C.M.E. Reinders Folmer, who lived in Shanghai, Kobe and Tokyo between the 1930s and 1940 and where Mr. Reinders Folmer (1903-1973) worked for the Nationale Handelsbank, as well as the Netherlands Trading Society, another forerunner of today's Dutch ABN AMRO bank. It is possible to compile a cultural biography of the paintings from the narrative told by their daughter, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer (1948).⁴⁰ During my talk with her in November 2014, it became apparent that her mother, Mrs. C.M.E. Reinders Folmer (1908-2005), had talked at great length about her "good and dear life" in Shanghai in the 1930s, where she fully participated in the expat society parties in this city, regularly visited exhibitions and bought art.

When the Second World War broke out in 1940, the couple left Japan, where they were living at that time, to visit family in the United States. They stored their art in a warehouse of the Swedish embassy in Japan and in a warehouse in San Francisco. The warehouse in Japan was robbed during their stay in the United States, but 'the silver', their painting collection and the Japanese netsukes stored in San Francisco were preserved. In 1942, the Reinders Folmer family boarded a ship again, back to 'the East'; back to work again, this time in Singapore. During their voyage, Pearl Harbour was attacked and so the

ship had to dock in Java, where the family settled in Bandung. In the same year, Java fell to the Japanese and the Dutch formally surrendered to the Japanese occupation forces. Because Mr. Reinders Folmer was fluent in Japanese, he was ordered to work as an interpreter in an internment camp, ruled by the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies of that time. Mother Reinders Folmer, when she realised that there was no escape and that she and her children would be arrested, placed all her valuables with trusted friends and even buried some of them, like many people did at that time in Java. After the Second World War, in 1945, the family was temporarily housed in Melbourne, after which they eventually moved back to the United States, via the Netherlands. At that time, when many Dutch were returning to the Netherlands from Indonesia, a lot of them left their belongings behind, including paintings. On Java, there were many warehouses filled with the possessions of people who had been in the Japanese internment camps. On the instructions of mother Reinders Folmer, a few of their valuables were recovered from the respective warehouses by a friendly acquaintance. The family did not stay long in the United States. In 1949 they left again for Singapore, where they spent a number of years before Mr. Reinders Folmer accepted a job as Regional Director of the *Nederlandse Handelsbank* in Jakarta.

In the talk and correspondence with her, it became clear that the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Reinders Folmer had seen similar paintings to those that form the focus of this section, in the



Fig. 5.II. View of Hong Kong, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 34.4 x 50 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-6166-8.

40 Although Mrs. A. Reinders Folmers has checked the narrative of these paintings with some of her relatives, I would, however, add a caveat, because of the fact that this story is just one source and that memory can play 'tricks' when remembering the past.

homes of both Chinese and European families and in public places such as restaurants, both in Indonesia and in the Netherlands. At the end of the 1950s, many Dutch had to leave Indonesia because of the Sukarno regime, which resulted in many objects, including all kinds of furniture and paintings, being shipped back to the Netherlands. A decade later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the prevailing view in the Netherlands was hostile to those who had lived in ‘the East’. The negative connotations of ‘the East – colonial – exploitation’ often caused embarrassment for the children of parents who had lived there. According to the Reinders Folmer’s daughter, there was a considerable ‘anti’ club in those years. By contrast, it was very fashionable, for example, to support the freedom movement in Cuba.

Despite the difficult time he had experienced there – and his wife and son having been imprisoned in Indonesia – until his death, Mr. Reinders Folmer always had warm feelings about ‘the East’, even though he could not easily express such feelings in the last decades of the last century.⁴¹ Society’s ‘anti’ attitude towards objects that symbolised ‘the East’ at this time explains why many of these paintings came onto the market via auction houses or were gifted to museums in these years.⁴²

In 1956, the family and the three paintings arrived in the Netherlands and settled in Aerdenhout. The paintings of the Bund and Hong Kong hung in the study, behind Mr. Reinders Folmer’s desk. This room, his daughter recalls, was a special place, “a real treasure chamber” with an extensive library of books about ‘the East’. The Reinders Folmer children loved to sit and read there.

After the death of her husband in 1997, Mrs. Reinders Folmer moved, together with the three artworks, to an apartment in Overveen, where she hung the interior- and garden scene with Chinese ladies in the guest room. In the contacts I had with Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer, the daughter, she expressed her feelings and memories about visiting her mother and told that she always

went into the guest room to have a look at ‘the ladies’. Her mother passed away in 2005, after which she and her family inherited the paintings as lawful heirs.

There is little we can say with certainty about the so-called ‘condensation of ideas’ relating to this acquisition. Due to the Chinese subject matter and her familiarity with her mother, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer believes that she bought the paintings in the 1930s in one of Shanghai’s antique stores. Likely, at that time these kinds of ‘antique’ artworks were available and fashionable among foreign households. Her mother always spoke lyrically about these years and the Chinese time she was so attached to, her daughter remembers. The knowledge that she always bought one or more iconic artworks in the places on earth where she lingered for a while, which made her remember ‘the good old days’, feeds the idea that the paintings came into the family’s possession there.⁴³

Despite the great significance and strong emotional value (“so strongly attached to my youth” and “they smelled of sandalwood, dust and cloves – a smell that is so reminiscent of my time in Jakarta”) in 2006, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer decided to donate the paintings and a number of other objects from Asia (e.g. a Japanese scroll depicting Decima) to Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. There were several factors behind this decision. First, was the belief that it was “vulnerable stuff,” which a museum could look after better than a private individual. Moreover, as a second argument, these reverse glass paintings were deemed unsuitable for the houses of the grandchildren: too much sunlight or not the proper climate (damp), etc. A third reason why the family felt it prudent to gift the artworks to Museum Volkenkunde was the idea that it was a straightforward way to deal with the legacy and would avoid any problems with heirs later on.

It is striking that there was never any discussion about taking the paintings to auction. They agreed unanimously that these paintings should stay in the Netherlands, given that they

41 Mr. Reinders Folmer took the view that only the ruling military Japanese generals should be held responsible for the crimes. The ordinary people had nothing to do with it. After the Second World War, Mr. Folmer Reinders cooperated with the war tribunals that put war criminals on trial. He was always concerned with documenting the war- and camp years as well as possible and, in this respect, worked closely with Prof. J.J. Brugmans of the University of Amsterdam. All the secret notes and diaries of Mr. and Mrs. Reinders Folmer from this time were transferred to the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD).

42 See Appendix I for information about dates when Chinese export paintings entered the museum walls, either by donation or purchased through auction houses or via private Asian art dealers.

43 Although some employees of companies were paid in natura for loss of salary during the wars years, for example, in the form of household goods or *objets d’art*, this was not the case for Mr. Reinders Folmer.

were so connected with the history of this Dutch family. Today, when many Chinese art connoisseurs are buying these kinds of paintings for museums in China, there is an almost 100% guarantee that ‘auctioning off’ would result in a life beyond the borders of the Netherlands.

In order to avoid them becoming ‘frozen’ in the Leiden museum depot, it would be wonderful if they could form part of a future exhibition. Thus, I agree with the heirs that these paintings and their associated stories should be displayed. This subject matter remains current. Indeed, nowadays there are again (new) heirs who do their business in Shanghai, Guangzhou or Hong Kong, giving these specific images, together with their stories and memories, an important use value. Their current worth is compiled by their cultural biography that started at the entwined Chinese export painting market and by their trajectory with an increasing value accrument during their social life in China, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and in the Netherlands, which, in turn, add to their historical and material value. Furthermore, through these paintings a history of the nineteenth and twentieth century emerges. What did they communicate across time and space? It is clear that their agency causes action of and interaction between humans throughout the paintings’ afterlife. They convey many stories, rather than that they bear witness to one single place or moment in time. The narrative just told, should persuade Museum Volkenkunde, as an arena where meaning of objects with their relation to identity are continuously at stake, to have a closer look at this set of three. New conservation technologies, new questions and new museum scholarship will open up new meanings. To communicate the fascinating story adherent to Chinese export painting in general, this set of three, in particular, is a good example for arguing that commodified artworks with their cohesive values makes this painting genre distinctive and a class in its own right.

Two ship portraits in Maritime Museum Rotterdam

The paintings treated in this section as a second party of ‘sentimental keepsakes’ are two ships portraits, donated at the end of 2006 to the Picturalia collection of the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam by A.M. Steffelaar. (Figures 5.12. and 5.13.)



The oil paintings once belonged to Meinard Frans van den Kerkhoff (1832-1897), helmsman and captain of big sailing vessels.⁴⁴ (Figure 5.14.) Via *Maritiem Digitaal*, the largest online database of maritime objects and literature in the Benelux (849,923 objects and titles), we know that before becoming captain in 1863, Van den Kerkhoff worked as a helmsman on board the *Cornelia*, a barque belonging to the Rotterdam shipping company P. de Boer.⁴⁵ He captained the same vessel between 1863 and 1866. In this period, he married Albertina Johanna de Jager (1848-1919) in Surabaya. From 1867-1870 he captained another barque, *Madura*, also from a Rotterdam shipping firm, Van Charante & Co. Once back in Rotterdam, in 1866 the pair had a daughter, Albertina Francoise (1886-1986), the grandmother of Mr. A.M. Steffelaar, the donator of the paintings to the Rotterdam Museum. The information on *Maritiem Digitaal*, furthermore, says that throughout his sailing career, Van den Kerkhoff was not a member of the captain’s college and so did not carry his own flag number of the ships that he captained. The many preserved *objets d’art* and other material culture from faraway places, makes clear, so wrote A.M. Steffelaar, that he regularly bought valuables for his own use during his travels to ‘the East’ and along the Chinese coast.⁴⁶ One of Steffelaar’s relatives kept Van den Kerkhoff’s collection of Imari porcelain and other art objects, before they left

Fig. 5.12. Ship portrait of the bark ship Wilhelmina, once belonged to Meinard Frans van den Kerkhoff (1832-1897), donated to the Maritime Museum Rotterdam by one of his descendants, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1863-1866, 57 x 70.5 x 3.8 cm, (including frame), inv.no. P3807.

44 Information about Van den Kerkhoff from www.maritiemdigitaal.nl (consulted June 2016).

45 The description of both paintings is based on the details of www.maritiemdigitaal.nl, delivered and described by Irene Jacobs, curator of paintings, prints and drawings, decorative arts, audiovisual collection and photo collection, Maritime Museum Rotterdam.

46 Emails Mr. A.M. Steffelaar 5 and 14 December 2014.



Fig. 5.13. Ship portrait of the three-master *Cornelia*, once belonged to Meinard Frans van den Kerkhoff (1832–1897), donated to the Maritime Museum Rotterdam by one of his descendants, anonymous, oil on canvas, 1860–1862, 57 x 70.5 x 3.8 cm, (including frame), inv.no. P3815.



Fig. 5.14. Portrait of Meinard Frans van den Kerkhoff (1832–1897).

the family. For a long time afterwards and to a great degree, these things symbolised his stay in China, Japan, and the Dutch East Indies.

One of the ship portraits in the Rotterdam museum is of the barque *Wilhelmina*, pictured from the starboard side with a name pennant, which is seen in reflection. (Figure 5.12.) On the front mast flutters the company's flag with the letters DB for 'De Boer', on the rear mast five signal flags flutter. The other ship portrait shows the three-master *Cornelia* sailing near to an Eastern coast (Lintin island?). (Figure 5.13.) This ship flies the captain's flag with the number 198 and the company flag 'DB' (De Boer). In the background, on the right, an English ship is depicted. On the right-hand side, along the coast, we can see a number of low buildings, possibly warehouses. Although we cannot go all the way back to the first documented owner of these paintings, we can, via his great-grandson, A.M. Steffelaar (1969), go some way back along the trajectory of their social life.

In Steffelaar's memory, refreshed by questioning his aunt, the paintings were very valuable in many ways and, as far as he remembers from seeing pictures and hearing stories, they decorated the walls in his grandmother's house and, later, after she died in 1986, his parents' house.⁴⁷ His father, Meinard Steffelaar (1923–2003), inherited both paintings, after his grandmother moved house and no longer had space to display them, and his great-uncle and aunt showed no interest in having them. The paintings hung in the official

residence of the gas plant on the Trekvlietplein in The Hague, where the family of Steffelaar's father grew up and lived until the death of Steffelaar's grandfather in 1948. When his father moved to Eindhoven to work for Philips, the paintings were also relocated and decorated the walls of their first house on the Montgomerylaan in that city. After they moved to a second residence in Eindhoven, they led a quiet life in the Steffelaar family home on the Nestorlaan until the 1990s. The last episode of their life, before they were added to the collection of the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam, was spent at the address where Steffelaar's parents spent their final years, before his mother passed away in 2006, the Cliosstraat in Eindhoven.

With the bequeathing to successive family members, the paintings' 'stories' were recounted and recounted again. As Manuel Charpy states, it is quite "common to exchange works of art [...], all transmitting a collective heritage."⁴⁸ The 'Steffelaar paintings' can be regarded as such. They were so important for this family and valuable to his father that Steffelaar used an image of the painting of the barque *Wilhelmina* on the thank you card that he sent to those who had attended the funeral of his father. (Figure 5.15.) There is no better way to demonstrate the high symbolic value of this painting. Thus, this image was forever connected with his father, and to the way Steffelaar's father felt about his grandfather Van den Kerkhoff. It accrued value because of his deeds, which this painting represented so characteristically.

Despite being the only heir to both paintings, Steffelaar had little interest in keeping them for himself. He decided to give them a new destination and to find a museum to keep them for posterity. Kept in such an institution, the paintings can contribute, so he strongly believes, to stories from the past, beautiful or otherwise. It is known that Van den Kerkhoff, the first documented owner of these two oil paintings, during his time sailing, had lived in the Leuvehaven in Rotterdam, close to the place where the Maritime Museum Rotterdam is now based. It was an easy choice, then, for Steffelaar to donate them to this museum. The great-grandson's donation to the museum gives the paintings a secure family provenance from the beginning of their existence.

To further analyse the meaning of these paintings I bring the visual economy perspective

47 Talk with A.M. Steffelaar on 17 December 2014. Although checked with his relative, I am aware that also the narrative of these two ship portraits is based on one personal source.

48 Charpy 2015, 212.

with the closely connected theoretical frame of a 'material complex' to the fore. Both ship portraits are examples of the well-organised commodified art production system in the Pearl River delta. This aspect is a meaningful time- and place-specific element, which accrued value to the paintings from the very beginning. In addition, the true value of these artworks is better understood and appreciated by taking their materiality and the social relational aspects of their biography into account.

Along their journey from that past time to the Maritime Museum they represented a culturally constructed reality. They kept the memory of Captain Van den Kerckhoff alive and, in doing so, until their donation to the museum, they re-inforced the identity of his descendants. Their agency, so I argue, caused an evaporation process insofar as these paintings motivated the owner's intention to act. After he became the holder of both works, Steffelaar did extract meaning and value from them that made him decide to give them a proper and safe future in a museum context. This new environment accrued new meanings and new ideas, which, in turn, were concentrated in the objects. The Maritime Museum saw their value and, almost immediately after they entered the museum, a decision was made to restore one of the paintings. See Figure 5.13. This justified value accrument resulted in this restored painting being part of the 2011 exhibition *Yin & Jan* about the close trading relationship between the Netherlands and China, the influence these two countries have had on one another and the major role played by shipping in this process. The *Yin & Jan* exhibition was inspired by the sister-city relationship between Rotterdam and Shanghai: both cities with a major transport hub.

5.4. Early icons of the historical China trade – a material complex case ⁴⁹

In the last part of this chapter I will focus on three eighteenth-century Chinese export oil paintings, which can be considered the earliest examples of this kind of art in Dutch collections.

49 A part of this section was published in a modified form in 'China back in the frame. An early set of three Chinese export harbour views in the Rijksmuseum'. The Rijksmuseum Bulletin, September 2013.

50 The Rijksmuseum owns an earlier painting, unfortunately there is no data available about the acquisition. This painting (thanks to Van Dyke & Mok, 2015) can be dated to 1771. Inv.no. NG-1052.

51 The restoration by Pauline J. Marchand and Nico Lingbeek is discussed in detail in Reuss et al. 2014. Its paper, textile, glue and paint were researched. This technical material analysis was carried out by Stichting Restauratieateliers Limburg, together with the Cultural Heritage Agency (René Hoppenbrouwers, Pauline J. Marchand, Kate Seymour, & Qiu Xiaohui, *Three China trading paintings from the National Museum of Ethnology* (unpublished research documentation), Stichting Restauratieateliers Limburg 2009).



Meinard is uitgevaren.

Velen kwamen afscheid nemen van

Meinard Steffelaar

*De hartverwarmende aandacht heeft ons goed gedaan en getroost.
Onze hartelijke dank voor uw medeleven en steun.*

(Figures 5.16. to 5.18.) The three early and well-documented paintings *View of Macao*, *View of Whampoa Anchorage*, and *View of the Quay of Canton*, were, in all probability, produced in 1773 in a Cantonese artist's studio.⁵⁰ Thorough conservation carried out in 2010-2012 has restored the paintings to their former glory.⁵¹ They come from the collection of Museum Volkenkunde and, on loan to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, they now form part of the permanent display. They have been given an appropriate place in room 1.05, where the narrative of the Netherlands overseas in the eighteenth century is told by objects of that time. (Figure 5.19.)

When we use a cultural biography to describe the origin of these paintings, it appears that Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807), lawyer, amateur

Fig. 5.15. Thank you card with an image of the Chinese oil painting with the bark ship Wilhelmina after the death of Meinard Steffelaar, one of the descendants of Meinard Frans van den Kerckhoff, the first owner of this painting.



Figs. 5.16. to 5.18. Set of three paintings with view of Macao, Whampoa Anchorage, and of the quay of Canton, anonymous, oil on paper, laid down on canvas, c. 1773, 52 x 76 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.nos. SK-C-1722 to 1724.

Fig. 5.19. Room 1.05 in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam with the three paintings from the Royer Collection (2013).

scholar and collector of Chinese (art-) objects, played a crucial role in the existence of this trio. Moreover, much is known about the trajectory they have followed between then and now.⁵² First, this section treats ideas about dating, and the formal aspects of stylistic and compositional issues will be discussed briefly. It is well worthwhile scrutinising this trio closely in order to discover the role that these (kinds of) paintings played in the lives of the European travellers to China in general, and in the Dutch context in particular.

Early harbour views

With their exquisite detail, the harbour scenes provide a wealth of information about these three locations that were so meaningful to Westerners. The harbour of Macao, a Portuguese possession from 1557 to 1999, is situated around 115 kilometres from Canton. (Figure 5.20).

When Western merchants arrived in the Pearl River Delta, Macao was an obligatory first stop on the way to their trading posts in Canton. They had to apply for trading permits here, and find local pilots who could lead them through Bocca Tigris, the narrow passage in the river delta, where there was a second compulsory stop at the customs post. The town in the centre of the *View of Macao*, viewed from Penha Hill, is home to a number of churches and monasteries, large and small, with Western architecture – some with domes and some without; some with austere façades, some lavishly ornamented. (Figure 5.21.) Familiar landmarks can be seen in the centre: the façade of St Paul’s Church at the foot of Monte Forte (right of centre), the baroque church of St Domingo and the church



⁵² For more information on Royer see Van Campen 2000-a, b and c. For the later museum history of the objects see Effert 2003 and 2008.

⁵³ Sargent, Palmer & Tsang (eds.) 1996, 54.

of St. Lorenzo – without the two square towers, which were not added until 1846.⁵³

The island of Whampoa is situated around a hundred kilometres to the north of Macao and fifteen kilometres south of Canton. On the *View of Whampoa Anchorage*, we see large Western ocean-going vessels bound for Canton, anchored in a specially built anchorage off this island for several months every year. The flags on the sterns are good distinguishing marks in terms of determining where the ships came from. Eight English, two Danish, one Swedish, two French (white flag) and four Dutch vessels lie at anchor with hoisted topmasts and pennants flying. (Figure 5.22) Other pennants indicate that there are three more ships behind the hill with the graves. From left to right, a Dutch, a Swedish and a Danish flag show just above the hill. All the vessels have their mainmasts lowered. These were struck so that the ships anchored there for months could not sail away without notice.

In the trading season, the Western trading companies rented two- or three-storey mercantile houses and places of residence as their trading posts. In the period of the historical Canton trade system (1757-1842), the Chinese authorities, which confined all foreign maritime trade to Canton at that time, kept a close eye on the Westerners to ensure that they only stayed in and around their *hongs* and did not go into the town. They were built on a special quay beside the Pearl River outside the high walls that surrounded Canton. The *View of the Quay of Canton* shows the Pearl River with various boats and the quay with seventeen Western and Chinese *hongs*. The flags outlined against the empty sky easily identify the trading posts. To their left flies a pale flag with Chinese characters, which marks the location of a customs post. From left to right we can see the Danish flag, the white flag of the French royal house and the Swedish, English and Dutch flags. (Figure 5.23.) To the right of the Dutch flag, in Figure 5.18., we can just see the Creek factory, which was named after the adjacent river ‘The Creek’, which ran parallel to the west wall of Canton. To the right of the Creek there is a hong on wooden piles. On the left of the French trading post is a gate, which led to New China Street, where there were countless workshops and shops, as there were in Old China Street and Hog Lane (immediately to the left of the English factory). This was where Western traders privately purchased souvenirs and merchandise.



Fig. 5.20. Map of the Pearl River Delta.



Fig. 5.21. View of Macao (detail), anonymous, oil on paper, laid down on canvas, c. 1773, 52 x 76 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. SK-C-1722.



Fig. 5.22. View of Whampoa Anchorage (detail), anonymous, oil on paper, laid down on canvas, c. 1773, 52 x 76 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. SK-C-1723.



Fig. 5.23. View of the quay of Canton (detail), anonymous, oil on paper, laid down on canvas, c. 1773, 52 x 76 cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. SK-C-1724.

Dating

A number of elements in this set of paintings allow us to date the depicted scenes accurately. The flags on the ships and the number of vessels near Whampoa, for instance, correspond to the situation in the 1773-1774 trading season. From the information conscientiously registered in archival documents and in the particularly informative work *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries* (also online), we know that in the autumn of 1773 four Dutch East Indiamen arrived in Canton: the *Holland* and the *Voorberg* from Amsterdam, the *Europa* from Zeeland, and the *Jonge Hellingman* from Rotterdam.⁵⁴ This latter ship replaced the *Juno* from Batavia.⁵⁵ The flags on the churches in Macao (the eighteenth-century Portuguese flag with the escudo) and those in front of the trading posts in Canton are other all-important pointers that indicate the same trading season.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the details of the architectural features of the buildings depicted on *View of the Quay of Canton* make it possible to pin down the date of the depicted scene to 1773 with great certainty. We know, for example, that the wall to the left of the Danish *factorij* was built in 1772-1773.⁵⁷ Furthermore, another important indicator for dating this painting is the representation of the Dutch *factorij*, which still has a short, open balcony protruding from the first floor. We know that this structure doubled in height and was provided with a roof in the

spring of 1774. An extended, closed arcade was also built on the ground floor during this renovation.⁵⁸ On 4 January 1772, the representative of the VOC in Canton wrote that the VOC wanted a new two-storey covered balcony, just like the English had, which would allow them to load and unload their sampans whatever the weather.⁵⁹ We know that the Dutch ships that left Canton at the end of 1772 had orders for building materials. In 1773, the Dutch also decided to build a new warehouse, on higher ground, so that the cases of tea could be protected if the river ever broke its banks. From the research on the Dutch *hong* in Canton done by Jörg, it is known that the material for these renovations arrived with one of the Dutch ships that reached Canton via Batavia in September 1773.⁶⁰ The renovations were finished in February-July 1774, during a quiet period after the trading season.⁶¹ Another pointer to an early production date of the three harbour views is the fact that, as the technical material analysis undertaken by Stichting Restauratieateliers Limburg in cooperation with the Cultural Heritage Agency showed, they are painted on *mitsumata* paper, a combination of cotton and jute that is pasted onto the canvas. Both paper and canvas are tensioned over the edges of the stretcher. The painters' decision to mount paper on canvas and work on that, rather than directly on the canvas itself, tells us that knowledge and understanding of European painting was still at a very early stage.⁶²

54 An East Indiaman is a general name for any sailing ship operating under charter or licence to any of the East India Companies of the major European trading powers between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. The term is therefore also used to refer to vessels belonging to the Dutch (*Oostindiëvaarder*) VOC. These East Indiamen or transom return ships were a mix of merchant- and war ship. They had a cannon deck, but also room to transport goods from Asia. This ship type was in use until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the threat of pirates receded.

55 Jörg 1982, appendix 1, 195-201. Bruijn, Gaastra & Schöffner, 1979. See also: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das/EnglishIntro>.

56 After the French revolution, from 1790, the white flag was replaced with the French tricolore. The barriers on the quay, the rise of the land in the foreground, the depiction of the skies, and the type of ships are other indicators, also used by Van Dyke & Mok and Conner in their publications to date these paintings.

57 Van Dyke & Mok 2015, 14.

58 *Ibid.*, 10 and 14. Crossman 1991, 431.

59 Van Dyke & Mok 2015, 10. The Hague National Archives, 4556, entry under 'Factory' and Canton 35, Resolution no. 2, 1772.01.04.

60 Jörg 1982, 195-201.

61 Van Dyke & Mok 2015, 14. The Hague National Archives, 4556, under 'Factory', Canton 36, Resolution no. 9, 1773.02.15, Resolutie nr. 11, 1773.03.11, Canton 37, Resolutie nr. 1, 1774.01.06, Canton 38, Resolutie nr. 2, 1775.01.19, en Canton 82, 1773.02.07 en 1773.09.12-21.

62 In the period 1780-1830 pictures were painted primarily on imported European paper. This paper came from paper merchants like the London firms of J. Whatman and A. Cowan & Son and from the Dutch paper manufacturer Van Gelder.

Style, composition and formal aspects

In the three geographical paintings, each one a characteristic example of early Chinese export painting, the painter demonstrates an awareness of the concept of 'Western perspective', an important aspect that the Chinese painters of these and comparable views had to master. This set is a characteristic example of early versions of this genre, because of stylistic (a sense of Western landscape painting style with three quarters of the canvas occupied with an empty sky with little depth), compositional (comparable compositions of these kinds of harbour views from this early period – 1770s – appear broadly identical) and formal aspects (mounting of paper on canvas).

In *View of the Quay of Canton*, the artist used the worm's eye view – the horizon is low, immediately above the bottom edge of the picture. The scene is rendered with central perspective from a low standpoint. In *View of Macao* an attempt was made to employ a bird's-eye view. This is not entirely successful; for example, the horizon should be higher. The viewer does, however, look down from the centre and, as a result, the depicted scene is easily visible. This is probably a well-chosen composed viewpoint. In this way the painter could show the viewers as much details as possible. The accurate details of the topographical early *View of Macao* can almost be compared with cartographical elements of a map. The dark foreground in the depictions of Macao and Whampoa reinforces the perspectival image, as do the vessels by the quay of Canton, carefully placed in the composition. The vast sky in the paintings displays little depth and minimal drawing, a painting style employed between 1760 and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when all skies of these kinds of harbour views were painted with a low horizon: bare and sleek. Furthermore, there is clearly no question of a strictly applied linear perspective, but rather a combination of Chinese and Western style techniques. The question is whether this is a result of incompetence and ignorance or of a difference of opinion about aesthetic values? As Wang et al. and Van Dyke & Mok posit, it looks like the Chinese painter might have tried to avoid the problems associated with the use of linear perspective, whereby the vanishing points of horizontal lines should meet at one point on the horizon of these harbour views.⁶³ This was

not the practice of Chinese export painters. The choice for the combination of a (Western) linear perspective with the familiar (Chinese) aesthetic quality of multi-perspective was probably deliberate. Moreover, applying this multiperspectivism comes close to the Chinese practice of painting handscrolls and the way of reading them. An explanation for this eclecticism is, and I concede with Mok on this point, that they did not want to skimp on any details.⁶⁴ By applying the Chinese way of painting and the inconsistent use of Western perspective rules, export painters accentuated a great degree of detail in their representations of their subjects, which often resulted in a strange, mysterious, incoherent, and certainly also fascinating atmosphere. It is partly for this mixture of painting styles that these kinds of works were (and are again) so highly appreciated.

If we compare different images of the quay at Canton with one another, it seems that compositions from a particular period are broadly identical. In many respects, the placement of buildings and boats are the same, but there are differences in details, in the representation of flags, windows, doors and pillars. It seems that a template was used for the rough outline of buildings and the positioning of boats and that, subsequently, Chinese painters meticulously painted the details to keep the depicted scene as current as possible in order to maximise the possibility of sale.

This special construction, whereby the images are first painted on paper and subsequently pasted onto the canvas, and – above all – the underdrawing discovered during the restoration, deviates in several aspects from the norm. The sparsely applied oil paint on the three harbour views, which gives a gouache-style appearance, gives all three the same structure. The paint is so delicate that some details can only be seen with a magnifying glass. An underdrawing in a water-colour medium on the *View of the Quay of Canton*, probably applied with a brush, was discovered in infrared photographs. Changes relative to the underdrawing were made in the final painting. In the top right hand corner in the infrared photograph a little boat is visible in the underdrawing, behind the mast. (Figure 5.24.) In the final result (Figure 5.25.) this boat has disappeared. This indicates that the anonymous painter, who seemed to have struggled to find the right composition for his work, was seeking an accurate representation. This discovery

63 Van Dyke & Mok 2015, 49. Wang et al. 2011, 9.

64 Mok 2014, 23-43.



Fig. 5.24. and 5.25. Infrared photograph (5.24.) and normal photograph (5.25.) of View of Canton (detail). In the top right hand corner in the infrared image a little boat is visible in the underdrawing, behind the mast.

supports the idea that these paintings were not produced *en masse* and as quickly as possible, but rather that the painter took ‘pains’ to incorporate Western pictorial idiom and painting conventions into his own painting tradition. Whether this was entirely in line with Royer’s wishes is another question. He was certainly always searching for Chinese objects that could inform him about Chinese culture and was not just something produced to please the eye of the Westerner.

Early harbour views as commodities with a social life: A cultural biography

The cultural biographies in 5.2. and 5.3. make clear that paintings with a maritime subject matter can be appreciated as identity strengthening objects and therefore are significant in the context of historic commercial enterprises. The practices in these paintings’ life stories also demonstrate a concern for posterity and “the trust in the ability of them to pass on family culture.”⁶⁵ The life story of the three harbour views in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, once acquired by Royer, show that the intentional purchase and later exchange of these kinds of paintings can also be driven by other motives. Much is known about how the paintings have travelled from their place in the collection of Chinese objects in Royer’s Chinese museum to their current location in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The paintings can be regarded as narrative records of a special and time-specific history. Different methods are conceivable to ensure that they tell their stories. In our case, the three harbour views lend themselves well to being treated as products characteristic of the historical China trade. This

⁶⁵ Charpy 2015, 213.

⁶⁶ Much, if not all of the information about Royer and his collection of Chinese paintings in his The Hague house comes to me from the research by Jan van Campen. The cultural biography about the beginning period of the three harbour views is built on Van Campen’s research results. Van Campen 2000-a, 73, 76-79, 116, 229-243. Van Campen 2010, 48, 116.

⁶⁷ Meilink-Roelofs 1980, 458-469. Van Campen 2000-a, 73, 76-77.

implies that I do not treat them as paintings created under the influence of Western painting conventions or of a specific art historical development per se, nor do I treat them as symbols of a break with an old and simultaneously the start of a new artistic movement or trend, but rather as a product that is intended purely for exchange; that is to say, as ‘things’ (commodities) that can be bought and sold, exchanged or given as a gift to another.

Given the strong focus in *Made for Trade* on the consumer-end of the Chinese export painting phenomenon in the Dutch context, the first important phase to mention in the biography of the paintings is their first stay in the collection of Chinese objects in Royer’s ‘Chinese museum’. China was one of his hobbies. The surviving pieces clearly express his desire to collect knowledge about China, irrespective of the information, such as that spread by missionaries.⁶⁶ In his time, there was an abundance of Asian artefacts in Holland, but Royer’s idea to create a study collection was, by contrast, incredibly rare. He built up his museum with the help of his friendship with high VOC functionaries in Canton, such as Ulrich Gualtherus Hemmingson (1741-1799), and his contacts, among whom Jean Paul Certon (1741-1793).⁶⁷ Hemmingson lived almost continuously in Canton and Macao between 1765 and 1790, aside from a number of journeys to Europe. Via Hemmingson, Royer came into contact with the Chinese Carolus Wang, an interpreter who had converted to Christianity, and who had been in a seminary in Naples where he had learned Latin. Besides Wang assisting his Dutch friend Royer in studying Chinese, he also ensured that Royer obtained the right books and objects through his

VOC contacts. In addition to the purchase of his Chinese products via his network, Royer also bought part of his collection in Holland. Indeed, his collection comprises many objects that can be grouped under the heading of ‘Chinese export art’. So far, however, there are unfortunately no clear indications about what Royer’s intentions were when he bought the three paintings and became their first owner. The question is whether his contact in Canton had asked for this set to be made, or whether Hemmingson or one of his Chinese trade contacts felt that these paintings would fit perfectly in Royer’s collection, or whether Royer had actually bought the paintings in the Netherlands?

We know from the thorough research undertaken by Van Campen that in Royer’s house in the upmarket Bezuidenhout area of The Hague (Figure 5.26.), a large number of paintings hung in a row in two rooms and in a cabinet on the first floor – the back room, the painting room and the cabinet in the library. After the death of Royer in 1807, his collection fell to his widow Johanna Louisa van Oldenbarneveld, also known as Tullingh (1735-1814). When she died in 1814, her possessions, including all the books, paintings, curiosities, prints and drawings ever assembled by her late husband were inventoried. In this inventory from 1815, most of the paintings were summarily described as ‘portraits’, ‘painting’ or ‘miniatures’; thus, we do not know where exactly in his house Royer had located the three Chinese harbour views or what significance they gained from their placement. Although little is known about Royer’s painting collection, and the low valuation prices at that time would suggest that this collection was also given a low valuation, the concentration of so many paintings in the three rooms is interesting. The phenomenon of the painting room is a typical part of the eighteenth-century interior, and by showing his painting collection in this concentrated manner, Royer adopted the prevailing fashion and practice of the affluent circles of The Hague. For him, the paintings were valuable carriers of information about China. As mentioned above, after Royer’s death in 1807, his wife inherited the three paintings. When, in 1814, she too died, in accordance with the wishes of her husband, she bequeathed the paintings to King Willem I.

The oldest description of the objects in

Royer’s museum is to be found in an inventory of 1816 by Reinier Pieter van de Kastele (1767-1845).⁶⁸ This inventory served as a starting point for a brief catalogue of Royer’s museum.⁶⁹ In the *Inventaris van het Cabinet Rariteiten nagelaten door Mevrouw J.L. van Oldenbarneveld, Weduwe van den Heer J.T. Roijer* [sic], Van de Kastele writes about the three paintings: “View of the city Macao, very detailed in terms of veracity painted in oil paint on the canvas, in a black lacquered frame with gilt edging, View of the harbour Wam-po, painted as above, ditto frame and of similar size, and View of the anchorage at Canton (or actually Kwantung): with the factories there of trade driven nations, and much bustle of ships, images, etc., painted and of the same size as the abovementioned.”⁷⁰ It is clear that Van de Kastele saw the three harbour views as a cohesive set. With the same format, identical frames and a stylistic unity in terms of “veraciously (*naar het wezen*) painted in oil paint on canvas,” we can also adopt this view.

The ‘Royer legacy’ from 1814, with its important collection of 3,000 Chinese and Japanese artefacts, led King Willem I (1772-1843) to establish the Cabinet of Chinese



Fig. 5.26. View of the Herengracht, The Hague, with the house of Royer on the front right, B.J. van Hove, panel, c. 1825-1835, 51 x 73 cm, Historical Museum of The Hague, inv.no. 1924-0007-SCH.

Rarities in 1816. Soon after its creation, he decided to bring together diverse art objects, together with a large number of objects that had belonged to his father, stadtholder Willem V, in a cabinet in a space in the Buitenhof in The Hague; he changed the name to the Royal Cabinet of Rarities. In addition to ethnographical and ethnological objects, the collection contained artefacts from the Royal House and from the collections of previous stadtholders, important for the general history of the Netherlands.⁷¹ In the years following its

68 Van de Kastele 1816.

69 Van Campen 2000-a, 287-369.

70 *Ibid.*, 322.

71 Effert 2003, 33.

establishment, the collection grew considerably, which led to it being moved to the ground floor of the Mauritshuis in The Hague in 1820. The informative guidebook, *Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden* from 1823, written with passion and understanding by R.P. van de Kastele, the first director of the Royal Cabinet, provides a spatial and geographic breakdown of the cabinet.⁷² Furthermore, the comparative ethnography, the trade relations of the Netherlands and the development of art all get a place in the catalogue, which can be seen as a first step towards a serious study of material culture from a comparative perspective.⁷³ The division was made in relation to function and material. The trade relations of Holland with East Asia were exposed on the basis of images. Room 1 of the Royal Cabinet contains “art products of the Chinese”, displayed in cabinets against the wall, on lecterns in the middle of the rooms and as paintings aside on the walls.⁷⁴ The three paintings are specifically mentioned.⁷⁵

The fact that they were included in the catalogue as separate items is not that strange. We know that it was a challenge for Van de Kastele to show the versatility of the collection. As Rudolf Effert also remarks, the comparative ethnography, with the emphasis on trade and crafts, by means of studying the objects and artefacts, gives meaning to the study and understanding of the people on earth.⁷⁶ The ethnographic presentation was arranged both geographically and in terms of materials and use. With the opportunity to compare cultures, the Royal Cabinet returned to the eighteenth-century ideal of visual education. The three Chinese harbour views were seen as products characteristic of the cultural dynamic between East and West and symbolic of ‘trade and crafts’ between these geographically distant areas. In addition, it was obvious that they should be

employed as educational tools at that time.

In 1840, Abraham Anne van de Kastele (1814-1893) was appointed as successor to his father Reinier Pieter. He remained director until his retirement in 1876. The guide, *Korte handleiding ter bezigtiging der verzameling van zeldzaamheden in het Koninklijk Kabinet op het Mauritshuis in 's Gravenhage*, that A.A. van de Kastele had made in 1855, uses group numbering and so is utterly useless in terms of gaining an insight into the collection at that time.⁷⁷ The catalogue makes no separate mention of the three harbour views from China. They were classified by Van de Kastele in the last chapter as ‘objects belonging to ethnography’, under the heading ‘Some Paintings in Oil’.⁷⁸ We know that he made a bit of a mess of things during his directorship. An important inventory and a register, in which all the gifts and purchases were recorded with the names of the donors, went missing, and diverse foreign visitors also criticised the catalogue for its confusing descriptions of the objects.⁷⁹ Under his regime, the Royal Cabinet became an exotic cabinet of rarities that was popular with the public, but completely missed the developments in museums and science in the nineteenth century. Everything points to the fact that, when Van de Kastele was in charge, the paintings led a dormant and insignificant existence on the ground floor of The Hague’s Mauritshuis.

In May 1876, A.A. van de Kastele resigned after 36 years of directorship; a few months later, the management was turned over to David van der Kellen Jr. (1827-1895). He would lead the cabinet for almost seven years until it was split up in 1883. In April 1880, the Minister of the Interior proposed to Van der Kellen and Lindor Serrurier (1846-1901), deputy director of the Leiden-based National Museum of Ethnography (Rijks Ethnografisch Museum), that the Royal Cabinet be split into a

72 Van de Kastele 1824.

73 Effert 2003, 53.

74 Van de Kastele 1824, 9.

75 Ibid., 30. “Kamer I, Aan de muur, ter zijde. [...] Gezicht van de haven Wampoa, zeer uitvoerig naar het wezen geschilderd, in olieverw, op doek in eene zwarte verlakte lijst, met verguld bies. Gezicht van de stad Makão, geschilderd, als boven in dito lijst en van gelijke grootte. Gezicht van de reede te Kanton of Kwam-tung, en de faktorien der aldaar handeldrijvende natiën, met veel gewoel van beelden enz., geschilderd en van grootte als de voorgemelde.”

76 Effert 2003, 54. Rudolf Effert studied Cultural Anthropology in Leiden and obtained his PhD in 2003. His research concerns the history of Dutch ethnography and cultural anthropology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on which he has published several monographs and articles.

77 Van de Kastele 1855.

78 Ibid., 29.

79 Effert 2003, 59-60.

department of ethnographical artefacts and a department for the museum of comparative art and crafts with objects relevant to the history of the Netherlands. In March 1883, the popular Royal Cabinet in The Hague had significantly expanded the collection of the new *Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst* (Dutch Museum for History and Art), now the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, and, since then, Leiden has had a wealth of ethnographic material within its city walls. All non-native ‘rarities’, along with three Chinese export harbour views of Macao, Whampoa and Canton, were transferred to the National Museum of Ethnography, currently Museum Volkenkunde, in 1883.⁸⁰

Museum Volkenkunde has the most representative collection of Chinese ethnographica of all the ethnographic museums in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries. The *Leidse Collectieprofiel China* (Leiden Collection Profile China) from 2008 indicates that this collection consists of general objects from the Qing period (1644-1911), ranging in nature, quality and age.⁸¹ Especially in terms of the paper collection, with circa 2,500 paintings, posters, prints, cuttings and rubbings, the size and quality of the individual objects from a subcollection (export painting) was and still is important. “Not strong, but responsive to improvement,” was how the paper collections were described in the Collection Profile. There is no special attention for the paintings from the original Royer collection in this profile, nor anything about an “active strengthening” of the subcollection of Chinese export art, Chinese paper and painting.

After the paintings were assigned to the National Ethnographic Museum in 1883 little more was heard of them. With the implementation of the *Delta Plan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage* between 1991-2001, the

entire collection was cleaned and, where necessary, restored, photographed and digitally registered. During this operation, a condition report about the paintings was prepared, in which they are earmarked as ‘Category A’.⁸² This report includes *inter alia* that the paint and primer layers are cracked with bits even missing, that there is talk of woodworm (also in the stretchers), that there are diverse spots, surface damage and strange white stains on the canvas, and that the varnish and gilding on the frames had either peeled off, disappeared or was damaged. By categorising these paintings as ‘A’, Museum Volkenkunde, rightly afforded them an important status. Indeed, in a sense, already before the creation of Museum Volkenkunde, the seeds were sown for the current China subcollection with the objects collected by Royer in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, since this valuable categorisation, there has been no coherent, logical follow up with respect to the three harbour views. They were brought to a depot complex in ’s-Gravenzande (the so-called MIBO warehouse), almost 40 kilometres from Leiden, and are lying quietly in a box on the shelf. Thus, we can observe that in their Leiden time, they have led an insignificant depot life, until, in 2000, Van Campen completed a dissertation about Royer and his collection of Chinese objects.⁸³ In the same year, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam organised the exhibition *Royers Chinese kabinet* with an eponymous catalogue, in which the *View of the Quay of Canton* was printed prominently over two pages.⁸⁴ Due to the poor condition of the painting, the physical exhibition of the painting was out of the question and only a print in the catalogue was possible for this exhibition. Van Campen appraised its valuable merits for the informative function and the strong symbolic value of this painting for the Royer collection and its associated China trade. After the exhibition in

80 The Rijks Ethnografisch Museum retained its name until 1931. Subsequently, after a few years as the Rijksmuseum van Etnografie in 1935 it was given the name Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (National Museum for Ethnography). Due to becoming independent in 1995 it is officially called a ‘Foundation’ and in accordance with the spirit of the time, since 2007 the museum has also had the name Museum Volkenkunde. Since 2013 the name Museum Volkenkunde has been used and, since 2014, it has been part of the National Museum of World Cultures.

81 Van Dongen 2008, 68-74.

82 In the 1990s, all the museum collections in the Netherlands were divided into categories: Top pieces, A, B, C, and D collections. The nature of the collection was taken into account. The A-category is for objects that are central to the interests of the institution and fit within the collection profile of that museum. A painting by Vermeer could be a C-collection piece in an ethnographic museum, while the same work would be a top piece in an art museum. Pieces in the D-category contain insufficient information or are of little use or interest for the relevant institution.

83 Van Campen 2000-a, b en c.

84 Van Campen & Oomes 2000.

the Rijksmuseum it went all quiet around Royer's artworks again. However, in 2006, the beginning of my study into the subject of Chinese export paintings in the Netherlands, the three paintings have once again come into full view.⁸⁵ Already in 2007 there appeared to be interest from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in the acquisition of the three harbour views on a long-term loan. In the *Collection Plan Asian Art* of the Rijksmuseum 2011-2016, we can read that this places high value on its public getting to know the art of Asia and the historical bond that the Netherlands has in this area.⁸⁶ The museum collects the best possible examples of Asian art from all periods and regions. Many objects from the collection were made for local clients and thus give the impression that the (art) objects were important in Asia itself. Other objects were made for export to Europe and therefore were more reflective of Western tastes. The three Chinese export harbour views fit perfectly within this profile. The move of these paintings from Museum Volkenkunde to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam was thus a logical one. In 2013, they made the leap from ethnographic cultural objects from China to art objects, the historical value of which is evident. They have been given a permanent place in the room where the story of Dutch overseas contacts in the eighteenth century is told. The paintings represent the locations where these objects were commissioned, produced and purchased and where the contact between the Netherlands and China, in the eighteenth-century China trade took place.

By writing their cultural biography, we discover that in their years at the Royal Cabinet and thereafter Museum Volkenkunde the paintings were not afforded much value. Although they hung steadfastly for everyone to see between 1816 and 1883, once under the care of Museum Volkenkunde they became totally forgotten. From the moment of this exchange, they were out of the picture entirely for a whole century. They belonged to the subcollection China and that was the end of it.⁸⁷ They lived their life as 'frozen' objects. The completion of their restoration in 2012 is an important turning point in their cultural biography. Their revivification and their new and appropriate home in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from

2013 marks the start of a new life phase. The decision to restore the three paintings seems obvious and as a result they became exhibitable. The paintings can be regarded as iconic early examples of art objects and are typically classified as products from the meeting between East and West that are so strongly related to the national trading history. As such, they deserve to be valued as important cultural heritage. The Rijksmuseum did not create a surprising new context for them, whereby the painting was integrated into a new story. No, the paintings provide an interpretation of a period of the past in order to comply with and to add content to the construction of the historical narrative of the Dutch overseas trade connections in the eighteenth century. The fact that we can now see this trio in this context, together with the other collected objects from his Chinese museum, would have given the old Royer great pleasure.

5.5. Conclusion

When thinking of questions about the consumer-end of a cultural biography, of how agency and location are crucial aspects to be taken into consideration, one can ask, who has seen these paintings through space and time? Who attached value to these paintings in previous times, presently, and who will do so in the future? Is the exchange value in the case of export paintings constructed by the discursive system itself, or is it "more like fashion in varying with the specific historical and social location of their viewers?"⁸⁸ I cannot stress enough that the diversity of visual subjectivities at work in any given material complex, or as Poole calls this 'image world', always has to be taken into account. We can assume that the paintings may well have taken on different meanings, when viewed by others than the cream of society who collected (and viewed) them in the first place. Or, when viewed by others than the descendants of their first owners, when no emotional value was at stake. If, as Poole questions, the only visual regimes in modernity "assume a unitary visual subject," these paintings "assume the disciplinary function of normalizing or limiting the range of meanings it was possible to ascribe" to China and its people.⁸⁹

85 Van der Poel 2007, 17-18, 22-28.

86 Collectieplan Rijksmuseum 2011-2016, June 2011.

87 This finding was confirmed in a personal conversation I had with Boen Ong (March 2015) who told me about the conservation practices of his uncle, Gan Tjiang-Tek, China curator at Museum Volkenkunde from 1950s to 1984.

88 Poole 1997, 20.

89 Ibid.

It would be an exaggeration to say that during the process of circulation Chinese export paintings changed into an equivalent of something else, articulating the condition of unequal exchange, as sometimes happens. On the contrary, these paintings are just as favoured again, because of their meaning-value as tokens of the very same China trade period. This revivification, particularly in South China, demands critical reflection and analysis regarding their meaning-value as historical sources. Indeed, we know that most visual material from that time or written testimonials of contemporary eyewitnesses must be understood as a representation of a subjective (selective) reality.

It is clear that the existence of the paintings in Dutch museum collections has its roots in Dutch trading activities, enterprises and lives, conducted by an eighteenth-century official VOC-merchant, the ‘actions’ of a remarkable collector, a Dutch consul-merchant, a brave captain on a Dutch trading ship, and an early twentieth-century bank official in ‘the East’. These artworks themselves, each with their different capacities and qualities, influenced human practices and were ‘victims’ of current ideas and concepts, or, on the contrary, they actually profited from them over time and accrued value. They have many types of potential use value, including economic, commodity/export, historic, artistic and material value. For the German philosopher Georg Simmel, value “is never an inherent property of objects, but is a judgment made about them by subjects.”⁹⁰ By following the life stories of these paintings I have challenged the seemingly paradoxical statement within Western thought that agents and objects used to be sharply contrasted, in order to discover the agency of these artworks. In most cases, the ideas about the paintings, because of their existence, subject matter and appearance resulted in the owners feeling that they should ‘take action’ (the

evaporation process), which consequently led to new meanings and values of the objects (the condensation idea).⁹¹ New material complex situations emerged with the ultimate example being the public reincarnation of the three Royer paintings in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Chinese export paintings move around the world and, when objects move, so we learn from the writings of Gerritsen, “they establish connections across space. [...] Objects articulate exchange, taste, design and cultural understanding on a global scale.”⁹² Future interpretation of other worthwhile Chinese export paintings in the Dutch collections for possible revivification includes awareness of the fact that these artworks are the result of different ‘layers’ of use, interpretation across space and restoration across time.⁹³ Likewise, the way of classifying, archiving and labelling add layers. The curators’ responsibility to take care of the often fragile painting albums and to prevent the run-down oil paintings from being damaged further, by keeping them ‘frozen’ in the storerooms, conflicts with their other social duties to valorise their research and display their collections to the public. We may hope that the future of the other paintings in the Dutch museums is one of restorations, exhibitions, more permanent displays, pictures in digitised image repositories, lemmas in museum catalogues and encyclopaedias, etc., because they are worth it.

When we follow Strathern’s and Munn’s viewpoints, “giving value” can be addressed respectively as a matter of “making visible” or as an act of recognition of this quality that already exists in potentia.⁹⁴ Social relations take on value in the process of public recognition and, more importantly, in the way people who could do almost anything, assess the importance of what they do as they act. As noted in the Introduction, I argue that the paintings referred to in this study have all sorts of potential identities. They must be considered as

90 Simmel 1978, 73, quoted in Appadurai 1986, 3.

91 See figure 2.11., demonstrating that ideas not only condense in objects, but also evaporate from them. In an evaporation process a change of meaning from matter to new ideas (intentions) take place. These new intentions, in turn, will be condensed in new material contexts.

92 Gerritsen 2015, 6–7.

93 Ibid., 8. Gerritsen uses this term (layers) when she writes about the presentation as well as the preservation and representation of material cultures in exhibitions, films and museum displays.

94 Graeber 2001, 47. Whereas Marilyn Strathern (among other works on this subject: *The Gender of Gift: The Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (1988)) starts her analysis from a web of social relationships (meaningful difference), Nancy Munn (among other works on this subject: *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society* (1986)) starts from a notion of activity (value emerges in action).

educational objects that can teach us about the broad range of China trade aspects, including, amongst others: the social world history in that period; globalisation and glocalisation; international trade with mutual exchanges between Western countries and China; cross-cultural ideas about artistic (painting) conventions in China and ‘the West.’

Finally, I conclude that value always exists in the eyes of someone else. Clyde Kluckhohn, an anthropologist who spent a large part of his life defining the terms of analysis of value, and who is cited in Graebers book, produced the central assumption that values are “conceptions of the desirable” – conceptions that play some sort of role in influencing the choices people make between different possible courses of action.⁹⁵ Here, ‘desirable’ refers to the idea about what people ought to want. Values, then, are ideas that have direct effects on people’s behaviour. For the present purpose, there is some worth in mapping the series of values of something in the traditional sociological sense: power, prestige, moral purity, etc., and also in defining them as being, on some level, fundamentally similar to economic ones. Yet, the way in which Western buyers, I assume, incorporated Chinese export paintings into their self-presentation reveals much about how they defined these artworks as a prestige good.⁹⁶ The narratives of this pictorial art produced for export purposes tell something about the interests and evaluation of the works by Westerners in ‘the East.’ The importance of Chinese export paintings merges in action towards it.

The sketches of the biographical fragments of the paintings and their owners show that the value of these paintings lies in their movement and connected interpretations. A biographical approach also demonstrates that when not evaluated as meaningful, valuable objects, they stay tucked away in the museum storeroom. After all, they are excellent examples of artworks that let the Chinese makers of them speak and that have the ability to let viewers of today go back to the historical times of the Dutch China trade. Moreover, they allow us to relate that history to present-day trade practices between the Netherlands and China.

⁹⁵ Graeber 2001, 2-5.

⁹⁶ Unfortunately, I do not know of any photographs showing Chinese export paintings in the interiors of Westerners who live in Chinese port cities or in Batavia, and who almost certainly possessed this kind of art.

