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

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Chapter 6

Transcultural artworks in a contemporary museum context

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In the previous Chapters 4 and 5, I examined both meaning and use value of the Dutch corpus of Chinese export paintings. I did this by studying the multiple ‘sites’ and ‘modalities’, including documentary sources, of the various genres (Chapter 4) and by writing the cultural biographies of some of these paintings to argue that the trajectories of these transnational artworks, with their representational and social function, substantially cumulate value when exchanged over time and space (Chapter 5). Chapter 6, by contrast, focuses on the ‘artistic value’ of the image itself as an important component of a Chinese export painting’s value. Through the decoding and translation of a group of Chinese winter landscapes, I argue that, besides their interesting cultural biography, the particular quality of their compositional design makes clear that these unique, transcultural paintings legitimately carry the label of Chinese export painting with its particular features and also reveal universal artistic elements. This aesthetically valuable group, which has the potential to be revived for future audiences, is unique and thus must be protected before the paintings vanish.

6.1. Introduction

The collection belonging to Museum Volkenkunde includes a coherent set of seven exceptional Chinese winter views of Tartary, as

the central regions of Asia were then (1800s) known, painted on canvas.¹ As Figures 6.1 to 6.7 show, it is immediately clear that the seven paintings, which belonged to the Royer Collection, were painted as a set. I add another set of three winter landscapes to the Royer paintings. (Figures 6.8 to 6.10.) This set was acquired by the Leiden museum through conveyance of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1883, and I group it with the Royer set on the basis of it being an identical genre; that is, winter landscapes with many related visual elements and compositional aspects.² Although these precious oil paintings have been totally withdrawn from circulation, ‘frozen’ so to say, they are unique and very valuable.

Before analysing or ‘translating’ these transcultural artworks’ rich cultural dimension, it is necessary to frame them by explaining the term ‘transcultural’ and by providing a summary of the problems of interpretation when viewing images in different contexts along their total trajectory, from production, through exchange to consumption, towards, in this case, their ‘deep frozen’ condition. Here, I recall Chapter 2.5. in which I elaborated on the transcultural features of this shared material culture, which these winter landscapes are part of.

It is now acknowledged that the large-scale cultural interaction between Europe and China, of the kind that took place at the time of the historical China trade, involved journeys by

1 An adapted version of this chapter formed part of ‘Tien ‘stuks wintergezigten in Tartarijen op doek geschilderd’. Chinese exportwinterlandschappen in Museum Volkenkunde’, in *Aziatische Kunst*, March 2011, and ‘Travels in Tartary: Decoding ten export winter landscapes’, in *Orientations*, April 2013.

2 In Van der Poel 2008, 107–128, I treat this set of winter views from the perspective of narratology, which is a conventional research method in literature. This perspective allows for an investigation of the various ways in which the viewer is addressed. Issues, such as the context in which the painting is made (artistic, social, political) or how this is presented, the painting style, the technique and an iconographic interpretation, plays a secondary role. Although I have previously found the narrative analysis model to be an effective method for constructing a plausible story for these winter landscapes and for providing a possible meaning, for my current research an investigation of the concepts of ‘translation’ and ‘transcultural’ are more suitable for these paintings.

Figs. 6.1. to 6.7.
Set of seven winter
landscape in Tartary,
anonymous, oil on
canvas, c. 1800,
64 x 95 cm,
Museum Volkenkunde/
Nationaal Museum van
Wereldculturen,
inv.nos. RV-360-349a
to 349g.





commodities and long-distance cultural traffic over a long-term period, between local Chinese business men, artists, foreign merchants, missionaries, explorers of various types, collectors, fortune-seekers, and others. The paintings studied for this chapter are emblematic examples of transcultural artworks. They are, to use the words of Burke, “neither a reflection of social reality nor a system of signs without relation to social reality.”³ They take up a variety of positions, this study argues, between these two extremities. Furthermore, this study often has to deal with two other extremities: East and West. Although, East-West remains the most expedient term in the vocabulary of cultural contact, it is, to concur with the idea of Lionel Jensen, an “increasingly inaccurate means of marking the difference between developed and developing nations of the world.”⁴ The meta-geographic entities of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ beg the question: where is East and West in relation to me? The East-West binary division

only feeds the discourse on differences, both in geography and value. In *Made for Trade*, I rather emphasise the mutual enhancements between East and West relating to the cultural exchanges over time. To escape the East-West dyad, the set of paintings at issue here, besides being transcultural, can also be labelled ‘EurAsian’.⁵ This term (with a capital A for Asian), espoused by Grasskamp (see Introduction and Chapter 2.5.), highlights the intensifying interconnectedness of Europe and Asia in recent millennia.⁶ I think EurAsian is an appropriate term for these Tartarian winter views, not least because through this interconnectedness, they are modified, re-framed and re-layered into a new, transcultural genre. The representation of these Tartarian winter views is characterised by an entanglement of foreign and recognised layers including, among other elements: the Chinese subject matter, the composition of the twisted trees, the (for Europeans) familiar position of the figures, and

3 Burke 2001, 183.

4 Jensen 2010, 108.

5 Grasskamp 2015, 363–393.

6 Hann 2016, <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/684625> (consulted March 2016).

Fig. 6.8. to 6.10. Three wintry landscapes in Tartary, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1820s, 72 x 102 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, inv.nos. RV-360-1133, 1134, and 1138.



the painted black frames. Thus, this set of oil paintings materialises both the interesting and complex intertwining of transcultural creation. Moreover, I argue that these wintry landscapes underwent deliberate, innovative adjustments in order to please a Western audience.

In ‘translating’ the set, *Made for Trade* invokes Walter Benjamin’s famous comparison of translation as the gluing together of fragments of a broken vessel, as recalled by Papastergiadis in Young’s article ‘Cultural translation as hybridisation’. Papastergiadis, cited by Young, asks us to think of translation as a “dynamic interaction within which conceptual boundaries are expanded and residual differences respected.”⁷ This idea does more justice to the hybrid character of these paintings, the understanding of their multifaceted positions in their post-studio life and the enormously diverse flows of exchange, considering their social lives on a temporal as well as on a spatial level. Produced within bustling Chinese harbour cities (‘contact zones’), where constant flows of exchange, dialogue, negotiation and mixtures took place, knowledge transformation and cultural respect for the differences could only happen and be understood through the existence of porous conceptual boundaries on all sides. In this way, they can be referred to as transcultural artworks with a unique shared cultural result.

This research interprets what is depicted in order to discover and understand the transcultural quintessence of this set of paintings. Therefore, for the purpose of interpretation, I recall four recurrent conditions when interpreting or deriving (historical) information from visual art, given to us by Peter Burke in *Eyewitnessing – The uses of images as historical evidence*, and summarised by Baxandall in a book review of Burke’s work on the testimony of images.⁸ These conditions are appropriate when discussing the paintings in this chapter and looking at their translatability. Firstly, these paintings provide access to views of imaginary depicted landscapes, rather than to the contemporary social (real) world directly. I am aware of the tendency of Chinese export painters

to idealise the world they present. Sometimes, as is the case with this set of paintings, it is “difficult distinguishing between representations of the typical and images of the eccentric,” as Burke also states, when writing about the access of images in general.⁹ Secondly, the attestations of these paintings need to be placed in the full range of ‘contexts’ (amongst others, cultural, social, material), including painting conventions, the first commissioner’s intentions as well as the interests of the painter, the intended function of these paintings, and their use value along their trajectory. Furthermore, the power of this coherent set of paintings as a set cannot be overestimated. In general, the totality of a set such as these export winter landscapes gives us more information than an individual painting ever could. And lastly, when analysing these narrative paintings, one has to be alert for the small details and absences that reveal the knowledge or assumptions that the makers were not aware they had. As products of not one, but at least three distinct visual ‘languages’, the group of paintings might be thought of, like the copperplates of the 36 views of Emperor Kangxi’s mountain estate, as “translations from one language into multiple dialects, related but not precisely the same.”¹⁰ Those paintings, with their roots in imperial painting projects, presumably proceeded initially from Western style to Manchu (court painting) style and were then executed in Chinese ‘export style’.

It must be noted that the research undertaken on these works (fieldwork in a museum of ethnology) is not based on an imaginary ‘distant place’, on the Other or the Exotic. On the contrary, this research was conducted in the researcher’s immediate vicinity, at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden. This type of research, or ethnographic fieldwork at ‘home’, must be considered equally important and merit the same attention as that undertaken far away, at strange field sites. The anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson give us a truthful image of ‘the field’. According to them, this term is “a clearing whose deceptive transparency obscures the complex processes that go into constructing it. In fact, it is a highly overdetermined setting for

7 Young 2012, 162. The Australian sociologist Nikos Papastergiadis discussed the concept of translation in his book *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000. In this book, page 124, he focuses on this concept as a metaphor for understanding how the foreign and the familiar are interrelated in every form of cultural production.

8 Burke 2001, 187–188. Baxandall 2002, 643.

9 Burke 2001, 187.

10 Whiteman 2016, 117.

the discovery of difference”.¹¹ As Gupta and Ferguson so aptly articulate: “Perhaps we should say that in an interconnected world we are never really ‘out of the field’.”¹² This concept of location allows access to ‘situated knowledges’.¹³ Such ‘knowledges’ are neither temporally, nor spatially fixed, but evolve from diverse factors that include local and other sources. They depend on social practices and their relation to local as well as transnational and global aspects that shape local culture, and vice versa. Hence, field research is an ethnographic method and adapted as a ‘locational’ understanding of both the social practices being researched and the researchers themselves. This kind of research is a promising approach to the new art practices that focus on the analysis and creation of social space through ‘actions’ like intervention, interaction, process-based collaboration and a permanent maintenance and preservation, activation and expansion of (social and cultural) networks. My field survey adopts this approach as both the researched art practice and the researcher (me) are focused on exactly these ‘actions’. My evaluation is based on an extensive empirical research trajectory and a deep conviction that the universal artistic nature of these transcultural paintings needs to be communicated in a museum context. Yet, the visual efficacy of this group of narrative paintings works only in relation to its viewers. There is, in my opinion, no doubt that they have a range of material qualities, but, as Rose teaches us, “it is only when someone uses the image in some way that any of those qualities become activated, as it were, and significant.”¹⁴ The same is true for this group of paintings.

6.2.

Value accruelement by decoding

In general, ‘curiosity’ and lacunae in academic research are good starting points for an in-depth study. Of all the paintings that I have studied for this dissertation, these ten Tartarian winter views intrigued me the most. This group has its own

narrative effect due to the formal arrangements of the elements in the depicted scenes. The painterly quality, the narrative images with protagonists and staffage figures in Arcadian winter landscapes and their mysterious atmosphere, made me curious about their meaning.¹⁵ Moreover, almost nothing has been written about this genre, in which the artistic component of its use value (because of the genre) predominates.¹⁶ For a discussion about how the winter landscape became a subject matter for Chinese export painting, see Chapter 4.2.

In order to say something about the meaning production of similar works, it is important to understand that the paintings were produced more than 200 years ago and that the interpretation of these images today, by me, an art historian by training, takes places many years later. According to Zijlmans,

*our view of the past is not unbiased, rather it involves a point of view, the articulation of particular questions and is always guided by theory. The past is re-constructed in the present and here the emphasis is on the word construction. [...] Nonetheless, the fundamental fact of the transfer can equally never be totally dissolved and is often crucial.*¹⁷

When studying these early nineteenth-century paintings in a museum context, it is necessary, when interpreting or deriving (historical) information, to condition the analysis; that is, to include an awareness of a contemporary view, their use value in a different context, their narrative power as a series, and their particularities. To paraphrase Hay in his article ‘Toward a theory of the intercultural’, it is beyond doubt that the transfer of objects or images never leaves that which is transferred untransformed, if only in terms of the effects of the re-contextualisation of the reception of artworks.¹⁸

My research into the origins of these paintings was also inspired by the fact that they have

11 Gupta & Ferguson 1997, 5.

12 Ibid., 35. But as <http://anthropologicalfieldwork.blogspot.nl> reads: “If we do in fact stretch the anthropological boundaries for ethnography, we must find ways to defines our methods. We can't say that we are ‘always in the field’, because then we have an all-inclusive situation where there are no boundaries left.”

13 I have borrowed the term ‘situated knowledges’ from Donna Haraway 1988, 575–599.

14 Rose 2007, 220.

15 Staffage figures are people or animals in, for example, a landscape, that are accessories, i.e. not the primary subject of the painting.

16 In 2005, William Shang wrote an article on winter views as a genre in Chinese export painting. Shang 2005, 90–101.

17 Zijlmans 1997, 168–169.

18 Hay 1999–a, 7.

never been studied as a group before. We are dealing with a coherent group of portrayals with links between the various visual elements in the paintings. Although Museum Volkenkunde did not acquire all the paintings at the same time, their similar storytelling format and the substantial number of comparable characteristics indicate that they can be considered as a group. The stylistic uniformity suggests that the same artist or studio executed the seven paintings from the Royer Collection (Figures 6.1. to 6.7.). Another notable feature of the seven 'Royers' of the same size (64 x 95 cm) is a painted black frame that surrounds each of them and which forms part of the image. Such painted frames are known on early European prints and were a traditional method used to frame a print. It is thus plausible that the Chinese export painter copied the image from a model, although it is noteworthy that such painted frames were never applied to oil paintings in the West in the early nineteenth century.¹⁹ The three paintings from the Royal Cabinet (Figures 6.8. to 6.10) are larger in size (72 x 102 cm) and, unlike the Royer paintings, two of them do not have a painted black frame.²⁰

Viewed as commodities, these paintings were individually made in a Cantonese studio, for trading exchange with a specific audience. It is important to note, though, that today only a few similar representations are known worldwide.²¹ Exceptions include paintings identical to Figure 6.4., one of which was on display at the exhibition *Journey to the Far East – George Chinnery and the Art of Canton, Macao and Hong Kong in the 19th Century* at Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum (1996-1997),

(Figure 6.11.), and another piece belongs to a private collection in Hong Kong. (Figure 6.12.) Furthermore, I recall the similarity of the Tartarian winter view shown in Figure 6.9. to the reverse glass painting *The hunt* in Figure 3.21., both currently in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde. Another wintry view, which resembles the emperor's audience scenes that belong to Museum Volkenkunde (Figures 4.77. and 4.78.), is Figure 6.13. showing a Chinese emperor giving an audience in a winter landscape. This painting is part of the collection of the V&A in London. In addition, it is known that Chinese export winter views in the collection of the Royal Pavilion in Brighton and in an American private collection (Figures 6.14. and 6.15.) concur in terms of atmosphere with the Leiden paintings in Figure 6.8. and 6.10. Finally, the collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan also includes a Chinese winter landscape in oils, showing a family walking along a path with a walled town in the background. This, too, shares the same integrated, EurAsian look. (Figure 6.16.)

Today, these kinds of early nineteenth-century Chinese winter views occasionally surface on the international art market.²² A look at the vast body of auction results data reveals that, when they do, these works by anonymous artists "still have value in the world of art-as-commodity."²³ Surprisingly, they are sometimes classified as 'exceptional', as *A wintry landscape with equestrienne crossing a bridge at The Exceptional Sale* auctioned in Paris on 4 November 2015 attests.²⁴ (Figures 6.17.a. to 6.17.c.) This Christie's auction offered masterpieces from various categories. They

19 Later, the French post-Impressionist painter and draftsman, Georges Seurat (1859-1891), painted black and coloured frames on his paintings. He is noted for creating the painting techniques known as chromoluminarism and pointillism around 1886. This latter technique of painting uses small, distinct dots of colour, applied in patterns to form an image.

20 These three Tartarian winter landscape paintings might belong to a series of eight Chinese export oil paintings with similar sizes and stylistic aspects, all conveyed from the Royal Cabinet of Rarities to Museum Volkenkunde in 1883. Other topics in this 'set' are river scenes (inv.nos. 360-1135 and 360-1137), landscape with rice paddies (inv.no. 360-1140), and imperial scenes (inv.nos. 360-1136 and 360-1139).

21 To my surprise, you can buy so-called *giclees* (French for 'spray of ink'), similar in style to these Tartarian Chinese winter landscapes today. These high-resolution, high-quality digital prints on canvas can be ordered through www.globalgallery.com (consulted March 2016). Hand-painted reproductions in oil paint of comparable scenes can be ordered at www.mystudios.com (consulted March 2016).

22 Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, and Christies' and Sotheby's Asian art auctions are the most successful market players in Chinese export painting.

23 <https://oxfordarthist.wordpress.com/2015/04/17/show-time>. Craig Clunas delivered the keynote at the *Association of Art Historians Annual Conference 2015*, entitled 'All the art in China? Art history in an expanded field'.

24 I thank Jan van Campen for pointing out this Paris auction to me with the surprising and unusual classification of this Chinese export winter view.

Fig. 6.11. A Manchu family in tented quarters, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1800, 78 x 112 cm, Tuyet Nguyet and Stephen Markbreiter Collection.



Fig. 6.12. Winter landscape, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1800, 90.2 x 146.1 cm, Martyn Gregory Gallery, London.



Fig. 6.13. Chinese emperor keeping audience in a winter landscape, anonymous, oil on glass, c. 1804, 144 x 221 x 6 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv.no. P.11.1, 2-1936.



Fig. 6.14. Winter scene with distant fortress, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1800, 55.7 x 89 cm, Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove, inv.no. FA000249.



Fig. 6.15. Archers at a winter camp, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1800, 74.7 x 111 cm, private collection.

promote the items for sale on their website with statements such as “[t]heir quality, their provenance, their history and what they symbolise make them exceptional.”²⁵ It is noteworthy that this particular oil painting, though in much better condition than the Leiden ones, featured in a category of expensive and very special items. Certainly, I would argue that their rarity assigns value to them. I will construct my argument hereafter along the lines of value accrue through a range of ‘sites’, i.e. the paintings’ cultural biographies, the images themselves, the dynamic cultural interactions, inspiration and the act of appropriation, translation as token, and a counter expertise exercise by specialists. The conclusion is that all these ‘sites’ benefit the paintings’ value.

Value accrue through cultural biographies

The plight of these artworks, stowed away in painting racks in the Leiden museum depot, says

much about the current use value assigned to them. Taking this current cultural context into consideration, I must first ‘decode’ them, before we can recontextualise or ‘localise’ them as translated and integrated items, in order to evaluate their remarkable artistry, which, in turn, determines their future use value.²⁶ Therefore, they need to be rediscovered in order to make the move to a ‘new’ material complex. This set of skilfully produced paintings functions as an actant insofar as they triggered me to take action to revivify them and to transfer them into inspirational, educational and aesthetically pleasing ‘new’ art objects. What do we know about these idyllic landscape paintings in Museum Volkenkunde?

Firstly, we know that seven of the winter views in the Leiden museum were commissioned by Royer and are dated to before 1807.²⁷ As is treated in Chapter 5, it is known that he had assistance in assembling his Chinese collection

Fig. 6.16. Snow scene with a Chinese family, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1810, 75.2 x 110.3 cm, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, inv.no. 726.



25 <http://www.christies.com/The-Exceptional-Sale-25924.aspx> (consulted in March 2016).

26 Burke 2009-b, 69-77.

27 Van Campen 2000-b, 323; Van der Poel 2007, 41-45.

from Hemmingson, who worked for the VOC in Canton from 1765 to 1790, and who purchased his items directly from Cantonese workshops.²⁸ In addition to those items that came straight from Canton, part of the Royer Collection was also purchased in the Netherlands, where around 1800 a large variety of Asian objects were available. No precise information has been found about how Royer acquired the winter views, but that he also wanted a set representing winter landscapes for his Chinese research collection is undisputed. After Royer's wife died in 1814, the paintings in the Royer Collection were bequeathed to the Dutch King Willem I, who in 1918 founded the Royal Cabinet of Rarities, where the paintings were subsequently housed. In the oldest description (1816) of the objects in Royer's museum, written by its first director, Reinier Pieter van de Kastele (1767-1845), the six paintings are entitled: 'Six winter views in Tartary painted on canvas'.²⁹ The seventh painting was added later. The *Guide to Viewing the Royal Cabinet of Rarities* (*Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden*) of 1823 provides a schematic and geographical classification of the Cabinet.³⁰ Here, too, the six winter landscapes are specifically mentioned. The description of Room 2 of the Cabinet, filled with "products from Sina, all visibly exhibited in cabinets or on lecterns, a few hung on the wall or standing on the ground"³¹ teaches us:

Room 2, On the wall

[...]

*Six pieces, winter scenes of Tartary, very elaborately painted on canvas.*³²

The fact that this set was given a prime place on the wall in Room 2 and was not consigned to the Cabinet's depot, says much about the aesthetic value that Van den Kastele awarded to these rare and visually captivating images with their storytelling format. He must have known that they were unique in the Netherlands. Moreover, the audience of this publicly accessible Cabinet must have loved them and their imagination would have been pricked when viewing these paintings with their peculiar kind of beauty. Indeed, they reinforced the image of

an 'enchanted fairy-land'; an image of China that people in 'the West' were willing to hold on to at a time when interest in this distant and mysterious empire was still growing, albeit an image that was no longer entirely positive. In 1883, after the dissolution of the Royal Cabinet, the paintings were relocated to the National Ethnographic Museum (Museum Volkenkunde) in Leiden, where they have remained ever since.

Secondly, we know that the other three Chinese winter views, acquired by the Royal Cabinet between 1824 and 1860, also ended up in Museum Volkenkunde and, like the Royer set, since 1883 have only been available to view and to consult in the depot. John Clark, an Australian art historian who is familiar with the topic of Chinese export painting and contemporary Asian painting, raised the



Figs. 6.17.a. to 6.17.c. A wintry landscape with equestrienne crossing a bridge, anonymous, oil on canvas, c. 1800, 74 x 112 cm, private collection.



28 Meilink-Roelofs 1980, 458-469.

29 Van Campen 2000-b, 323. The 1816 inventory by R. P. van de Kastele contains the oldest known descriptions of the objects in Royer's museum, and served as the basis for a catalogue of the collection.

30 Van de Kastele 1824.

31 Van de Kastele 1823, 32.

32 Ibid., 43.

Den 18^{en} Noobr. Aan J. van Eijk voor geleverde 3 Schilderijen
 Kol. Ragaij aan Zijne Majesteit volgens Hoogstezelfs
 mondeling bevel 1750.



Fig. 6.18. Record from the cashbook of Colonel P.A. Ragaij (1768–1830), who paid 1750 Dutch guilders to J. van Eijk for three paintings delivered to King Willem I. The Hague Royal House Archive KHA-A35-XI.10a.

possibility that – given the high quality of their execution and their unknown cultural biography before they entered the Cabinet – these three paintings in the Leiden collection could well have Chinese imperial origins and could have been a gift from the Chinese court to the Dutch king.³³ Unfortunately, however, there is (still) no serious indication that such an imperial donation was ever made. Furthermore, many art treasures were looted during the occupation and plundering of the old summer palace (*Yuanming-yuan*) by English-French troops in 1860.³⁴ It is

certainly possible that a number of winter landscapes were part of the booty and subsequently ended up in the Dutch Royal Cabinet via auction or a legacy.³⁵ Thanks to the research undertaken by Van Campen, we know of the existence of 30 wealthy Dutch families in the period 1750–1810, with about 1000 (Chinese or otherwise?) paintings in their collections.³⁶ A number of these paintings, including three winter landscapes of Tartary, could, hypothetically, via the heir of a notorious Dutch early nineteenth-century first owner, have been gifted to the Cabinet, which existed from 1816 to 1883. It is commonly accepted that a painting with a documented pedigree, which once belonged to a famous collector or was produced by a well-known export painter, is valued much higher than a similar painting from an unknown source. A manipulation of these three paintings, describing their pedigree as being associated with the Dutch Royal collection, certainly makes this trio more valuable. A vague record in the 1823 cashbook of thesaurier Colonel P.A. Ragaij (1769–1830), manager of the Royal treasury during the reign of King William I between 1813 and 1830, at the Royal House Archive might be the key to the early stage of these paintings' life?³⁷ (Figure 6.18.) This suggestion, nonetheless, needs future research to be substantiated.³⁸

Fig. 6.20 One of the Chinese rooms in Villa del Poggio Imperiale, Florence, with the original collection from 1780–1790 of 150 Chinese export oil paintings and watercolours with scenes of Chinese daily life, landscapes, flora and fauna. Via archival documents it was possible to reconstruct the original layout of the paintings' arrangement filling most space on the walls. In this way they were used as upholstery of the walls.

33 Personal communication John Clark on 20 September 2007.

34 Hevia 1999, 199–213.

35 Ibid., 195. In 1860, after the looting of the Summer Palace in Beijing by the British, auctions were immediately held on the premises of the Yellow Temple in that same city. Many valuable works of Chinese art from Imperial collections were distributed to all kind of art markets and collectors around the world. Curio shop owners from Shanghai and Hong Kong, who were reported to have commissions from European auction houses and art dealers, members of diplomatic corps and foreign residents in Beijing, have all to be taken in account as potential owners of these three paintings. Sources describing the auction in 1860 (Hevia 1999, 210, footnote 10) need to be studied yet (R.J.L. M'Ghee, *How we got to Peking 1862*, 294; Robert Swinhoe, *Narrative of the North China Campaign of 1860* 1861, 311; Henry Knollys, *Incidents in the China War 1873*, 193–194; George Allgood, *China War 1860* 1901, 59; and Garnet J. Wolseley, *Narrative of the war with China in 1860* 1861, 237–242).

36 Van Campen 2000–c, 47–81.

37 Inv.no. KHA A35.XI.10a_03_03.

38 Research at the National Archives in December 2015 did not reveal anything useful about Royal Cabinet's acquisition of these three Chinese paintings. The archival records of the Algemeen Rijksarchief, Tweede Afdeling, Binnenlandse Zaken, Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, Index 1824 (inv.no. ARA 2.04–01–4925, 308) reveal that on 12 April (14F.) a report was made that His Majesty wanted to purchase, amongst other items, paintings from China. This document, unfortunately, did not stand the rigours of the time. On May 1st the Royal Cabinet purchased Chinese paintings (8F.). I thank Rudolf Effert for pointing out this archival reference to me.

Thirdly, we know that, in general, this genre was used as decoration, as overmantel paintings, as supraportes (a relief or painted work hung above a doorway), or as paintings belonging to the pictorial scheme in the rooms where the walls were covered with Chinese painted wallpaper or were decorated according to Chinese taste, which was very popular during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Figures 6.19 and 6.20. show examples of this use. The composition of the staffage figures in the landscape is also reminiscent of some of the representations found on Chinese wallpaper as Figure 6.21. shows. However, it is unlikely that these ten winter views were intended for use as Chinese wallpaper, which was always executed in gouache, whereas overmantel paintings and supraportes were frequently painted in oils.³⁹ It is possible, however, that these paintings were made in a studio that also produced wallpaper.⁴⁰ We know from research by Friederike Wappenschmidt that the Dutch East India Company (VOC) commissioned wallpaper, supraportes and overmantel paintings from the Cantonese silk painters Anthonij (act. c. 1756-1787) and Sequa (act. c. 1778-1790) in 1786, although the descriptions thereof do not correspond with the winter landscapes in Museum Volkenkunde.⁴¹

Value accrue ment through the site of the image itself: Universalities, particularities and ‘hybrids’

In viewing these paintings as having a cultural dimension, I stress, as Appadurai argues, “the idea of situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant.”⁴² It is obvious that the perspective applied, the composition of the figures, and the materials used in these winter landscapes signify the West. By contrast, the subject matter and the way the mountings and surroundings are touched by the brush are of a more Chinese style. This, amongst other visible features, is why, to put it bluntly, the paintings can be



Fig. 6.21. Panoramic Chinese wallpaper with depictions of a falcon hunt. Nymphenburg Castle, Munich.

described as ‘hybrid’ works. To clarify this notion, often used to perpetuate the illusion of ‘authenticity’, some remarks should be made about ‘universalities’ and ‘particularities’.⁴³ Universal elements can, on the one hand, be identified in all visual representations, regardless of whether they are Chinese or Western: lines, surfaces, space, colour, motion and other characteristic (limiting) aspects that belong to two-dimensional art. These are elements, as the late Nelson Ikon Wu stated, “of an universal language cultural imprints, favouring no



Fig. 6.19. The Yellow Bow Rooms, Royal Pavilion, Brighton. The pictorial scheme of this suite of rooms (bedchambers of the Duke of York and the Duke of Clarence, decorated to the original design of 1821) with Chinese export paintings includes a winter scene like Figure 6.13. The vivid chrome yellow dragon wallpaper dramatically sets off the rich colouring of the Chinese oil paintings and watercolours.

39 Wappenschmidt 1989. With thanks to Frederieke Wappenschmidt for supplying this information (email 3 August 2010). Today Wappenschmidt works as a freelance writer on art historical and cultural subjects. Furthermore, she is an art consultant, lecturer and art critic. In addition to lectures, she participates as a curator in exhibitions at home and abroad, she publishes books and contributions on East Asian art and reception of Chinese art in Europe, and European cultural history from antiquity to the present.

40 Many of the presented papers at the London conference *Chinese wallpaper: trade, technique and taste* on 7 and 8 April 2016 (<https://chinesewallpaper2016.wordpress.com>), made me believe more that these paintings originated in the Cantonese wallpaper painting studios.

41 Wappenschmidt 1989, 74–75.

42 Appadurai 1996, 12.

43 Wu 1976, 179–180. Nelson Ikon Wu (1919–2002) was a Chinese and American writer and professor of Asian art history.

particular culture or tradition and belonging to all.”⁴⁴ Universality also appears in comfortable proportions. When, for example, the format becomes more important than the painting, this says something about the aspiration of the painting studios, i.e. to sell as much as possible of what the customer wants and in a format that can be carried home. By themselves, these aspects do not convey any information about a specific tradition or culture.

On the other hand, ‘particularities’ of paintings stamp a specific cultural imprint on the image. As Wu further explains, “once the particularities attributable to a culture are discovered, their significance seem to grow more and more. [...] Time further complicates the cultural differences. So, particularities are by no means permanent features in a society.”⁴⁵ I argue that this means that a process of developing new particularities will always begin again. Consequently, viewers from one culture frequently do not fully understand paintings from another culture. The fact that cultures are never hermetically sealed makes this process ever subject to change. As much as Chinese literati-painters could not appreciate Western-style painting, Westerners were not familiar with the traditional Chinese portrayals of landscapes, or the style in which they were painted. We know, for example, that the Chinese painter Wu Li (1632-1718) emphasised the difference between Chinese and Western painting in terms such as ‘spiritual excellence’ and ‘outward resemblance of form’, implying that he deemed the former characteristic to be superior to the latter.⁴⁶ During his stay in Canton in 1836-1837, Downing wrote of the traditional Chinese landscapes “they are in general very defective” and

[a]lthough the objects are often very finely drawn, and the tints of the colours laid on with

*great truth and faithfulness, yet there is a total want of perspective. The objects in the background are as large as those in front, and not the slightest allowance is made for that mellowing of the tints which is produced by distance. [...] Although to our eye these performances have no merit whatever, except perhaps their freedom, the Chinese reverence them somewhat in the same way as we do the rough sketches in pencil of chalk, done by Raphael, Da Vinci, and others of the old masters.*⁴⁷

Familiar with the well-established painting style in late eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century Britain – that is, the picturesque, along with the beautiful and the sublime – Downing naturally did not very well understand the elongated Chinese scroll paintings. By saying that Chinese landscape paintings are imperfect and faulty, his text exudes an attitude of superiority, i.e. Western painting conventions are better than Chinese ones. He notices, however, the different valuations placed on these paintings by himself and Chinese viewers in a respectful way and is aware of his own ignorance of this esteemed Chinese painting style. But Downing understands well that local viewers adore these performances in the way that he loves old masters from Europe, and thus these landscapes are certainly of some value.⁴⁸

Returning to the ten Tartarian winter views, it is also appropriate to label them picturesque, a term first introduced into the mainstream by William Gilpin (1724-1804). Picturesque stands for a category of painting in which, so Pagani’s article ‘In search of a Chinese picturesque’ reads, “beauty came not from natural perfection but from a roughness, irregularity, and sudden variation imparted by the artist,”⁴⁹ for those elements that make a “scene beautiful in nature does not necessarily make it pleasing as a

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 183.

46 Sullivan 1980, 18–20.

47 Downing 1838, facsimile 1972. Several statements by Chinese and Western painters about each other’s work can be read in Xiang 1976, 172–5, and in Sirén 1963.

48 It should be understood that in China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the status of landscape paintings (*shan shui*, either mountain-water) corresponded with the status of portrait art in the West at this time. According to Loehr 1962, 800, there is a view that this information typically expresses two contrasting worldviews. A traditional Chinese landscape painter is judged on his skill in terms of leaving viewers feeling that they are really seeing mountains. Hills and mountain streams symbolise the ideology of Taoist thought, in which adapts his life to the rhythm of nature. This is in contrast to the West, where the emphasis is much more on man attempting to control nature.

49 Pagani 2010, 84. George Chinnery’s and William Alexander’s painting styles are considered to be ‘Chinese picturesque’.

painting.”⁵⁰ This term came to be applied, so continues Pagani, “to objects (particularly landscapes) that could be depicted in a painting or to a work that had the ‘great power of pleasure’ for the viewer.”⁵¹ This painting style provided an aesthetic frame in which ‘exotic’ landscapes could coexist comfortably with depictions of Western sceneries. The attractiveness of the winter views in Leiden, I believe, comes primarily from their picturesque look.

How can we conceive (or translate) these scenes, and is there more to them than meets the eye? Translation of depicted scenes is “a structural principle,” as Liu writes, about ‘mutual translatability’ in the field of linguistic science, “whereby signs are equated with other signs within the same code or between codes.”⁵² To appreciate and understand the value of the Chinese-like scenes depicted in these paintings implies an analysis of mutual translatability. As I observed in Chapter 2.5., the act of comparing two different painting styles seems quite useless, as this discourages attention for the dynamic exchange relation between the realities of China and the West regarding the conventions in this artistic domain. That said, a strong tendency exists, based on associative considerations, to make comparisons with Western-style painting or literary sources in order to understand what the universal artistic value of these paintings mean and why they are so attractive to our eyes. This research, therefore, stresses the dimensionality of a culture rather than its

substantiality, which permits us to think of culture as Appadurai does: “less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about cultural difference.”⁵³ In this regard, let us now dwell further on the term ‘particularities’, to discover if there are any characteristics of Chinese or European cultural identity or habits (perceived and otherwise) that lend themselves to visual representation in these paintings.

If we observe these paintings from the perspective of Heinrich, we can speak of “an ethnically marked painting style with ‘Chinese characteristics’.”⁵⁴ The ‘particularities’ of these paintings are the Manchu mandarin figures and their families in a rugged northern Chinese mountainous winter landscape with typical walled towns, residences and pagodas.⁵⁵ The remote premises, shacks and villages seen in the distance are surrounded by nature.⁵⁶ The various Chinese attributes, such as clothing, accessories, muskets, palanquins, bows and arrows, the familiar banners in the military encampments and other visual elements also contribute to a Chinese atmosphere.⁵⁷ The trees in the rocky landscape are leafless and deciduous. The mandarins, archers, helpers and family groups portrayed in the winter landscapes are dressed in thick clothing and winter headgear. They are seen travelling to or arriving somewhere (Figures 6.1., 6.2., 6.5. and 6.8.), returning from a (falcon) hunt (Figures 6.3., 6.4., 6.6., 6.7., 6.9. and 6.10.), or are at ‘home’

50 Harrison, Wood and Gaiger 2000, 857, cited in Pagani 2000, 85.

51 Pagani 2000, 85.

52 Liu (ed.) 1999, 28.

53 Appadurai 1996, 13.

54 Heinrich 1999, 244.

55 The Mandarin’s home is recognisable from the two watchtowers on either side of the gate and the two waving flags that hang on the towers. By day, the towers fly flags as a sign of the Mandarin’s status; at night they usually bedecked with lanterns. Furthermore, the use of a pipe by elite women, as in Figure 6.10., was normal.

56 Chinese Tartary was separated from the rest of Tartary by high mountains. The Qing emperors did not want their citizens to travel to this territory, fearful as they were of hostile forces from the north that wanted to bring about the collapse of their empire. To prevent incursions, the Imperial hunting grounds at Jehol (present-day Chengde) were guarded by the Imperial troops. There was a permanent garrison at Jehol during the eighteenth century (Forêt 2000, 85–88). At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Manchurian tribes were organized into these infantry companies, identified by their standards (Ter Molen 1990, 233). These were initially the Plain White, Bordered White, Plain Yellow, Bordered Yellow, Plain Red, Bordered Red, Plain Blue and Bordered Blue. The organisation into military companies was intended to break up the original tribal bonds and loyalties. To the extent that Manchu power grew and new regions were conquered, the company system became the basis for military, administrative and social organisation. Like the Manchu, their Mongolian allies and Chinese defectors were divided into companies, bringing the total number to twenty-four. During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) the members of these companies remained a privileged group with high status, and the companies’ troops formed the core of the Qing army.

57 For more information on the details of the depicted particular Chinese attributes: Garret 1994 and 1997; Govers 1988; Richter, 2004; Ter Molen & Uitzinger 1990; Van der Poel 2007, 46–65, and 2008, 109–115.

in the encampment (Figures 6.3., 6.4., 6.6. and 6.10.). They are shown walking along a mountain path, in frozen fields, across bridges, seated on a horse (equestrienne), walking behind a wheelbarrow or two-wheeled handcart or carrying a shoulder yoke or other objects. These activities take place in snow-covered mountains, on barren plains, rocky plateaus and mountain paths, and in encampments used by Imperial troops or hunting parties. The narrative power of these paintings is the result of various elements. All protagonists are placed in the foreground of each painting. Some are portrayed en face and include the viewer in the scene depicted in the painting. In all of the paintings, the postures and various gestures of the portrayed figures and their eye contact with each other are significant and inform the viewer about a form of interactive communication between them. This latter aspect, in particular, imbues the paintings with a sense of liveliness; it makes them accessible and it is easy to imagine fantastic stories for each of them. The illustrated people look as though they are inviting the viewer to become their friends, to visit them and join them on their trajectory.

Despite their many elite Manchu-Chinese ‘particularities’, these wintry views presented a China that, though unknown to most Western viewers, was not entirely alien to the Dutch audience. With the use of familiar materials, style, and the composition of the human figures they retain a certain familiarity.⁵⁸ In addition, the repoussoir function of the trees and foothills, which lend depth to the composition, the colours and techniques used – oil paint on canvas – are typically Western conventions. Besides the mountains and rocks, which are depicted in typical Chinese painting style with clear brush strokes, the other visual elements have been painted minutely and are extremely detailed without visible brushstrokes. The use of light and dark, and the colour and atmospheric

perspective complete an overall familiar tone in these winter landscapes.⁵⁹ With the evident exceptions of the Chinese ‘particularities’ mentioned above, they convey an image of China that differed very little from familiar scenes in ‘the West’. This image is still reminiscent of a harmonious and mystic and peaceful China today.

The assignment of artistic value is, first and foremost, closely connected to the integration of cultural forms determined by cultural universalities and particularities. The transcultural miscellany of goods, people, ideas and values, in full swing in Canton at the time of the production of these paintings (c. 1800), was developed in processes of exchange, appropriation and mutual interests in different tastes and visual codes and laws, and engendered the emergence of this much-valued painting style. Together with Wang, I am convinced that the styles that feature prominently in Chinese export painting testify to the widespread presence of Western stylistic elements in China.⁶⁰ Indeed, the continuous and unabated attention for the specific features in Chinese Western-style paintings and prints produced from the late sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, as Wang also concludes in *The Art Bulletin*, appears to remain “one thread that runs through the late Ming and the Qing dynasties, connecting the early modern and modern periods in Chinese art history.”⁶¹ Therefore, in order to make these artistic objects more comprehensible, it is appropriate to examine more closely how and what the cultural dynamics were between these geographical regions, thousands of kilometres apart. This painting genre can also be understood and appreciated, according to Shang, by understanding or imagining the Chinese painter’s perception of and his familiarity with the story-telling perspective and content-oriented method of expression.⁶²

58 People in Chinese literati landscape painting are usually portrayed in valleys at the lower edge of the painting, giving them a diminutive appearance. They are thus juxtaposed as insignificant in relation to the majestic and untouched natural surroundings, which were, so it was believed, embodied by mountains. The composition of human figures in this winter landscapes is clearly different.

59 Another form of perspective is used in Chinese painting, which Lucien van Valen (2007) calls the ‘walking perspective’, where the term ‘walking’ should be considered literally. The Chinese painter takes us with him, on the basis of the different views he represents, through the scenes, one after the other, allowing us to follow his perception of the images. This idea of ‘walking’ through the scenes is not relevant or intended, however, in the case of the Tartarian winter views.

60 Wang 2014-b, 390–391.

61 Ibid., 390.

62 Shang 2013, 131.

Value accrue ment through dynamic cultural interactions, inspiration and the act of appropriation

New art forms and cultural paradigm shifts usually come into existence after a long period of evolution that enables them to take root and grow. This also applies to the development of Chinese export painting. In this process – that already began in the sixteenth century – several factors in China meant that Western artistic conventions were incorporated and successfully executed. The presence of Jesuit painters at the Chinese court and the preference of the Qing emperors Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-1735) and Qianlong (1736-1795) for Western painting techniques in their commissions to court painters, albeit on a limited scale, contributed to Western conventions making inroads into Chinese painting traditions.

While Westerners and their art gradually lost status to the northern court when the reign of Emperor Qianlong ended, events in South China took a different course. Foreign merchants were engaged in brisk trade with China, and Canton was the only port of access for foreigners. In the run up to the eighteenth century, China's encounters with Western imperialism had already provided an important impetus to Chinese export paintings. After all, the massive trade in porcelain, tea and silk, and the rage for all things Chinese in the West, had stirred an interest among Westerners for China and fostered their predilection for 'faithful' portrayals of Chinese life and its countryside.

It is known that Cantonese painting studios were supplied with Western-style engravings and prints, which served as models and inspiration for their works. Several possible examples can be identified by linking the motifs found within these export paintings and by tracing sources and inspirations from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western and Chinese painters. Thanks to the meticulous research of Nicolas Standaert on Chinese prints and their European prototypes, we know that the history of Chinese reproductions of especially Flemish engravings are relatively well-documented, and that the cultural exchange between Europe and

China in the early seventeenth century entailed a lively transfer of illustrated prints and miniature paintings.⁶³ During the eighteenth century, growing numbers of (old) paintings from famous European collections were reproduced as prints, and it is possible that copies of these prints made their way to China via the imperial court or through Dutch and Belgian missionaries, merchants and scientists.⁶⁴ We can assume, and, indeed, several scholars have argued, that Chinese painters transformed Western prints by making their specific features one of their cultural resources or selling points to meet their own needs.⁶⁴ Jourdain & Jenyns' early writings about Chinese export art in Canton reads:

*[w]riting of paintings of this period, Sir George Staunton speaks of the closeness of the copies of European prints, which attracted the notice of a 'gentleman eminent for his taste in London', who had in his possession a coloured copy made in China of a print from a study of Joshua Reynolds, which he 'deems not unworthy' of being added to his collections of valuable paintings.*⁶⁶

Clearly, Staunton (1781-1859), who had been appointed secretary to Lord Macartney's mission to China (1792-1794), was impressed by the transformation of a European print into an oil painting. He pays little tribute ('not unworthy') to the endeavours of the Chinese painter and adds his Chinese artwork to his collection of valuable paintings. Cantonese painters actively used copying as a production method at the time of the historical China trade. To produce an oil painting from a print requires adequate painting skills; the professionals in Canton possessed this expertise. Moreover, this transformation process gave them ample opportunities to show their cleverness.

The possible Western landscape prints brought to China did not survive the whims of the time, but through Wang's research we know that perspectival (Western-style) pictures, such as those handled by Jesuits in China (Figure 4.74.), may also have employed a visual effect like "displaying a rigorous form of perspective marching toward the center of the painting" and "exerted a stylistic impact on the local

63 Standaert 2006, 231. Chinese (woodblock) prints after paintings by Joachim Patinier (c. 1485–1524) that were made by members of the sixteenth-century Wierix family or Maarten de Vos (1531–1603) from Antwerp are known.

64 Crossman 1991, 125, 188 and 214.

65 Shang 2005; Standaert 2006; Wang 2014-a and 2014-b.

66 Jourdain & Jenyns 1950, 108.

production of art.”⁶⁷ Wang’s research on global perspectives on eighteenth-century Chinese art and visual culture supplies us with various examples of Jesuits in China, or devout Catholic Chinese painters, who left letters and account books behind. These mention that they “spent money on making Christian images for the purpose of preaching,” that most Western pictures that they encountered “were landscapes and city views,” that perspectival pictures were mostly used by them “as gifts for making connections with locals,” and that some even “earned a living by selling ‘Western (or Westernised) pictures’ or ran a shop of ‘Western (or Westernised) pictures’ in Suzhou.”⁶⁸

My search for the sources that possibly inspired the specific features on the Tartarian winter views revealed a number of works by landscape painters from the Northern and Southern Netherlands, England and France, and by Chinese court painters, which share many similarities in terms of atmosphere, subject matter, and compositional aspects with the paintings under discussion here.⁶⁹ The hunt for ‘authentic’ sources stemmed from what Heinrich

describes as “the larger epistemological issue of determining who get to discriminate the ‘real’ from the ‘counterfeit’ in the debate about Chinese painters working in the Western styles.”⁷⁰ Did my concern to distinguish ‘authentic’ Western or Chinese models from well-produced reproductive winter views lead to new insights and an advanced outlook on the paintings in the Leiden museum? No, I would say. For, even though the overarching topic of *Made for Trade* – building an argument to elucidate that the commodity/export, historic, artistic, and material values, as they are congregated in the use value of most Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections – is convincingly present, it is not interesting to know exactly what the story of these absolute exponents of integrated cultural East-West dynamics unveils and on what sources they are based. That is to say, this knowledge does not add any value to the paintings per se.

Just as interesting as the quest for visual or textual sources for these Tartarian winter landscapes is the thinking about the line of appropriation or translation, relating to the

67 Wang 2014-b, 386–389.

68 Ibid., 386.

69 Among these are prints and paintings by the Flemish painter and draughtsman Joos de Momper (1564–1635) and works by the Dutch painter and graphic artist Hercules Segers (circa 1590–1636). Furthermore, the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1572–1616) by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg could have been an important source. A copy of this six-part work arrived at the Jesuit mission in Nanchang in 1708, and was thoroughly studied by Chinese artists who had contact with the Western missionaries. Cahill has discussed several prints from *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* like Tempe, Sevilla, Terracina, and the mountains of St. Adrian that inspired traditional Chinese painters in the Ming and early Qing dynasties when making their paintings. According to Cahill, European prints helped seventeenth-century Chinese landscape painters to break free of the established composition conventions and the limited number of defined landscape types that they had to adhere to (1982, 70–105). Patrick Conner proposes the English landscape painters George Morland (1763–1804) and George Smith (1713–1776) as possible models for the winter views. Furthermore, Chinese painters, such as Wu Bin (act. c. 1568–1626), Dong Qichang (1555–1636), Zhao Zuo (act. c. 1610–30), and Gong Xian (c. 1617–89), experimented with Western-style painting techniques in their landscapes (Rawski & Rawson 2005, 308–29; Cahill 1982, 70–105). Also scenes from Chinese literary classics could have served as inspiring sources. We know that, earlier, in the first half of the seventeenth century, figures in Chinese winter landscapes and scenes from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *Flowers in the Mirror*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, or *Romance of the Western Chamber*, were repeatedly depicted on export porcelain (Jörg et al. 2003, 73; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 1989, 57–97). Among well-known porcelain painters was Dong Qichang (1555–1636). He and a few of his followers were famous for their beautiful landscapes with mountains. The Leeuwarden Ceramics Museum Prinsessehof owns a blue, underglaze porcelain dish with a representation of a snow-covered landscape in which the Tang poet Meng Haoran (689–740), on a donkey in the snow, goes in search of plum blossoms and draws inspiration from nature (inv.nr. OKS 1984–62). Since the Song dynasty, this scene has regularly been a model for portraying figures in snowy landscapes in the later Ming and Qing dynasties (Jörg et al. 2003, 73). Furthermore, we know that during the Transitional Period (1620–1682) porcelain painters were not long constrained by conventional representations, because from 1620, the Imperial commissions began to diminish (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1989, 57). Woodcuts from novels frequently served as sources of inspiration for images on export porcelain (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1989, 57; Clunas 1997, 196). In particular, scenes with public dignitaries, accompanied by one or more people, often with a horse in a landscape with trees and against a backdrop of mountains were popular. It seems obvious, then, that this material inspired Cantonese export painters.

70 Heinrich 1999, 244.

changing situation of the Cantonese export painters as an effect of the globalisation of exchanges between ‘the West’ and China, involving, for example, the perception of visual art. I agree with Wang that the act of ‘appropriation’ deserves more attention. Wang explains that only “the approach of ‘appropriation’ gives agency to local actors and is thus one apposite response to the concern of Eurocentrism in art historical research.”⁷¹ She further points out that the study and “an understanding of local agents and the agencies that they assume are important in the exploration of complementary concepts as the relation of particularism and universalism, or localism and globalism.”⁷² These interdependent concepts, which have everything to do with their ‘translatability’ and ‘understanding’, can help us to explain why these artistic commodities, such as these winter views, are valuable and worthy of entering a new phase in their biographies.

Value accrueement through translation

An unbound and transcultural spot like Canton, for a long time (1757-1842) the only official place for *yang* things (things from across the sea) certainly left behind marks that lead to a mixed visual practice. To reiterate, researching these winter views requires me to approach them as transcultural commodities, teeming with mixed cultural phenomena, which are translated. ‘Translated’ in the sense that they represent a dynamic cultural interaction between and within conceptual parameters of Western and Chinese painting conventions. To what extent does the fact they are ‘foreignised’ or ‘translated’ lend value to these paintings? As is known, to some degree reciprocity of meaning-value (or the denial thereof) occurred at significant moments in the social life of Chinese export paintings. On the one hand, production-wise, they were meaningful due to successful economic trade (commodity/export value). On the other hand, consumer-wise, they represented a rich palette of valuable meaning from the perspective of trading activities. They had a commemorative function, albeit subjective and selective, they function as information carriers, they are pleasant to look at, and so on. Even though they depicted imaginary, composed landscapes, most of the export winter views faithfully expressed what Westerners thought about how harmonious

wintry Chinese landscapes should look.

The production of meaning as value in this specific movement requires rethinking the circulatory relationship with other meanings, because, as Lydia Liu posits in *Tokens of Exchange*, “no value can exist by itself.”⁷³ In the same impressive volume in which she expands the metaphor of translation, Liu, when talking about the term ‘token’, states that: “like verbal signs, objects also constitute representations and that their tangible material existence participates in its own signification rather than exists outside it.”⁷⁴ Returning to the value accrued by the Tartarian winter views in their social life, using ‘translation as a primary agent of token’ is appropriate as a means to explain why, at both ends of their trajectory, from production then to consumption today, their value is still at a premium. In other words: ‘translation’ has the capacity to enable exchange, produce and circulate meaning as value among visual culture independently of place and time.

As hinted at in Chapter 2.5., when thinking of ‘translating’ Chinese export paintings, we must consider the act of translation as an interactive dynamic. A dynamic that is important for the valuation of the unique character of these transcultural artworks. In doing so, we can understand the multifaceted positions of appraisal that Chinese export paintings have along their cultural biographical trajectory at different places. Moreover, in the course of time, Chinese export paintings might meet processes that deny their meaningful use value, which movements can change and reverse again in a renewed use value. This process, as discussed in Chapter 2.4., in which I explained the mechanisms of a material complex, depends on spatial and temporal aspects with subjective (human) attitudes towards the paintings. On the one hand, in the Netherlands, these winter views in Tartary have been overlooked and ‘frozen’ since 1883. On the other hand, contemporary developments in China today culminate in these paintings meeting a frantic art market. In contrast to their decline in meaning for the Dutch, in China they are consumed as increasingly meaningful and valuable. The symbolic meaning that stems from their connection to early international relations between Guangzhou and the worldwide community and, therefore, the role they play in

71 Wang 2014-b, 392.

72 Ibid.

73 Liu (ed.) 1999, 14.

74 Ibid., 4.

strengthening the identity of this city, now legitimately form foundations for the meaning and value of this painting genre. Imagine, when they move back to China, their use value changes into functional objects that affirm interconnectedness. This is in contrast to the local low value accrument some hundreds of years ago, when this harbour city stood on the production side of these artworks.

With the pictorial translation that took place, the meaning of these works depends on the composite of “maker, viewer, medium, intention and articulation.”⁷⁵ Looking at the translation process necessary to label them as paintings with absolute artistic value, I argue that the appraisal of these winter landscapes at both ends of the China-Netherlands line originates primarily from their hybrid character. These oil paintings, once exchanged from Canton to a new milieu, received a new meaning upon their arrival in the Netherlands, and many times after until today. Their particularities and local marks – as foreign and impenetrable aspects – can be translated into more familiar constructed universal (Western) features, thus making them comprehensible as a construct of ‘the East’, omitting their possible origins and rendering them as integrated new artworks in their own right. For audiences at both ends of the aforementioned line, they possess enough unknown (‘exotic’ Chinese and Western) and familiar ingredients. Notwithstanding the general Chinese underestimation of them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, today the excited Chinese art market in this field shows exactly the opposite. In the case of these paintings, we can assume that they were exchanged as a commodity for something equivalent: money. In addition, Royer acquired his ‘set of seven’ for his Chinese museum as a valuable source of information about China, an important marker, a first intention in their biography. The fact that they were hung on the walls of Room 2 of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities, a prestigious institution, is also important for their valuation. Bearing these components of cumulating value in mind, these paintings must become commensurable as exchangeable value and should be ‘exchanged’ (or circulated) again on that basis. By extension, the policy towards them in the museum where they are kept now must be adjusted to take into

account the meaningful use value these paintings once had, as both commodity and art. I trust that my plea in *Made for Trade* strengthens this argument. Indeed, I hope that it will be a ‘game-changer’ in this regard.

Value accrument through counter expertise

During the time span of my research for *Made for Trade*, i.e. since 2007, scouring the world for meaningful answers to my questions about these winter views, I have conducted a counter expertise exercise and asked relevant experts for comment. Their reactions to the ‘site’ of the images themselves are of such interest and are so valuable that I would like to share them. Firstly, Patrick Conner, a leading connoisseur in the field, knows of the existence of singular pieces with similar subject matter, but he has never come across sets identical to these winter landscapes.⁷⁶ Secondly, Ingrid Vermeulen, associate professor of early modern art history at the Amsterdam Free University and author of *Picturing Art History*. The rise of the illustrated history of art in the eighteenth century, wonders whether these paintings actually are Chinese. Further, as a specialist in the history of collecting, museums and the historiography of art, prints and drawing in the eighteenth century, she comments: “The way in which the fantastical mountain chains, the trees and the figures are composed makes me think of the idyllic landscape formulas of Western art (see for example, the prints at the Remondini’s foundation). Further, this subject makes me think, in particular, about the exotic images on porcelain (Sèvres, Meissen).”⁷⁷ Thirdly, James Cahill (1926-2014) appreciated the landscapes as “unusual and very interesting.”⁷⁸ The fourth scholar, Michael Sullivan (1916-2013), wrote:

[t]hose paintings really are remarkable. You must be thrilled to have discovered them. [...] They are clearly inspired by some European pictures or engravings that the artist(s) saw. But finding the originals could be a problem [...] It is odd that while the principal figures are Chinese, the hunters are clearly derived from some European picture or print. And those incredible icy mountains! [...] There are Chinese-looking figures in the pictures, and they seem to be enacting some story. I wonder whether it might be Lady Wen-chi’s Return, the old story of the

⁷⁵ Whiteman 2016, 119.

⁷⁶ Email 9 November 2006.

⁷⁷ Email 26 July 2010.

⁷⁸ Email 24 December 2010.

*Chinese lady married to a Xiongnu chieftain who lived the nomadic life with him in the northern wastes for years, and bears a child with him, before being ransomed and returning to China.*⁷⁹

Furthermore, Koos Kuiper, specialist in old Chinese books and manuscripts, confirmed my idea that some of the paintings are clearly situated in the Manchu area (bordered red banners near the tents) and that their depictions might be based on the above-mentioned Lady Wen-chi story.⁸⁰ My research into the eighteen images in *Tsai Wen-Chi, The Eighteen Laments*, translated by Rewi Alley (1963), did not yield any significant similarities. This result accords with the judgement of the Cantonese historian and Chinese export painting specialist, Jiang Yinghe, who believes that the story of these winter views has nothing to do with Wen-chi.⁸¹ Kuiper goes on to say that: “Some other paintings have Chinese landscapes. It’s very curious how they are depicted, just like Chinese landscapes, but with oil paint and with larger figures. The details are often good. I don’t think immediately of a specific story. Maybe they are different stories.”⁸² Finally, John Clark, let me know that

[t]hey are clearly Manchu in subject matter – investigating a Chinese literary theme seems not fruitful, like Sending Coals in the Snow – and the figures are all Manchu as shown by the women’s shoes, not bound feet. Going out of a camp for archery and falconry, unmounted, might be a Manchu custom in February since the snow landscapes are clearly not wet or with deep snow in the locality of the subjects. Indeed, the paths are all snow free, so the time is probably January or February. This points to a transfer to this medium of subjects from perhaps a customary set of Manchu annual events, these the winter ones. The painter is clearly well versed with Western landscape conventions with the low horizons and shading techniques applied to the trees. I don’t see much syncretism as in the Suzhou printers, so the guess would be a late eighteenth-century craftsman painter trained by Europeans in Beijing, possibly a Manchu artist

*given the social intimacy he has with his Manchu subjects, and possibly in the service of a Manchu prince in the North. I would check with the Palace Museum in both Beijing and Taipei in case they have something labelled Manchu craftsmen painting [Manzhou gongbi hua]. I can’t see anything in the Castiglione or Qing print books I have here.*⁸³

It goes without saying that these significant re-appraisals by respected specialists in the various fields of eighteenth century European and Chinese (export) visual culture, drawings and prints, Chinese manuscripts, Chinese classic stories, and early modern visual art produced both in ‘the West’ as in ‘the East’, make it absolutely clear that we are dealing here with a unique set of paintings, uncommonly valuable and rare.

6.3.

Conclusion: Back on the stage

The analysis of the paintings’ cultural biographies, the images themselves, compelling dynamic cultural interactions, the act of appropriation that took place, and the degree of translatability leads to the conclusion: they must be returned to circulation. The use value and the meaning of these sorts of paintings do not come from fidelity to an original, but, as Poole also argues, “from the system of accumulation, classification and exchange through which they circulate as image objects divorced from the substance they once portrayed.”⁸⁴ With their genesis in the economic trading circuit, these winter views were made for exchange with a specific audience. In this regard, the commodity/export value they once portrayed is an important aspect of their use value. Furthermore, as stated in the Introduction, if we follow the standpoint of Olsen, we must also recognise the importance of materiality (the agency and meaning of the paintings) and the inextricable entanglement of the human condition with objects and other non-human entities.⁸⁵ One aspect of the materiality of the Tartarian winter views is their presentational (visual) form; that is, their power to create presence. It is not their composition or technical

79 Emails 3 and 4 January 2011.

80 Email 4 January 2011.

81 Email 26 December 2010.

82 Email 4 January 2011.

83 Email 5 January 2011.

84 Poole 2007, 132.

85 Olsen 2012, 211. Van Eck et al. 2015, 5.

prowess, but rather their transcultural features, as a result of increased EurAsian cultural connectivity, plus their strong narrative aspects that ensure the artistic value we need to empower them with.

Having said that, looking at this group of paintings, neither the capacity, nor representations that claim to be truthful or real, counts when value accrument is at issue. I agree with Graeber's idea that "the specific history accumulated by an object in its production, exchange and consumption in some way is crucial to its value."⁸⁶ He argues, "it is prior human actions that are in some sense congealed in objects that make them valuable. Thus it is action itself which is the source of value, even if people do not recognize it as such."⁸⁷ I also took this 'action of exchange' regarding the social life of the studied group as a starting point for my research. The agency of this group as 'cast-offs' and the awareness of their significance made me act. The decision either to take action or not to take action is crucial for the future of these Tartarian winter views. Yet, it is what is done with these paintings, rather than their inherent meaning, that gives them significance. These paintings, therefore, as Nicolas Thomas posits in his influential work *Entangled Objects*, "are not what they were made to be, but what they have become."⁸⁸ This group of winter views possess a range of material qualities, but it is only when someone uses the paintings in such a way that those qualities with connected meanings are switched on that they become significant and valuable. Until then, these qualities are latent and invisible. In anticipating future policy and the attitude of Museum Volkenkunde towards these paintings, it is important to know how their materiality intervenes with this museum's collection. In particular, this museum context contributes to the interpretation and assignment of meaning to them, as these aspects come into being in interaction with the viewer and the researcher. Especially in the context of ethnological museums in the twenty-first century, which "are more apt to deploy narrative and 'experience' to stimulate the transfer of knowledge," these paintings should be at the heart of a

presentation, where they serve increasingly to illustrate ethnographic and historical phenomena.⁸⁹ They are noteworthy, not only for their artistry, but in particular for the story they tell us about the system responsible for their creation, the individuals responsible for their exchange, and the institutions responsible for their preservation. In other words: they are a material resource that is both an integral part of human heritage and central to understanding a specific time in history.

As is generally known, most attempts to categorise material culture are bound to fail. However, nowadays, the problem of classifying objects in museum collections has become important again, since many curators, as Ter Keurs notes with concern, are struggling with the development of thesauri for handling computerised collections.⁹⁰ In general, I agree with Ter Keurs that material culture is a valuable entry point into culture. Likewise, language, social structure, politics and norms and values prevailing in a society can be considered as legitimate starting points for research into a culture.⁹¹ But can we discover any key values of Chinese (or Western) society condensed in these winter views? The paintings alone do not speak a language that answers our questions. They cannot be considered sufficient for extracting relevant information from or about Chinese or Dutch culture. And, as said before, museum collections are limited sources for understanding cultures. The paintings referred to in this research patiently await their turn in the storeroom. Currently, they are not on display and are not accessible by the public. This fixed and static status does not do justice to the way in which they were used in their life, in the heyday of production and consumption in the nineteenth century. Contemporary users today, combined with current uses, are invested with the power to generate change and bring the paintings back to the exchange-chain again.

Competent museum workers are, like Haselberger's message recalled by Ter Keurs, primarily interested in collecting and documenting as much information as possible to secure solid evidence, records for generations to come.⁹² Such documentation is valuable, but

⁸⁶ Graeber 2002, quoted in Sutton 2004, 374.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 375.

⁸⁸ Thomas 1991, 4.

⁸⁹ Ter Horst 2012, 36.

⁹⁰ Ter Keurs 2006, 87.

⁹¹ Ibid., 202.

⁹² Ibid., 203.

will not solve all our questions. Thus, these transcultural landscape paintings, which are a part of the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, will always induce new questions that previous museum workers almost certainly did not think of. We must take into account the dynamic aspect of meaning, and, in doing so, the derivative value dwindle or just the increase of value that comes with changing views of reality and policies. Current museum systems with checklist information about these paintings recorded on registration cards give us the opinions of one or more people in a specific social context and over a specific time. The accurate documentation is valuable and harmful at the same time. In times when little information about ethnological collections was available, properly executed documentary work provides us useful information. Presently, it is more interesting to take a social-science view on culture and these paintings in museum collections, which, moreover, are not inalienable goods. Here, we come back to human interpretation, a process that enables us to understand reality. We need, as Ter Keurs so clearly states, “to integrate material culture into the complex world of human activities, in order not to become ‘objects freaks’, who are only interested in the objects themselves, and not how they can be useful in understanding human society,” and, as he continues, we must be aware that “the study of material culture has such fascination and promising horizons, that materiality cannot be stressed enough.”⁹³ It is important to keep attention for this group of winter views alive, thus justifying their brilliance.

Again, returning to the materiality of Chinese export paintings, we may not forget that “human action, or even human thought, can only take place through some kind of material medium and therefore cannot be understood without taking the qualities of that medium into account.”⁹⁴ Chinese export paintings have qualities in and of themselves. In memorialising the past by studying the many and multifaceted visual aspects of this specific painting

phenomenon, especially when it comes to their visual strength and their material features, this past will never look the same as when it is memorialised purely by historical written sources. The valuation of these qualities in and of themselves is an important aspect that must be involved in the formulation of a future policy regarding these paintings. Their potential value must be weighed up in the context of the bigger picture that the paintings are now part of. But is it true that one cannot have any meaningful approach to value without some notion of totalities? When totality is understood as something that exists in the actors’ imagination, as Graeber, who is not entirely comfortable with the word ‘totality’, states, “we can yet take up a reference to this term, when we study the concept of meaning.”⁹⁵ The conclusion in Graeber’s chapter ‘Value as the importance of actions’ convincingly reads: “It is surely one thing that almost all classic traditions of the study of meaning agree on, it is that for human beings, meaning is a matter of comparison.”⁹⁶ The process, in which this comparison takes place, realises value in the multifarious expressions of this notion.

It is clear that their interesting early life story did not add substantially to the value of the winter landscapes in Museum Volkenkunde. They certainly did not benefit from their flourishing period at the Royal ‘curiosity’ Cabinet after they left its premises.⁹⁷ But by restoring their former glory in times to come, I will once again situate them so that they can tell their story and amuse the eye. The marvellous and detailed execution and the haunting atmosphere of these Leiden paintings with their narrative images inhabited by figures in idyllic winter landscapes, have the potential to hang on walls again, like they did in Room 2 of the nineteenth-century Royal Cabinet. When restored, their universal qualities of shared cultural heritage will emerge, hale and hearty, and will lead to a new use value.

I should say that if these paintings are not getting looked at and are sitting in storage and collecting dust, they become pointless. ‘Frozen’

93 Ibid., 205.

94 Graeber 2001, 83.

95 Ibid., 86.

96 Ibid.

97 Until the late nineteenth century (1883) these paintings were part of a collection of curiosities. This is significant, because ‘curiosity’ as Rose (2007, 225) writes, was “increasingly understood as an inferior form of knowledge, prevalent among sailors for example rather than officers, and what were seen as more scientific and judgemental modes of knowing became dominant.”

and isolated from other processes that are going on in the world outside the museum, these paintings must be rescued from oblivion.

Finally, this chapter gives the stage to Hans-Georg Gadamer and his analyses of the encounter with art in his magnum opus *Truth and Method*. His view on this encounter is certainly relevant to this group of Tartarian winter views, when he writes that

*a work of art itself has a horizon and can never be separated from the circumstances of its origination, its intentions and functions. Increased understanding merges these horizons. The historical horizon of the work of art and the present-day horizon of the interpreter combine to form a new horizon that overrides both previous ones.*⁹⁸

Present-day viewers' and researchers' understandings are not merely reproductive, but productive as well, as discussed in the material complex-model in Figure 2.11. During the processes of understanding and accruelement of value, in different times and at different places, new aspects will emerge that enlarge the original significance horizon. We can assume, looking at this particular group of paintings and considering longer-term shifts and larger-scale dynamics, that we would discover a larger historical ebb and flow in the course of which their use value may well shift.⁹⁹ In a future display space they may well travel up the Western hierarchy, for "objects of 'art' have a higher status than objects of 'ethnography',"¹⁰⁰ as they were interpreted after they left Royer's stately home in The Hague. It would be interesting to further study the valuation of these Tartarian winter views over time, to explore the challenges entailed in knowledge of the changing, complex and variable conditions of viewing and evaluating those that were produced in the context of intercultural trading networks, undoubtedly a breeding ground for innovation and transformation. Surely, new horizons will emerge.

⁹⁸ Gadamer, quoted in Ter Horst 2012, 37.

⁹⁹ Siegenthaler 2013, 739. Some contemporary artists such as Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine, for example, challenged and interrogated the value and (re)production system of artworks on the global market in the mid-1990s by reproducing established icons of the art world within the exhibition space. This action was not focused on the Chinese export painting market though this historical painting genre suffered from the same idea that is, reproductions have no use value.

¹⁰⁰ Tythacott 2012, 179.

