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The illusion of verisimilitude : Johan Nieuhof's images of China
Sun, J.

Citation

Sun, J. (2013, June 6). *The illusion of verisimilitude : Johan Nieuhof's images of China*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20937>

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Title: The illusion of verisimilitude : Johan Nieuhof's images of China

Issue Date: 2013-06-06

The Illusion of Verisimilitude:
Johan Nieuhof's Images of China

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op donderdag 6 juni 2013
klokke 16.15 uur

door

Jing Sun

geboren te Peking, China

in 1979

Title in Dutch:

De illusie van waarschijnlijkheid:

Johan Nieuhofs verbeeldingen van China

Cover illustration:

Johan Nieuhof, *Forbidden City*, 1658, drawing, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Promotiecommissie

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Acknowledgements

During the first Dutch envoy's visit to China between 1655 and 1657, Johan Nieuhof (1617-1672) made many drawings of Chinese cities, towns, rivers, landscapes, Chinese people and their costumes, Chinese customs and so forth. The engravings of China, which were produced on the basis of these drawings, have been explored by various scholars from different perspectives. Nieuhof's work showed European people what China looked like, and thus raised their expectations of this fanciful country. It also greatly influenced the Chinoiserie fashion in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By tackling Nieuhof's opus I have aimed to shed new light on the illustrations of Dutch printed travelogues, a genre which bloomed in the seventeenth century along with the Dutch exploration in the world. To gain a deeper understanding of these issues, I have focused my research on the text and the drawings of the illustrated travelogue (the Paris manuscript) that Nieuhof personally offered to the Gentlemen XVII after his return from China and the illustrations of the first Dutch printed edition edited by his brother Hendrick and published by Jacob van Meurs in Amsterdam in 1665. By focusing on the discussion of Nieuhof's images of China, I have endeavoured to sketch a broader understanding, not only of the image of China in Europe, the "naar het leven" (from life) pictorial convention in the seventeenth century, but also of the complicated relationship between Nieuhof's images of China and Chinoiserie.

Owing to certain unexpected difficulties, it took me much longer time than I had anticipated finishing this research, but thanks to the intervention

2 *Acknowledgements*

of several persons whose names I mention below, the final months ‘passed like an arrow’.

I have received energetic, innovative training and constant support from many people during my research and writing, for which I am immensely grateful. Prof. Dr. Kitty Zijlmans, the head of the Art History Department, offered great encouragement and support. Natalie Everts was generous in helping me reading and translating seventeenth century Dutch archives. Rosemary Robson-McKillop made thousands of language corrections of my early text and Anne Sietske Keizer and Alice de Jong graciously shared their previous research with me. Marlein van Raalte and Nelleke Bartelings also gave me guidance and support during my research. Korrie Koorevaart and Lia ten Brink were always there when I needed them for solving administrative problems. With Lincoln Payne’s judicious editing, the rewritten draft finally turned into a presentable manuscript.

I owe special thanks to my supervisors from the History Department and Art History Department of Leiden University. It would be impossible for me to have completed my dissertation if without their enduring guidance, constructive suggestions, helpful comments and support, especially during the final stages. My gratitude to them cannot be described in words. According to Leiden academic tradition, I am not allowed to specifically thank my two promoters and supervisors, Prof. Leonard Blussé and Dr. Louk Tilanus. May I simply say that I have been fortunate to have had such quality mentoring and engaged supervision.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), the History Department and the Art History Department of Leiden University, the Art History Department of the University of California (Berkeley). The staff in various archives, libraries

and museums was very helpful during my research. Jinna Smit of the National Archives of the Netherlands (The Hague) helped me to scan the important archives of the VOC for my research, and Lina van der Wolde of Atlas Van Stolk assisted me to review the drawings made by Pieter van Doornik and the related sources. Many individuals who were my fellow doctoral students of the Art History Department, Todd M. Richardson, Larissa Mendoza Traffon and Anna K. Grasskamp have been a constant source of inspiration, confirmation and guidance.

I also thank my family for their unfailing support in many different ways. Finally, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Chinese Scholarship Council for funding my research and writing.

Introduction

I. The significance of Nieuhof's book on China

It [*Het Gezantschap*] is, as people well know, the earliest and most reliable source on China in the seventeenth century and is still very valuable even today. (Het is, gelijk men weet, de meest vroegtijdige en trouwste bron over het China der zeventiende eeuw, nog op waarde geschat in de tegenwoordige.)¹

—J. T. Bodel Nijenhuis

In the years 1655 to 1657, the first Dutch envoy's visit to China was commissioned by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), its primary task being to negotiate trading privileges in China.² Although this visit did not achieve the expected goals, the publication of the account of the embassy's experience by Johan Nieuhof (1618–1672, see fig. 1) was an undoubted triumph.³ His work not only helped satisfy the seventeenth-century European longing for knowledge of China and stimulated people's curiosity about this mysterious country, but it also exercised significant influence on the development of European art, especially chinoiserie, in the late

¹ See J. T. Bodel Nijenhuis, "Johan Nieuhof," *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde* 3 (1864): 36.

² On the background and process of this envoy visit, see Margery Corbett, "The Dutch Mission to Peking in 1655," *Quaerendo* 16 (1986): 131–36; also see Leonard Blussé and Reindert Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657* (Middelburg: Stichting VOC Publicaties, 1987), 14.

³ The result of this embassy visit has been discussed by many scholars, see Henriette Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops, "Not Such an 'Unpromising Beginning': The First Dutch Trade Embassy to China, 1655–1657," *Modern Asian Studies* 36: 3 (2002): 535–578. Also see Leonard Blussé, "No Boats to China: The Dutch East India Company and The Changing Pattern of The China Sea Trade, 1635–1690," *Modern Asian Studies* 30:1 (1996): 51–70.

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁴ The first edition was published in Amsterdam by the bookseller and art dealer Jacob van Meurs (1619–1680) in 1665,⁵ as *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keize van China: waar in de gedenkwaardighste Geschiedenissen, die onder het reizen door de Sineesche Landtschappen [. . .] sedert den jare 1655 tot 1657 zijn voorgevallen [. . .] verhandelt worden. Beneffens Een Naukeurige Beschrijving der Sineesche Steden, Dorpen, Regeeing, Wetenschappen, Hantwerken, Zeden, Godsdiensten, Gebouwen, Drachten, Schepen, Bergen, Gewassen, Dieren, etc, en Oorlogen tegen de Tartars. Verciert met over de 150 Afbeeltsels, na't leven in Sina getekent* (An embassy of the Dutch East India Company to the Grand Cham of Tartary, the present Emperor of China: in which are treated the most remarkable events which befell them during the journey through the Chinese Countryside [. . .] from the year 1655 to 1657 [. . .] Also, an accurate description of the Chinese cities, villages, government, sciences, crafts, customs, religions, buildings, costumes, ships, mountains, crops, animals etc.. and the wars against the Tartars.

⁴ There is a lot of research about the influence of Nieuwhof's book of China to the development of chinoiserie. For instance, see Paola Dematte and Marcia Reed, *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2007), 13–26; Donald F. Lach, and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, bk. 4, *East Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.1685; Chi-ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-century England, 1660–1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 144.

⁵ Jacob van Meurs had obtained the privilege granted by the States of Holland for fifteen years to publish this book, not only in Dutch, but also in French and Latin editions. He also published many other travel accounts about China, including Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* (1667), Olfert Dapper's *Gedenkwaerdig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye op de kuste en in het Keizerrijk van Taising of Sina* in 1670. The same publisher of the three significant books on China in the seventeenth century, to a large extent, explains their close connection. Moreover, in 1682, his workshop also published Nieuwhof's books on East India and Brazil: *Zee- en Lant-Reise door verscheide Gewesten van Oostindien, behelzende veele zeldzaame en wonderlijke voorvallen en geschiedenissen. Beneffens een beschrijving van lantschappen, dieren, gewassen, draghten, zeden en godsdienst der inwoonders: En inzonderheit een wijtloopig verhael der Stad Batavia* and *Gedenkweerdige Brasiliaense Zee- en Lant-Reise und Zee- en Lant-Reize door verscheide Gewesten van Oostindien.en van Oostindien.*

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Embellished with more than 150 illustrations, drawn from life in China). As the title indicates, this book offers an overview of the Dutch embassy's visit in China and an accurate description of China. The greatest selling-point of this book conveyed by the title is the more than 150 finely engraved illustrations depicting a comprehensive range of aspects of China, including cityscapes and architecture; people and their costumes; customs; flora and fauna, and so forth.



Figure 1. Portrait of Johan Nieuhof from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

In this circumstance, it is not difficult to understand the great success of Nieuhof's book of China upon its publication, because it not only presented European readers with the most substantial and detailed account of China of the day, but its many illustrations also enabled them to visualize China. Translations into other European languages appeared in rapid

succession in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ A French translation by Jean le Carpentier, under the title *L'Ambassade de la Compagnie Oriental des Provinces Unies vers L'empereur de la Chine*, was printed in Leiden the same year as the first Dutch edition.⁷ In 1666, van Meurs brought out a German translation, while another Dutch version with considerable deletions and additions was printed in Antwerp. A Latin translation under the title *Legatio Batavica ad magnum Tartarae Chamun* followed in 1668, and the first English translation was edited by John Ogilby in 1669.⁸

Thus Nieuhof's book of China quickly became one of the primary sources of information in Europe about China and the Far East, and its illustrations remained standard visual sources for images of China for a long time.⁹ As a result, it has been highly valued by scholars. For instance, in *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Edwin van Kley comments that "Nieuhof's account presented the Dutch reader with the most substantial and detailed description of the Middle Kingdom yet published" and the illustrations "provided European readers with more realistic visual images of China's landscape and people than ever before."¹⁰

⁶ It was quickly translated and printed into many editions. Dutch: Amsterdam, 1665, 1669, 1670, 1680, 1693, and Antwerp, 1666 (an expurgated Roman Catholic edition); German: Amsterdam, 1666, 1669 and 1675; English: London, 1669 and 1673; French: Leiden, 1665; Latin: Amsterdam, 1668. For the bibliography of these editions, see P. A. Tiele, *Nederlandsche Bibliographie Van Land- En Volkenkunde* (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller, 1884), 179–80.

⁷ According to John Pinkerton, this edition was made after Nieuhof's manuscript and de Carpentier had edited half of the first part and almost all of the second part of this book. See John Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World, Many of Which Are Now First Translated into English: Digested on A New Plan* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1808–1814), 7.231.

⁸ In the English edition, Ogilby follows the text in the first Dutch edition with only a few slips. He also selected the best English illustrator, Wenceslar Hollar, to copy the engravings. See Margery Corbett, "The Dutch Mission to Peking in 1655," *Quaerendo* 16 (1986): 133.

⁹ See Demattè and Reed, *China on Paper*, 142.

¹⁰ Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, bk. 1, *Trade, Missions, Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 484.

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This comment actually points out two characteristics that distinguish Nieuhof's book from previous publications on China, namely the written account and the illustrations. Accounts of China in previous publications were mainly based on scattered pieces of information including previously published sources, earlier reports by missionaries in China, and occasionally the accounts of other travellers, such as the *Historia del gran Reyno de la China* written by the Augustinian father Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza in 1585,¹¹ and Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Reys-gheschrift vande navigatien der Portugaloyers in Orienten* (Travel accounts of Portuguese navigation in the Orient) and *Itinerario*, published in 1595 and 1596, respectively.¹² Although later works by Jesuits like Matteo Ricci¹³ and Martino Martini,¹⁴

¹¹ This book was in response to the growing interest in China among educated Europeans in the sixteenth century. However, Mendoza had never been to China. The original Spanish title is *Historia de la cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China*, which means literally "history of the most notable things, rites, and customs, of the great kingdom of China." It was very successful that by the end of the sixteenth century that it had been reprinted 46 times in seven European languages: Spanish, German, Dutch Italian, French, English and Latin. See Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24–25; also see Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, bk. 2, *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 743. The Dutch translation was printed in Alkmaar in 1595 under the title *D'istorie ofte Beschrijvinghe van het Groote Rijk van China* (The History or Description of the Great Kingdom of China).

¹² When Jan Huyghen van Linschoten worked for the Portuguese, he had access to the secret nautical maps and then copied and took them back to Holland. These maps and a great number of sailing instructions about the voyage to Asia provided in his books enabled the Dutch and English to get access and trade with Asian countries including China. His books are also well known for the description on Asia. However, the account on China and its people takes a minor part, and it is in fact taken almost entirely from Mendoza's work, probably by the publisher Cornelis Claeszoon, who also brought out the Dutch translation of de Mendoza's description of China. See Ernst van den Boogaart, *Civil and Corrupt Asia: Image and Text in the Itinerario and the Icones of Jan Huygen Van Linschoten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Lach and Van Kley, *Trade, Missions, Literature*, 435–436.

¹³ Ricci arrived at Macau in August 1582, and from 1601 he stayed in Peking until the end of his life in 1610. During this period, he kept writing journals to record the progress of his work and Chinese culture in general. His letters, reports and diaries were taken to Rome by Father Nicholas Trigault, a fellow Jesuit who translated them from Italian to Latin and had them published in 1615. There are a lot of works discussing his work and contribution on the communication between China and Europe. See Lach and Van Kley, *Trade, Missions, Literature*, 483; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (London: Faber, 1985); Gianni Criveller, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China: The Jesuits' Presentation of Christ from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Aleni* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 1997).

offered the European readers more detailed information about Chinese society,¹⁵ it is noteworthy that such great attention and introductions to China may have been made out of more practical considerations, as most of the Jesuit's reports and letters were published to display the success of their mission in China in order to acquire support from Rome. Moreover, when the letters were translated or published, they often were abbreviated or censored by the secretary of the Society of Jesus. Unlike these publications, Nieuhof's book provides a contemporary's eyewitness account of the VOC's first official visit to China and the experience of travelling through the interior of China.

The first part of the book is a narrative of the journey and includes a brief description of Chinese history and geography borrowed from Father Nicholas Trigault's work and Martini's *Atlas*.¹⁶ But the essential part of the narrative of the envoy's visit is based upon Nieuhof's personal observations. The second part of the book is a general description of China based primarily on the works by Trigault, Semedo, and Martini.¹⁷ Therefore, although the general descriptions of China were borrowed from previous

¹⁴ After his study in China for more than ten years, Martini took with him more than 50 Chinese books and maps when he went back to Europe in 1651. In 1654, he arrived in Amsterdam and edited the large atlas of China for the cartographer Johan Blaeu, who published the *Novus Atlas Sinensis* in 1655. In addition to a general description of Chinese culture and history, this atlas contains seventeen maps of China and its provinces. Despite of the fact that Martini had been to several provinces of China as a Jesuit since 1642, the maps in his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* were entirely derived from the *Mongol Atlas*, which were compiled by Zhu Siben in 1311–12 and later revised by Lo Hongxian. Thus the Chinese provinces that Martini had never been to were also contained in his atlas. Even so, they were the most accurate maps of China that was available in Europe in the seventeenth century. On Martini and his atlas of China, see Demattè and Reed, *China on Paper*, 188–190.

¹⁵ It includes Chinese intellectual tradition, Chinese achievements in mathematics, astronomy and medicine as well as the crucial role of the Confusion classics in Chinese society.

¹⁶ See Lach and Van Kley, *Trade, Missions, Literature*, 483. Father Nicholas Trigault took back Matteo Ricci's work on China, and translated them from Italian to Latin and had them published in Augsburg in 1615.

¹⁷ Nicholas Trigault's *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (1615), Alvarez Semedo's *Imperio de la China* (1642) and Martino Martini's *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655) had been considered as the most important Jesuit's description of China in the first half of seventeenth century, see Lach and Van Kley, *Trade, Missions, Literature*, 483.

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publications, Nieuhof did provide firsthand material about China, especially his experiences along the route from Canton to Peking. This was no doubt very enlightening to European readers, especially given the context of China's nationwide seclusion policy in the seventeenth century, which made accurate information about the country hard to obtain.¹⁸

Another significant characteristic of Nieuhof's book are the more than 150 illustrations (the number of illustrations slightly differs in various editions of the book) which he claimed to have produced from eyewitness observation. Such an undertaking requires at least some basic artistic training, which most Jesuits, Dutch merchants, and sailors probably did not have. Although some earlier works are illustrated, the drawings and engravings do not seem to have been based on eyewitness observation. For instance, Van Linschoten's *Itinerario* contains several illustrations showing Chinese people, their costume, and boats. Figure 2, for instance, shows two Chinese couples arranged in the extreme foreground as if they are standing on a stage, while behind them a cityscape indicates where they come from. This is a commonly-used approach to highlight the figures and their costume in contemporary travel illustrations. The man second from the right wears a long robe with wide sleeves and a hat with two wings. At first glance, the robe and hat resemble the costume wore by Chinese officials in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), but a closer examination of the details suggests that the representation is not accurate, especially that of the hat. It is true that the official's hat in the Ming Dynasty has two wings, but they should be on the left and right side of the hat, as shown in figure 3, rather

¹⁸ On how the structure, language and other elements in Nieuhof's text affect the credibility of his narrative of his experience in China, see Dawn Odell, "The Soul of Transactions: Illustration and Johan Nieuhof's Travel in China," in *Tweelinge eener dragt': Woord en beeld in de Nederlanden (1500–1750)*, ed. K. J. S. Bostoen and Elmer Kolfin (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 225–241.

than on the front and back as shown in Van Linschoten's illustration. As a matter of fact, the style of the figures can hardly be regarded as Chinese, especially in view of the woman's hairstyle and collar decoration, and the background setting, which more closely resembles a European landscape. Given the fact that Van Linschoten never set foot in China, and the account of China in the *Itinerario* derives from Mendoza's work, the authenticity of these illustrations of China is quite doubtful.



Figure 2. Huygen van Linschoten, image of Chinese figures in *Itinerario*, 1595.



Figure 3. Unknown artist, “Portrait of Xu Guangqi (徐光启),” late Ming Dynasty.
Private collection in the United States.

Unlike previous publications, which contain limited and borrowed images, those in Nieuhof’s book are said to have been drawn *na het leven* (from life) in China and to provide a comprehensive survey of various aspects of life in China at that time. These illustrations include a frontispiece, a full-page engraved portrait of Nieuhof with an engraved poem by Jan Vos underneath (as shown in figure 1), one large folding map of China that shows the envoys’ route, thirty-four double-page engraved plates, and views of Batavia, Canton, Macao, Nankan, Nanking, and Beijing, among other cities, and one hundred and ten half-page engraved views and plates of religious and public ceremonies, costumes, animals, fish, and plants, with captions in Dutch.

These illustrations, such as those representing Chinese figures and their costumes, offer a more reliable impression of China than those in Van Linschoten’s book. A glance at an engraving showing the young viceroy of Canton (fig. 4) reveals the particular style and some characteristics of these illustrations. In the centre of this print, the young viceroy is mounted on

horseback and his soldiers are lined up in the background holding various flags. He wears a hat bedecked with peacock feathers and an official uniform, and a sword and a quiver of arrows hang on either side of his waist. His costume and equipment match the actual situation in the Qing Dynasty, as we can see “Portrait of Yunli (允礼)” made by Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), an Italian Jesuit and well-known artist who was active in the Qing court in the eighteenth century (fig. 5). The remarkable similarities between these two pictures, such as the type of hat, the style of garment, and the kinds of weapons suggest that Nieuhof’s illustration offers the viewer a reliable impression of how Chinese officials in the Qing Dynasty were dressed and armed. And this, to a large extent, also reflects the remarkable quality of the illustrations noted in the title, that they are all *na’t leven in Sina getekent* (drawn from life in China).



Figure 4. Drawing folio 18 in the Paris manuscript.



Figure 5. Giuseppe Castiglione, “Portrait of Yunli (允礼),” 18th century, 31.5x36.7cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

II. The claim of “na het leven” of the illustrations of China in

Het Gezantschap

The reliability of these illustrations of China had also been emphasized by Nieuhof himself as follows: herein (without committing any breach of modesty) I dare boldly affirm that nothing considerable intruded into my observation relating to my design, and that making accurate maps and sketches, not only of the countries and towns, but also of beast, birds, fishes, and

plants, and other rarities never divulged (as I am informed) heretofore.¹⁹

In addition to the emphasis that he has made accurate sketches on the basis of his own observations, he further points out other authors' lack of accuracy: "And also we find by their most ancient and accurate writers, that they neither spared cost, study, nor pains, to be replenished with remote and transmarine embellishments, both of arts, science, and industry."²⁰

These claims were also highlighted by his brother Hendrik Nieuhof, who was in charge of the publication of his work in Amsterdam. Hendrik echoed his brother in his introduction to the book on Johan Nieuhof's *Voyages & Travels to the East Indies 1653–1670*, claiming that Johan stuck to the "naked truth" (naekte waerheit) and gave an account of history rather than fables.²¹

Claims of trustworthiness, as Dawn Odell has pointed out, usually appear in the introductions to the travel book narratives of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²² For instance, the German physician, scientist, and artist, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), who, like Nieuhof, was commissioned by the VOC to record an embassy's experience in Japan in 1690–92, pointed out in the prologue of his travelogue of Japan:

¹⁹ The Dutch text is "En hier in, zonder roem gesproken, heb ik my ook zodanig gequeeten, dat ik niets on-aangemerkt heb laten voor-bygaan, zo in 't onderzoeken, van de zeden en manieren dezer volken, en den aart van 't land, als ook, en dat voornamelijk, in 't aftekenen van lantschappen, steden, dorpen, dieren, kruiden, en meer andere vreemdigheden; 't welk tot noch toe, mijns wetens, niemand dus gedaan heeft." See Johan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, ann den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China ...* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665), 3.

²⁰ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, the second English ed. (London, 1673), 2.

²¹ Nieuhof, *Gedenkwaardige zee en lantreise door de voornaemste landschappen van West en Oostindien* (Amsterdam, 1682), Introduction, unnumbered.

²² Odell, "The Soul of Transactions: Illustration and Johan Nieuhof's Travel in China," 225.

I will describe and publish its [Japan's] present condition before dealing with my travel diaries and other works, giving assurance that everything is described and illustrated as I saw it and without exaggeration. The illustrations are perhaps not very attractive, but they are unaltered and by my own hand. The descriptions are at times incomplete, but they contain only facts that deal with the hidden workings of the empire.²³

Proclaiming the veracity of both the text and the illustrations was apparently a great selling point for his travelogue. This was actually a very common approach used to emphasize the credibility of travel accounts and illustrations in the seventeenth century, particularly for those authors who had actually seen the foreign countries for themselves.

Not all of Nieuhof's contemporaries approved his claim, especially readers who had the opportunity to observe China with their own eyes. Vincent Paets, the ambassador of the second VOC envoy's visit to China in 1666–67 wrote of Nieuhof's work that "in addition to the much exaggerated and unfaithful depiction in Nieuhof's book, I did not see anything special in China" (buyten de ontrouw door den schrijver Nieuhoff in het opproncken van zijn beschrijvinge niet bijsonders hebben aangemerckt).²⁴ More than a century later another Dutch ambassador, Isaac Titsingh, offered a similar assessment after his journey in China in 1795. He said that *Het gezantschap* was "a too much embellished record by Nieuhof" (een te zeer opgecierende

²³ Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, trans. M. Bodart-Bailey (Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1999), 27.

²⁴ Jan Vixseboxse, *Een Hollandsch Gezantschap Naar China in de Zeventiende Eeuw (1685–1687)* (Leiden: Brill, 1946), 85.

aftekening in Nieuhof).²⁵ These statements contradict the claims of both author and publisher, and raise doubts about the reliability of both the text and illustrations in Nieuhof's book of China.

This has drawn the attention of many scholars. In his study of Nieuhof's work, for instance, Leonard Blussé has pointed out that Nieuhof was not involved in the production and publication of the first Dutch edition or other translations,²⁶ so the embellishments in the printed book should be largely attributed to Hendrik Nieuhof and the publishers, and "because various text and illustration editors have made arbitrary recomposition and additions to its original content, his [Johan Nieuhof's] text and illustrations, to a large extent, lose their authenticity."²⁷

He has also analysed different editions of Nieuhof's book. In the first French edition, which was titled *L'Ambassade de la Compagnie Orientale des Provinces Unies vers l'Empereur de la Chine ... faite par les Srs P. de Goyer et J. de Keyser ... Le tout recueilli par Nieuhoff ... mis en François*, Jean le Carpentier admitted that he had modified and added some details.²⁸ The practical purpose for such modifications, however, is more obvious in the Dutch edition, which was published in 1666 in Antwerp. In this edition Nieuhof's negative account of how the Jesuits misrepresented the Dutch embassy to Chinese Emperor at the imperial court has been omitted. Instead,

²⁵ See Isaac Titsingh and Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh in China (1794–1796): Het Onuitgegeven Journaal van Zijn Ambassade naar Peking* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto/Repro Holland, 2005), 280–82.

²⁶ Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 16–17.

²⁷ Leonard Blussé and Zhuang Guotu, eds., *A Study of the First Dutch Embassy Visit to China* (<荷使初访中国记> 研究) (Xiamen: Xiamen University Publishing House, 1989), 23.

²⁸ Johan Nieuhof, *L'ambassade De La Compagnie Orientale Des Provinces Unies Vers L'empereur De La Chine ... Faite Par Les Srs P. De Goyer Et J. De Keyser ... Le Tout Recueilli Par Nieuhoff ... Mis En François*, ed. Jean Le Carpentier (Leiden, 1665), introduction. Also see Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World, Many of Which Are Now First Translated into English*, 7.231.

the publisher, Cnobaert, who was closely connected with the Jesuits had added fourteen new chapters declaring the Jesuits' respectable activities in China.²⁹

This strategy was often used by seventeenth-century authors and publishers. Again, a glimpse of Kaempfer's comments on a previous travel book about Japan, this one edited by Arnoldus Montanus (ca. 1625–1683), will shed some light on this strategy:

Although it is claimed that the work [by Montanus] has been compiled from the diaries and writings of the ambassadors themselves, I truly believe that if you remove what the author has taken at random from the letters of the Jesuits . . . there would be very few pages left. More important still, most of the plates, which form the chief ornamentation and are as it were the soul of transactions of this kind, depart a long way from the truth, and do not show things as they were, but as the draughtsman imagined them to be.³⁰

In this statement, in the process of claiming the superiority of his own account, Kaempfer also reveals what he sees as the strategy behind seventeenth-century travel books. According to him, the text found in

²⁹ Paul Arblaster, "Piracy and Play: Two Catholic Appropriations of Nieuhof's *Gezantschap*," in *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks*, ed. Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong, and Elmer Kolfin (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 129; Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 16. According to Guido van Meersbergen, this edition was actually published by van Meurs under the false name Cnobaert; see Guido van Meersbergen, "De uitgeversstrategie van Jacob van Meurs belicht: De Amsterdamse en 'Antwerpse' edities van Johan Nieuhofs *Gezantschap* (1665–1666)," *Tijdschrift van de Werkgroep Zeventiende Eeuw Cultuur in de Nederlanden* 26:1 (2010): 79–82.

³⁰ I. H. van Eeghen, "Arnold Montanus's Book on Japan," *Quaerendo* 4 (1972): 256–57; also see Odell, "The Soul of Transactions: Illustration and Johan Nieuhof's Travel in China," 225.

seventeenth-century travel books on Asia relied largely on descriptions by Jesuits, while the illustrations were based on the draughtsman's imagination rather than the truth. Therefore, to return to Nieuhof's case, it would not be a surprise that the editors' and publishers' background as well as the contemporary readers' interest and preferences had an impact on the text and illustrations found in different editions of Nieuhof's work. In this process, the text and illustrations lose a lot of their authenticity, as Blussé has argued. That is to say, the changes made by the publishers and the engravers served as the primary rationale for why ambassadors who later had the opportunity to see China with their own eyes came up with a different assessment of publishers' claims of "na het leven" in Nieuhof's work of China.

But here one issue needs to be addressed: whether the different assessments, or the lack of authenticity, can be completely attributed to the publishers and editors? In other words, we have to ask whether the source of the printed books, namely, the text and the drawings or sketches made by Nieuhof while still in China, had the quality of "na het leven."

Here, a very interesting case study related to the above issue is the version of Nieuhof's travelogue of China included in one of the four-volume travel compilations, the *Relations de Divers Voyages Curieux* by the French publisher Melchisédech Thévenot (c. 1620–1692).³¹ Thévenot mainly collected and translated travel accounts from English and Dutch long-distance voyagers, as these accounts contained more reliable and

³¹ For more information on Thévenot's collection of voyages, see Nicholas Dew, "Reading Travels in the Culture of Curiosity: Thévenot's Collection of Voyages," *Journey of Early Modern History* 10 (2006): 39–59.

practical information that could be used by French merchants.³² Because Thévenot had good relations with people in the Dutch Republic, he could get access to some unpublished texts relating to the Dutch East Indies trade, particularly through Christiaan Huygens, who sent him François Caron's description of Japan. It is highly likely that Thévenot's Dutch friends gave him a copy of Nieuhof's as yet unpublished account of the Dutch embassy to China.³³

However, there remains the controversial issue of whether a version of Nieuhof's travelogue of China was first compiled in Thévenot's collections, as Peter Rietbergen and, in his wake, Blussé suggest. The *Relations de Divers Voyages Curieux* is the first large-scale French travel collection and consists of four parts. The first part of the *Relations* appeared in 1663, the second in 1664, the third in 1666 (together with a reissue of Parts 1 and 2), and the fourth in 1672.³⁴ Nieuhof's account of China appeared in the third part in 1666, but it was also marked that this was first printed in 1664 as claimed on the octroy page that "Achevé d' imprimer pour la première fois le 25, October, 1664."³⁵ Reconstructing the messy collections by Thévenot and interpreting this privilege, Rietbergen has concluded that the Thévenot edition of 1664 is actually the publication of an original text and was wrongly dated 1666.³⁶ That is to say this account of Nieuhof should be dated one year earlier than the first Dutch edition, even if it was reissued in

³² See Melchisédech Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux, qui n'ont point esté publiées ou qui ont esté traduites d'Hacluyt, de Purchas, et d'autres voyageurs Anglois, Hollandois, Portugais, Allemands, Espagnols, et quelques Persans, Arabes et autres orientaux* (Paris, 1666), Introduction; and Dew, "Reading Travels in the Culture of Curiosity: Thévenot's Collection of Voyages," 48, 51.

³³ See Dew, "Reading Travels in the Culture of Curiosity: Thévenot's Collection of Voyages," 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52, footnote 46.

³⁵ See Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, "Extrait dv privilege dv roy."

³⁶ P. J. A. N. Rietbergen, "Zover de aarde rijkt. De werken van Johan Nieuhof (1618–1672) als illustratie van het probleem der cultuur-en mentaliteits geschiedenis tussen specialisatie en integratie," *De zeventiende eeuw* 2–1 (1986): 24.

the third part of Thevenot's work in 1666. This means his edition is not a translation from the first Dutch edition. Therefore, the version of Nieuhof's travelogue in Thévenot's collection is supposed to be closer to Nieuhof's original work than the first Dutch edition, and it has been so considered by later authors such as Antoine François Prévost (1697–1763)³⁷ and John Pinkerton (1758–1826), who chose to use this edition for his English translation in 1808.³⁸ Anthony Reid further points out in his 1988 translation of Nieuhof's book that the French edition by Thévenot is the most faithful version of Nieuhof's *China voyage*.³⁹

However, Guido van Meersbergen believes that Thévenot's version of Nieuhof's account is an abridgement from Van Meurs's edition,⁴⁰ because he does not believe the existence of the original text as about which Thévenot wrote as follows:

The principal merit of this *Relation* is the truth. I have checked that the instruction is trustworthy and the only ornament that I can offer is truth. I have held the conviction that people who read it can be sure that it completely conforms to the two Dutch copies that I have had copied and one of them is signed Nieuhof. For this reason, I have been very careful to change nothing, and even certainly not add more passages by other authors who

³⁷ A. F. Prévost, *Histoire Générale Des Voyages* (La Haye, 1746–61), 7.3.

³⁸ As he said in the introduction of his collection of Nieuhof's account of China: "Of these several editions of this work, we think that of Thévenot to be both the most exact and genuine. For which reason we have used it as a check upon the English translation, and have often supplied it from thence; which additions, for distinction's sake, are placed between hooks." See Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World, Many of Which Are Now First Translated into English*, 7.233.

³⁹ Johan Nieuhof, *Voyages & Travels to the East Indies 1653–1670* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii.

⁴⁰ Meersbergen, "De uitgeversstrategie van Jacob van Meurs belicht: De Amsterdamse en 'Antwerpse' edities van Johan Nieuhofs Gezantschap (1665–1666)," 78–79.

wrote about China in fear of mixing things they have reported by hearsay. I think only one area that he [Nieuhof] wanted to speak about the history of Temurleng, is wrong.

(Le principal merite de cette Relation est la verité. I'ay crû que sur tout la traduction en devoit estre fidele, que c'étoit là le seul ornement qu'elle pût souffrir. Ceux qui la liront se peuvent assurer qu'elle est en tout conforme à deux copies Hollandoises que j'en ay manuscrites, dont l'une est signée Nieuhoff. Je me suis bien gardé par cette raison d'y rien changer, & encore plus d'y inserer des passages de ces autres auteurs qui ont écrit de la Chine, de peur de mesler ce qu'ils rapportent souvent sur des oüydire, avec ce que ces gens-cy ont veu. Il n'y a qu'un seul endroit où il a voulu parler de l'histoire de Temurleng, où je croy qu'il se trompe.)⁴¹

In this account, he not only declares that this travelogue is based on two Dutch manuscripts of which he has made copies and that one of them has been signed by Nieuhof, but he also emphasizes that the French translation conforms to these two copies and that he does not add anything else about China by other authors. Based on this statement, Blussé therefore infers that these two copies are actually the source of Nieuhof's account in Thévenot's version. Besides the manuscript, which according to Thévenot is by "Nieuhof," there is another official manuscript submitted to the Gentlemen Seventeen, the directors of the VOC, which will be analysed in detail in later chapters of this study. Regardless, Thévenot's version provides a much briefer report of the first Dutch embassy visit to China than

⁴¹ Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, Introduction.

the other editions. Compared to the 208 pages in Van Meurs's 1665 Dutch edition, there are only 37 pages about this journey in the Thévenot version.

Thévenot also remarks on the credibility of Nieuhof's account, and expresses his belief that except for the history of Temurleng, Nieuhof's record on China is reliable. But he is not altogether uncritical and he points out the limitations or shortcomings of Nieuhof's record, noting that because the Dutch embassy had always been confined in their lodgings in Canton and in Beijing, Nieuhof had little chance to broaden his version and provide a more comprehensive and detailed description of China.⁴² It is true that due to Chinese policy, the Dutch embassy was often confined in their lodgings during their stay in Canton and Beijing, and they were often shut out of some Chinese towns and cities. Therefore, unlike most editors who always insisted on the credibility of their publications, Thévenot tried to offer an objective assessment of Nieuhof's work. He also applied this objective attitude to the illustrations in Nieuhof's manuscript, which we can see from his comments on the illustrations:

I have nothing added in my description, because I thought they had no relation to the description he gives and I had some suspicion that there were many cityscapes made for pleasure, in addition to which all the cities in China look alike, as we are assured by the cosmographers themselves who confirm that who

⁴² Ibid., unnumbered. The French text is "Cette Relation est courte à la verité, mais il faut faire justice à son Auteur, & faire reflexion sur ce que les Hollandois ayant esté toujours enfermez en leur logis à Canton & à la Cour de Pekin, comme il dit, après cette confession il auroit eu mauvaise grace de s'étendre à faire une description des Provinces de la Chine, d'en marquer l'étendue & les bornes, de faire le denombrement & l'estime du nombre d'hommes qui les habitent, de marquer leurs revenus, & enfin d'entrer dans un détail que nous ne devons attendre que de ceux qui l'ont traduit des Chinois mesmes, que je donneray avec quantité d'autres particularitez, dans la suite de ce Recueil. Outre la Relation du Voyage des Ambassadeurs, Nieuhoff nous en a donné aussi une autre manuscrite qui a pour titre, Route de Voyage des Ambassadeurs."

has seen one, has seen them all. For this reason, I believed that it was enough to insert the views of Peking and Nanking, the two principal cities of China. The plate that shows the animal carrying musk, is already in the first part of this book; those of plants and some animals of this country can be seen in the second part with the description given by Father Boym. (Je n'ay point inseré dans la Relation les figures des villes, car je trouvoy qu'elles n'avoient point de rapport à la description qu'il en donne; & j'eus quelque soupçon que c'estoit plustost des veües de paysages faites à plaisir, outre que toutes les villes de la Chine estant semblables, comme nous l'asseurent leurs Cosmographes mesmes, qui en a veu une, les a veuës toutes: j'ay crû par cette raison qu'il suffisoit de mettre les veuës de Pekin & de Nankin, les deux principales villes de la Chine. La figure de l'animal qui porte le Musc, est déjà dans la première partie de ce Recueil: celles des plantes & de quelques animaux de ce pays se peuvent voir dans la seconde Partie avec la description qu'en a donnée le Père Boym.)⁴³

In Thévenot's opinion, the representations of Chinese cityscapes do not match the specific description in the text and they are made for pleasure. He also asked for professional judgments from cosmographers and concluded that the cityscapes of China are so alike that the representation of one or two can stand for all. This may be the reason why his edition contains only twelve illustrations (except for the envoy's route in China), most of which are individual representations of Chinese people, animals, and buildings, but

⁴³ Ibid., Introduction.

none of the landscape. Moreover, different subjects have been arranged into one illustration; for instance, the landscape of Peking has been inserted in the cityscape of Nanking, as he has planned.⁴⁴

Thévenot's opinion and judgement should be based on his personal consultation of Nieuhof's text and drawings or sketches of China. Unlike the other editions, his version was based on copies of actual manuscripts, and should not have been influenced by the illustrations in the first Dutch edition; rather, the illustrations in his edition were based on Nieuhof's original drawings or sketches. Thus, Thévenot's account not only indicates the existence of a manuscript signed by Nieuhof, but also introduces the fact that there were many drawings or sketches of China made by him. However, rather than sticking to the original designs by Nieuhof, he recomposed and made changes to them, as he admitted in the aforementioned account, because he thought Nieuhof's representations of Chinese cityscapes were made for pleasure and did not meet the cosmographer's requirements. However, Hendrik Nieuhof, who was responsible for the publication of his account on China, had a quite different opinion about the sketches made by his brother.⁴⁵ In the dedication to the first Dutch edition, he said:

My brother, who has crossed the Ocean up to five times, and over a period of more than twenty-five years has visited different places in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, on water or land, where many memorable things and worthy-to-tell stories

⁴⁴ Ibid. This has also been discussed by Blussé; see Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 17.

⁴⁵ Hendrik Nieuhof was an unknown Dutch artist of the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, no drawings, paintings or other written materials by him are available. In addition to his management in publishing his brother Johan's travel accounts, the only information that can be found about him is the registration of his marriage in Amsterdam.

occurred to him has not only written down with diligence the achievements of the embassy and all curious things that have happened to him along the way, but has also noted the cities, pagodas, idol temples, villages, animals, plants, custom, ships, etc., in over 150 sketches (which no one has done till my brother had brought them from China, and the prints of which are shown in the work) drawn by him over there from life, and with a map of the journey in China, with the adjoining description succinctly and accurately explained, in addition to what the trustworthy authors have put on paper.

(Mijn broeder, die, zonder roem gesproken, den grooten Oceaan tot vyfmaal heft overgescheept, en in den tijd van meer als vyf en twintig jaren verscheide plaatsen in Europe, Asia, Africa en Amerika, te water en te lande bezocht heft, alwaar hem vele verhaal-en gedenkwaardige zaken zijn voorgevallen, heft niet alleen, behalven het beschryven van het verrichten des Gezantschaps, alle vreemdigheden en verhaalwaardige dingen, die hem op de reis zijn voorgekomen, met een byzonderen vlijt aangemerkt en hier beschreven, maar ook de steden, pagoden of Afgoden Kerken, Dorpen, Dieren, Gewassen, Drachten der inwoonders, Schepen, &c. in meer dan 150 schtsen, (die van niemant tot noch toe, dan van mynen broeder uit Sina, gebracht zyn, en waar af d' Afbeeldsels in dit werk vertoont worden) zelf aldaar na het leven, als mee een kaart van de gantsche reis door Sina, afgeteekent, en met haere bygaande beschryvingh op het bondighste en naukeurighste verklaart, neffens het geen de

geloofwaardigste Schryvers daar af op het pampier gebracht hebben.)⁴⁶

Here, Hendrik points out that Johan Nieuhof had made more than 150 sketches “na het leven” showing various aspects of China and the prints in the first Dutch edition were made on the basis of these sketches. It is not clear whether the sketches used by Hendrik are the same as those that Thévenot saw, but apparently, both of them had seen Nieuhof’s sketches and they had quite different opinion about them. This leads to the questions: whose opinion on Nieuhof’s sketches is closer to the fact and whether these sketches are made from life? To answer these questions, it is necessary to find and investigate the sketches made by Nieuhof on site. The comparison between these original drawings or sketches by Nieuhof and the illustrations in the printed books will shed some light on the above issues.

Therefore, to deeply investigate the illustrations in the printed book, it is necessary to start with their source, namely, the original drawings or sketches made by Nieuhof.

III. The search for the manuscript made by Nieuhof and its significance to the study of Nieuhof’s images of China

The value of the manuscript signed and sketches made by Nieuhof mentioned by Thévenot has been recognized for centuries and the effort to trace them has lasted just as long. According to Blussé, a vague clue as to the whereabouts Nieuhof’s manuscript was first given in the 1802 *Mémoire sur la collection des Grands et Petits Voyages, et sur la collection des*

⁴⁶ Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap*, 4.

voyages de Melchisédech Thévenot by the French scholar A. G. Camus (1740–1804). He said, “Collections of Thévenot’s manuscripts have been preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France since 1712, but we are not sure whether Nieuhof’s manuscript is among them.”⁴⁷

In 1861, the Dutch scholar J. T. Bodel Nijenhuis highly commended Nieuhof’s books about his journeys in Brazil and Asia and wrote of *Het Gezantschap*, “this book, as people well know, is the earliest and most reliable source of China in the seventeenth century and is still very valuable even today (Het is, gelijk men weet, de meest vroegtijdige en trouwste bron over het China der zeventiende eeuw, nog op waarde geschat in de tegenwoordige tijd).”⁴⁸ But he also questioned the over-decorated illustrations and tried to deduce their source: “Both earlier and alter Dutch travellers... supplied illustrations of their travel accounts, which were engraved on copper-plates by Dutch engravers, and hence these illustrations could be preserved. But their original drawings seem to have been lost. Nieuhof must have made hundreds and hundreds of drawings for his work. Where are they? All my efforts to trace these sketches have been in vain (De vroegere en latere Nederlandsche reizigers [...] hebben in hunne reisverhalen afbeeldingen geleverd, die door Nederlandsche graveurs in het koper gesneden en aldus bewaard gebleven zijn. Doch hunne oorspronkelijke teekeningen schijnen te zijn verloren gegaan. Ook Nieuhof heeft er voor zijne werken honderden bij honderden geteekend. Waar zijn ze? Al mijn pogingen tot opsporing dier schetsen bleven vruchteloos).”⁴⁹ Later, P. A. Tiele (1834–1889) claimed that he had found the manuscript of

⁴⁷ A. G. Camus, *Mémoire sur la Collection des Grands et Petits Voyages, et sur la Collection des Voyages de Melchisédech Thévenot* (Paris, 1802).

⁴⁸ See Nijenhuis, “Johan Nieuhof,” 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

Nieuhof's travelogue with the sketches at the premises of the book dealer Martinus Nijhoff in The Hague, but he did not give any more information.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, successive attempts to locate Nieuhof's original text and sketches remained fruitless until Blussé found a manuscript in the 1980s in Middelburg.

The Middelburg manuscript is titled *Dagelijkse aanteekening van zommige notable voorvallen in de voyage van de E. Heeren Pieter de Goyer en Jacob Keyzer etc.* (Daily records of some notable events in the voyage of the Honorable Messrs. Pieter de Goyer and Jacob Keyzer). It contains a brief description of the VOC envoy's visit from Batavia to Beijing and back and is accompanied by eighty-one drawings (not including the title page). After further study, it was found that the manuscript was actually a draftsman's 1850 copy of an older document.⁵¹ But it raised questions about where the Middelburg manuscript was copied and whether the source could be the manuscript made by Johan Nieuhof?

Not much later, in 1984 Blussé discovered a manuscript personally signed by Johan Nieuhof, in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.⁵² He believed that this was Nieuhof's original report about the visit of the VOC envoys to the imperial court in Peking between 1655 and 1657. It was submitted to the directors of the VOC in 1658, which was seven years before the publication of the first Dutch edition. He further discovered that this manuscript was bought by Prince Roland Bonaparte from the Amsterdam book dealer Frederik Muller in the 1890s and bequeathed to

⁵⁰ Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 18.

⁵¹ According to the staff of the Zeeuws Museum in Middelburg, this draftsman is named E. J. W. Koch.

⁵² The codex is BnF/Cartes et Plans/ Société de Géographie/ Ms.in 8o/ 17/1271 Reserve. Also see Alfred Fierro, *Inventaire des Manuscrits de la Société de Géographie* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1984), 96–7, nt. 1271.

Société de Géographie after his death.⁵³ It turned out to be the same copy Tiele had seen.

According to the inscription, which has the signature of “Nieuhoff,” this manuscript is indeed a report recording the VOC embassy’s journey in China to the directors of the Amsterdam chamber. And according to the date signed on the manuscript, it was submitted to the VOC on 3 August 1658, when Nieuhof returned to Holland and stayed in Amsterdam.⁵⁴

In addition to an inscription, the manuscript consists principally of descriptive text embellished by eighty-one drawings (not including the title page). The text records the entire duration of envoys’ journey, including the departure from Batavia in August 1655, the six-month wait in Canton, the journey from Canton to Peking, and the return to Batavia in March 1657. Depicted in pencil, chalk, pen, and watercolour, these drawings represent various aspects of China, such as dress, cityscapes and landscapes, boats, plants, and so forth. Comparing the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the first Dutch edition, we find that most of them have basically a similar design. For instance, in the drawing folio 89 (fig. 6), which is supposed to represent the cityscape of Nanjing (南京), the foreground is filled with a vast field and a canal extends diagonally toward the city wall in the background. Flourishing trees grow on the canal bank and a group of people holding an umbrella walk over a bridge. Here, the city of Nanjing is mainly represented as a silhouette. One can see a long city wall running across the picture in the distance, while Chinese-style buildings such as a pagoda rise from behind the wall. A range of continuous mountains runs in the distance and one in the left background is very

⁵³ See Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhoofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 20.

⁵⁴ The date shown in the inscription of the manuscript is “Derden van Oostmd” (3 August).

notable for its gigantic size. All these details can also be found in the illustration of the first Dutch edition, as shown in figure 7. This engraving has exactly the same overall composition as the drawing. But on closer observation, we can see that the engraving includes many exotic objects such as the palm tree in the foreground, and some decorative details such as the staffage (human and animal figures added for aesthetic or decorative reasons) and various trees in the middle ground. These seem to have been added later by the engraver or publisher.



Figure 6. Drawing folio 89 in the Paris manuscript.



Figure 7. Engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

Consequently, the great resemblance between the drawing in the Paris manuscript and the engraving of the first Dutch edition suggests that it is worth investigating the claim of “na het leven” through the drawings in the Paris manuscript. Moreover, as the Paris manuscript is closely related to Nieuhof rather than the later publishers, these drawings are of great importance for examining the nature of the engravings. A thorough study of the drawings in the Paris manuscript, which may be the very foundation of the published book, may offer some clues about the validity of the claim of “na het leven” in the first Dutch edition of Nieuhof’s travel journal of China published in 1665, and in so doing shed further light on the study of the image of China in Europe in the seventeenth century.

IV. Previous research

Research has been done on whether the drawings in the Paris manuscript are made from life and how to interpret the claim of “na het leven.” When this manuscript was exhibited in Middelburg in 1987, Blussé and R. Falkenburg each wrote an essay for the catalogue *Johan Nieuhofs*

Beelden van en Chinareis 1655–1657, and their investigations had a profound impact on the later study of Nieuhof's work of China. Blussé's essay concentrates on introducing of the historical background of the VOC envoys' first visit to China, the publication of Nieuhof's book and its different editions, and particularly the discovery of the Paris manuscript, which he argues is the source of Nieuhof's book. In his opinion, Nieuhof himself compiled the manuscript on the basis of the sketches he made on spot, and the lack of trustworthiness of various published editions should be attributed to arbitrary changes made by the editors and publishers.⁵⁵ This has laid an essential foundation for the later study.

Writing from the perspective of an art historian, Falkenburg focuses more on the examination on the trustworthiness of the drawings in the Paris manuscript and pointed out the importance of the European audience's understanding of the phase "na het leven" in the seventeenth century. He agrees with the historian F. de Haan's opinion that the engravings in Nieuhof's book of China were made on the basis of the sketches that Nieuhof made in China, but that they were later supplemented with cityscapes in the background and figures in the foreground by other people in the Netherlands. To support this hypothesis, he has analysed a number of drawings to determine how they were produced. On the basis of his findings, he argues that the drawings in the Paris manuscript are not the original sketches that Nieuhof made on site but were made on the basis of some rough sketches. He believes the drawings in the Paris manuscript were made by different hands. He concludes that although these engravings supposedly represented "the more realistic China," they actually reproduced exotic and

⁵⁵ Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden Van Een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 19–20.

fantastic images of China.⁵⁶ Falkenburg's research pays much attention to the drawings and engravings themselves and investigates them from different angles and pays special attention to how they were produced. It brings new perspectives to the study of the drawings, especially in respect to the "na het leven" quality, but to a certain degree neglects the historical records.

For a long time, little was done to build on the study of Nieuhof's work. For instance, Edwin van Kley has commented that "Nieuhof's account presented the Dutch reader with the most substantial and detailed description of the Middle Kingdom yet published" and "they [the illustrations] nevertheless provided European reader with more realistic visual images of China's landscape and people than ever before."⁵⁷ In an essay titled as "A Perfume Is Best from Afar: Publishing China for Europe," Marcia Reed says that "Nieuhof was conscious of his role as a writer and artist whose practical observations were corrections to the wondrous tales and exaggerations of previous authors [...] for the most part his book is an eyewitness account, with no missionary agenda, written in a direct style that describes the people and places depicted in illustrations based on his own sketches." Furthermore, she writes, "Nieuhof's volume broke the ground by providing a range of arguably more accurate and undoubtedly more varied and compelling images of China and its people for Western consumption."⁵⁸ Her comments remain very general and to a certain degree show an uncritical appraisal of the illustrations in Nieuhof's book of China.

Further research into Nieuhof's images of China was not taken up until the last decade. In 2001, Dawn Odell's article "The Soul of Transactions:

⁵⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁷ Lach and Van Kley, *Trade, Missions, Literature*, 484.

⁵⁸ Demattè and Reed, *China on Paper*, 13.

Illustration and Johan Nieuhof's Travels in China," deeply investigated how trustworthiness is conveyed in European travel literature by focusing on Nieuhof's description of China. She carefully studies Nieuhof's text and points out that Nieuhof promotes his own authority by denying the stories of previous travellers, through employing clear and direct language, and through the juxtaposition of image and text. In respect to Nieuhof's landscape drawings of China, however, Odell compares them with ships' journals, especially the format of rutters, navigational guides which provide coastal profile views and written instructions for coastal navigation. She believes that Nieuhof's sketches are very similar to such coastal profile views as made by sailors.⁵⁹ Certainly, like rutters they show profiles and the "viewer is always placed at distance from the land and is often separated from it by an open expanse of still and empty water."⁶⁰ Yet all this seems a bit overdone to me, because what makes Nieuhof's drawings fundamentally different from coastal profiles in rutters is that he tries, admittedly often somewhat ineptly, to provide dimensional depth to his drawings, which coastal profiles never do. Nevertheless, neither of these scholars addresses the "na het leven" quality of the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the printed book.

In 2003, Friederike Ulrichs investigated Nieuhof's views on China in her book *Johan Nieuhofs Blick auf China (1655–1657): Die Kupferstiche in seinem Chinabuch und ihre Wirkung auf den Verleger Jacob van Meurs* (Johan Nieuhof's view of China (1655–1657): The copper engravings in his China book and their effect on the publisher Jacob van Meurs). In this book, she analyses and compares these two China books published by Jacob van

⁵⁹ Odell, "The Soul of Transactions: Illustration and Johan Nieuhof's Travel in China," 238.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

Meurs, Nieuhof's and *Gedenkwaardig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye, op de kust en in het keizerrijk van Taising of Sina*, a compilation of two later embassies by Olfert Dapper (1639–1689).⁶¹ In her study, she also shows the transformation of Nieuhof's observations and sketches of China into the copper plates. In this process, she discusses some factors such as the fact that the engravers had never been to China, contemporary pictorial traditions, and the book's market potential. She discusses Nieuhof's impact on Olfert Dapper's work and points out that Dapper's illustrations focus on more sensational themes than Nieuhof's work and "use more accessory embellishment to please the baroque taste of the time."⁶² Moreover, regarding the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the printed book, she agrees with Blussé that the Paris manuscript was produced by Nieuhof and that its drawings are much more trustworthy than the engravings in the printed book. She adds that the fanciful representations of China in the engravings should be attributed to the engravers (probably Jacob van Meurs, who was also an engraver, and his staff) and Johan's brother Hendrik Nieuhof, who was also a painter. Comparing the drawings in the Paris manuscript to those by other contemporary Dutch artists, Ulrichs also concludes that "the imaginative additions in the plates of Nieuhof's account are partly attributable to the amateurish and hasty nature of his sketches."⁶³ However, she neither discusses whether these "sketches" are the drawings in the Paris manuscript

⁶¹ This book was published in 1670 in Amsterdam and was translated into English as *Atlas Chinensis* by J. Ogilby in 1671. It mainly records the Dutch admiral Balthasar Bort's experience along the coast of Fujian province in 1663 and 1664 and Pieter van Hoorn's embassy to Peking from 1666 to 1668. However, Dapper himself had never been to China, so both the content and plates of this book were borrowed from other sources. See Demattè and Reed, *China on Paper*, 280.

⁶² Friederike Ulrichs, *Johan Nieuhofs Blick auf China (1655–1657)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 117, 156.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43–44, 153.

nor analyses the nature of these “sketches.” She concludes, on the whole, that the illustrations can be considered as reliable representations of Nieuhof’s observations, even though they were more or less embellished. As a matter of fact, her opinion on the trustworthiness of the illustrations is quite nuanced: “Nieuhof’s observations in China were changed when engravers transferred them to the printed medium, adapting them to Dutch art traditions, because readers expected entertainment and sensation in addition to pictorial information about a distant and unknown country. However, fundamental new information about China was preserved. The need to show exotic things is only apparent in the staffage and individual motifs like deities and animals.”⁶⁴

It is true that some of the suspicious additions in the engravings could be attributed to the publishers, but can we therefore infer that the drawings in the Paris manuscript are genuine? Another recent contribution about Nieuhof’s work on China is Guido van Meersbergen’s essay “De uitgeversstrategie van Jacob van Meurs belicht: De Amsterdamse en ‘Antwerpse’ edities van Johan Nieuhofs Gezantschap (1665–1666).”⁶⁵ Focussed on Nieuhof’s work of China, his efforts are mainly dedicated to the analysis of the genesis of various editions, the relationship between the editions and the source, the interrelationship between the publications, and the publication strategies of Dutch publishers in the seventeenth century. According to him, the publishers’ choices at first sight are seemingly determined by religious sensibilities, but on closer inspection there are more trade-based matters. The primary aim of Van Meurs’s first version of *Het Gezantschap* was to satisfy the commercial interests of his audience, that is,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁵ Meersbergen, “De uitgeversstrategie van Jacob van Meurs belicht: De Amsterdamse en ‘Antwerpse’ edities van Johan Nieuhofs Gezantschap (1665–1666),” 73–90.

the merchants in Holland. But he tailored later editions to appeal to a wider audience.

Van Meersbergen points out that the huge international success of the publication of Nieuhof's book on China was due to the fact that it was based on direct observations and the text is interwoven with accompanying pictures. About the source of Thévenot's version, he has a different view than Rietbergen and Blussé. According to them, the sources of Thévenot's publication were the two manuscript copies that he mentions in his introduction. On the basis of this, many scholars believe that Thévenot's version should be closer to the original work than Nieuhof's published book. Thévenot's reputation as a scholar and librarian also reinforces this impression. But according to Van Meersbergen there was no other original text for the Thévenot and Van Meurs's editions than the Paris manuscript discovered by Blussé. He speculates that Nieuhof made a collection of texts and drawings during his journey in China, that this collection was the basis of the Paris manuscript, and that Hendrik Nieuhof probably had a copy of the Paris manuscript that he used for the first edition of the book printed by Van Meurs. Therefore, according to him, the version by Thévenot was based on Van Meurs's edition.⁶⁶ Moreover, he believes that there are no original sources for Thévenot's version and deems it merely a highly abbreviated version of the book published in 1665.⁶⁷

In my opinion, however, this judgment is not based on a solid foundation. There is no doubt that Nieuhof would have made notes and sketches during his journey in China, and that when he returned to the Netherlands he made the Paris manuscript on the basis of his work. But the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 77, 78–79.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

first Dutch edition should be seen as being based on the notes and sketches he left to his brother Hendrik Nieuhof rather than a copy of the Paris manuscript in Hendrik's possession. Anyhow, as the Paris manuscript was finished in a very short time it is unlikely that Hendrik had enough time to make a copy before the manuscript was submitted to the directors of the Amsterdam Chamber. Moreover, the fact that much more detailed and reliable descriptions of China and the embassy's activities appear in Van Meurs's edition suggests that the source of this book—the collection of notes and drawings made by Nieuhof during his journey in China—must have contained much more information than the Paris manuscript. That is to say, besides the Paris manuscript, there must also be an original source for Van Meurs's edition. This means Van Meurs's edition is indeed closely related to the Paris manuscript but it is not necessarily based only on the Paris manuscript, since it includes text and illustrations not found in the Paris manuscript. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that Nieuhof made a lot of notes and drawings, especially considering the commission he received from the VOC. He may have made selections from these original works when he produced the Paris manuscript.

In addition to the Paris manuscript, there is another report about this embassy to China submitted to the VOC, which I will analyse in chapter 2. This actually supports Thévenot's statement that he had two copies and that one of them was signed by Nieuhof. In that sense, Blussé's opinion is not "incorrect," as Guido van Meersbergen has said. And Thévenot's version is different from Van Meurs's edition, especially with respect to the illustrations. I will discuss these arguments in detail in the later chapters.

Guido van Meersbergen also argues that the images made by Nieuhof follow the tradition of maritime reporting because they resemble the

drawings of coastal profiles, and that the detailed maritime and geographic information and related sketches were to be used as directions for the journey. So, he maintains, the identity and credibility of the material presented in the Amsterdam edition is guaranteed.⁶⁸ This argument is actually based on Odell's opinion, but without a comprehensive investigation of the Paris manuscript, especially the cityscapes of China. Of course those cityscapes are meant to show what the cities looked like from a distance, but the way in which the sketches are drawn is fundamentally different from the coastal profiles found in rutters. My investigation of the representations of Chinese cityscapes in the Paris manuscript and in Van Meurs's edition, however, suggests that it is a rather complicated situation. The Chinese cityscapes in these works are actually artificially composed on the basis of direct observation, and topographical accuracy is a primary concern of neither Nieuhof nor the engravers.

Moreover, according to Van Meersbergen, Thévenot's version lacks the reliable "log data" contained in Van Meurs's edition, but includes the contemplative, which leads him to believe that Thévenot's version must have been published after the appearance of the publication by Van Meurs. He suggests that Thévenot's version was published in 1666 instead of 1664. I prefer to keep a reserved opinion on these statements.

Van Meersbergen's analysis of the Antwerp edition is however very impressive and original, if not sensational. The Antwerp edition was published under the name Michael Cnobbaert, but he believes this is merely a pseudonym for Van Meurs. Because Van Meurs sought to maximize the market and opportunity, he published a seemingly Catholic edition under a pseudonym. He further analyses the copper plates in different editions,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

particularly in respect to the changes of the titles and captions. By comparing the Amsterdam and Antwerp editions, he points out that the publisher strategically targeted different audiences and markets.

Guido van Meersbergen's main contribution is that he has thrown new light on the relationship between different editions and the strategy taken by Van Meurs to conquer a large market. But without a comprehensive study of the sources of these editions, and of the Paris manuscript, some of his opinions are not built on solid foundation.

Above all, the importance of the drawings in the Paris manuscript has been recognized through the recent research into Nieuhof's images of China. However, some issues regarding the nature of the drawings in the Paris manuscript are still under question: How and what kinds of images of China were represented by Nieuhof? How should we interpret the "na het leven" claim of the drawings and the illustrations in the context of Dutch pictorial conventions of the seventeenth century? In attempting to answer these questions, I will contextualize my analysis of the nature of the drawings in the Paris manuscript within discussions of the Chinese and Dutch pictorial source material, how the "na het leven" quality was achieved, and the claims of "na het leven" in the context of seventeenth-century Dutch pictorial conventions.

V. The structure

Therefore, my research on Nieuhof's images of China in Europe in the seventeenth century starts from the drawings in the Paris manuscript. The first chapter is dedicated to a background introduction about the first Dutch embassy visit to China and the Paris manuscript. The first section establishes the historical background and purpose of the VOC's visit to China. The second section introduces Nieuhof's biography and the

commission he received from the VOC will be introduced in the second section. In the third section, I briefly describe the Dutch envoys' court voyage and adventures in China. In the fourth section, through an analysis of the appearance of the Paris manuscript, I discuss my conclusion that the manuscript is actually a reproduction made by Nieuhof after his return to Holland rather than the original sketchbook he used during his journey in China. On the basis of these findings, in the last section, I try to discuss the authorship of the Paris manuscript through Nieuhof's own accounts in various sources and a comparison of the handwriting in the Paris manuscript and the maps of Saint Helena produced by Nieuhof in 1658. All these suggest that the Paris manuscript was produced by Nieuhof during his stay in Amsterdam in 1658. On the basis of Nieuhof's accounts about his experience in this period, I reconstruct the circumstances under which the Paris manuscript was produced.

Chapter two concentrates on the analysis of the text in the Paris manuscript. An analysis of Nieuhof's accounts about the journey to China in the first section suggests that he not only recorded the embassy's mission, but that he was also emotionally engaged in his experience there. The second section offers a comparison of Nieuhof's work with an official report to the VOC signed by one of the envoys, Jacob Keijser. It will be shown that this official report is much more specific and written from quite a different perspective than Nieuhof's account. This may be why the later published book on China did not contain the contents of the official report.

Comparisons of the dates and corresponding subject matter found in the official report and the Paris manuscript also suggest that Nieuhof's account in the Paris manuscript is based on his own eyewitness observation.

Comparison with Chinese chorographical works suggest that the

descriptions of China in the Paris manuscript are not completely accurate; in fact, there are mistakes due to the author's misunderstanding of local Chinese customs, the lack of knowledge of China, and so forth. This may lead people to doubt the credibility of the drawings in the Paris manuscript.

Therefore, chapter 3 conducts an investigation into the drawings themselves. It starts with a brief analysis of the themes and working procedure of the drawings in the first section. The coarse representation in these drawings invites people to question Nieuhof's artistic skills. In the second section, I compare them with the drawings of China made by the trained draughtsman Pieter van Doornik, who travelled with the following embassy and encountered experiences similar to Nieuhof's. In contrast to the clear and neat representation of China in Van Doornik's drawings, the uncertain and coarse strokes in the Paris manuscript suggest that Nieuhof was not a well-trained draughtsman or artist. To further investigate the artistic skill embodied in the drawings in the Paris manuscript, I also compare Nieuhof's drawings with reproductions preserved in the Zeeuws Museum, which indicates that the original sketches, which are produced on the basis of the drawings in the Paris manuscript, were not of good quality. This leads to two important issues related to the nature of the drawings: under what artistic principles or conventions were the drawings in the Paris manuscript produced, and how did they reflect the "na het leven" quality.

Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to an investigation of the above issues. In chapter 4, I first address the term "na het leven"—the essential claim of the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the first Dutch edition—in the context of seventeenth-century Dutch pictorial convention. Two characteristics of the "na het leven" quality, namely that the depiction is based on direct observation and that the artist should select the motif and

refine the picture, play a key role in understanding how these drawings were produced. Accordingly, the study of the drawings focuses on the representations based on direct observation and those that aim to achieve a harmonious effect through refinement. This actually is closely related to the working procedure of the drawings, namely, the depictions in pencil and chalk and the depictions in pen. Therefore, in the second section of chapter 4, I first investigate the working procedure of the drawings in the Paris manuscript with several examples. Furthermore, comparisons of some drawings with actual Chinese scenes or pictorial material suggest that the representations of some specific motifs, such as Chinese officials, grotesque rockeries and hills, boats, architecture, and so forth, are based on direct observation. And it is also noteworthy that most representations of these motifs were first drawn in pencil and chalk. In section 3, I discuss the great resemblance of these representations to Chinese pictorial material, and suggest that Nieuhof might have adopted some contemporary Chinese pictorial material when he produced the drawings. The drawing of the Bao'en temple will be used to prove this argument.

After the analysis of the representations of China based on direct observation, in the first section of chapter 5, I first highlight that a number of drawings, particularly those themed with Chinese cityscapes, do not match actual Chinese scenes, especially after taking into account the topographical features. Closer observation of these drawings shows that they are very roughly sketched in pencil and chalk and that the representation of Chinese scenes is mainly refined in pen. Chapter 5 further demonstrates Nieuhof's efforts to refine the rough preliminary depictions through the depiction in pen, so as to meet the audience's expectation by making representations of China natural or even exotic. In section 2, I first

take the example of Jan van Goyen's "View of Leiden" to illustrate the common seventeenth-century Dutch artistic practice of refining cityscapes for a natural effect. Afterwards, I analyse how Nieuhof followed Dutch pictorial convention to compose Chinese cityscapes, especially with regard to the patterns of their composition. It is noteworthy that a great number of components have Chinese traditional characteristics. Through the case study of a representation of the Forbidden City, section 3 shows how Nieuhof "improved" the representations of Chinese scenes based in part on his observation and in part on his imagination. All these examples show that in the process of refining Chinese scenes, apart from relying on direct observation, Nieuhof tended to create some scenes with a natural and exotic appearance to attract the contemporary audience who had never seen China.

After establishing the basic analysis of the drawings in the Paris manuscript, chapter 6 is dedicated to analysing what kinds of improvements have been made to the illustrations of the first Dutch edition and how they reflected the "na het leven" quality. The case study of how Pieter van Doornik's drawings were modified by the publisher Olfert Dapper throws some light on this issue. In the first section, I discuss how the illustrations were produced on the basis of the drawings. Van Meurs and Thévenot's different approaches to dealing with the drawings are addressed here. Section 2 is dedicated to an analysis of how engravers embellished the engravings, for instance, by directly borrowing elements from contemporary Dutch pictorial material, rearranging elements in the drawings, and even by inventing new representations of China. Section 3 focuses on the improvements made by the engravers when they produced illustrations whose design is similar to that of the drawings. Such improvements include making Chinese architecture look natural, drawing details closer for a

clearer observation of Chinese scenes, and so forth. In this process, many embellishments have been added in order to make representations of China exotic. Given the above, these improvements made by the engravers have nothing to do with direct observation and provide no further reliable and specific information of China. To meet Western reader's expectation of a foreign country, the illustrations concentrate more on the embellishments to enhance a sense of naturalness while bringing some exotic sensibilities to the contemporary reader.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to the analysis of chinoiserie works, because the illustrations in Nieuhof's book played an important role in the development of chinoiserie in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By giving various examples inspired by Nieuhof's illustrations, I try to suggest that the chinoiserie designers initially simply copied Nieuhof's work; but later on also started to create the images of China through a combination of various elements with their own imaginations. The approaches to producing these works of chinoiserie have a lot in common with the manner in which the illustrations in the printed book were published. And this suggests that the illustrations in Nieuhof's China book not only provided sources for chinoiserie, they themselves were also early representations of chinoiserie in the seventeenth century.

In conclusion, the question whether the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the printed book are made "na het leven" cannot be simply answered by yes or no. The claim needs to be considered in the context of Dutch pictorial conventions of the seventeenth century. On the one hand, the study of Nieuhof's images of China will make a contribution to the study of what kinds of images of China were presented to European audiences in the seventeenth century and how Dutch artists of the

seventeenth century made “na het leven” images. On the other hand, the study of the “na het leven” quality of the drawings and illustrations reveals a more complicated relationship between Nieuhof’s images of China and chinoiserie, namely, that they not only are the fundamental sources for later chinoiserie designs, but that they themselves are also part of chinoiserie style.