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

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Chapter 6 The Illustrations in the Printed Book

6.1 The publishers' strategy on the illustrations

Instead of being on display to the public, Nieuhof's charming present to the Gentlemen Seventeen and his portfolio of original sketches were on view to only a very small, select group of people. Not until the first Dutch edition had been published seven years after his return from China could Western readers have access to Nieuhof's account and images of China. In fact, the profound impact on European sensibilities made by Nieuhof's images of China is attributable to the book edition and the widely disseminated translations based on the original Dutch publication. Through these works, Western readers were able to obtain a vivid visual impression of China, while European artists also drew a wealth of inspiration from them, especially those who made chinoiserie. In a time at which any pictures of this mysterious empire were extremely rare, the illustrations in the printed book played a fundamental role in presenting China to Western readers.

Normally, the illustrations in seventeenth-century travelogues were made from copper engravings. The original drawing was first cut into the copperplate surface by the engraver with a steel tool called a burin. The design was usually a copy of an artist's original drawing or sketch. After that, the engraved copper plate was inked to leave ink in the engraved lines. When the plate was put through a high-pressure printing press, the sheet of paper under the plate picked up the ink from the engraved lines and the print was finished. If the engraver did not etch a mirror image of the sketch or drawing to make the design in the copper plate, the printed image was the reverse of the original. The engravings in *Het Gezantschap* of course had to

follow their source, namely, the sketches Nieuhof produced on site or the drawings in the Paris manuscript, or both. But here, it is noteworthy that the illustrations in the printed book are not the reverse of the drawings in the Paris manuscript. Normally, the engraver first copied the design on transparent paper and applied the back side of the paper to the plate so as to get the same image as the source.

This provides a clue about the production of the illustrations in the printed books, including Thévenot's edition. As discussed in the Introduction, Thévenot had obtained two copies of Nieuhof's manuscript and had been shown Nieuhof's original drawings. His edition has been acknowledged to be the one closest to Nieuhof's original manuscript. While the text is a faithful rendition, however, Thévenot did not absolutely stick to Nieuhof's images of China when he selected illustrations for his source publication. In his opinion, Nieuhof's drawings of Chinese cityscapes did not tally with the accompanying descriptions and might just as well have been the fruit of his pleasure and invention.[303] And in his eyes, "all the towns of China are so alike, when one has seen one, one has seen them all."[304] Therefore, his collection only contains twelve illustrations, most of which are individual representations of Chinese people, animals, and buildings, but ignoring the landscapes. In fact, not only did he omit most of the cityscapes, he also combined different subjects into one engraving. For instance, figure 6.1 shows a man wearing the costume of an official and holding a knife at his waist in the centre of the picture. To the viewer's right stands a Chinese woman in profile with her right side towards the viewer, which brings a better angle for showing the woman's hairstyle, garment, and

[303] See Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux,* Introduction.
[304] Ibid., introduction.

ornaments. This woman is represented as much smaller than the man in an artificial composition that also includes a meadow in the foreground and the plan of the Forbidden City in the background. Apparently, here, Thévenot preferred to compose a picture with different subjects regardless of their connection—or lack of one—to each other. This engraving also demonstrates two points about the nature of Nieuhof's original sketches and the relationship between Thévenot's version and Van Meurs's edition. First of all, as figure 6.2 shows, the Chinese official and the plan of the Forbidden City also appear in Van Meurs's edition, but only the latter's prototype can be found in the Paris manuscript: the drawing of the Chinese official does not appear in the Paris manuscript. This means that in addition to the drawings in the Paris manuscript, there must have been other sketches made by Nieuhof on site available for the engravers to make the engravings in Thévenot's version and Van Meurs's edition. Second, it is noteworthy that although the Chinese official and the plan of the Forbidden City in these two engravings look alike, on closer inspection one can find subtle differences such as the official's facial expression, the shape of his *piling*, the necklace, the type of knife, and so forth. The resemblances suggest that they originate from the same source, that is, the original sketches, while the differences indicate that the engravers chose different criteria in dealing with the sketches. That is to say, the illustrations in Thévenot's version are not based on those in Van Meurs's edition. This is actually much more apparent when we compare the other illustrations that share the same subjects. These two points suggest that Guido van Meersbergen's opinion that Thévenot's version was merely a highly abbreviated version of Nieuhof's book is inaccurate.

Figure 6.1. Copper engraving from 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, Hollandais, Portugais, Allemands, Espagnols, et quelques Persans, Arabes et autres orientaux* (Paris, 1666).

Figure 6.2. Copper engravings from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

This example shows that when Thévenot dealt with Nieuhof's images of China, he chose to concentrate on themes that he valued and combined them into one image regardless of whether they had anything to do with

each other.[305] This is actually a very common approach adopted by contemporary editors and publishers. Blussé has pointed out that in *Gedenkwaerdig Bedryf,* Olfer Dapper adopted Van Doornik's designs for the illustrations in his book. When comparing Van Doornik's original drawing (fig. 6.3) and the illustration (fig. 6.4) of the famous bridge of Fuzhou, he demonstrated that the illustration in Dapper's edition followed Van Doornik's drawing, but that the engraver added many embellishments, such as in the addition of a foreground, many boats on the water, and a great number of people on the riverbank.

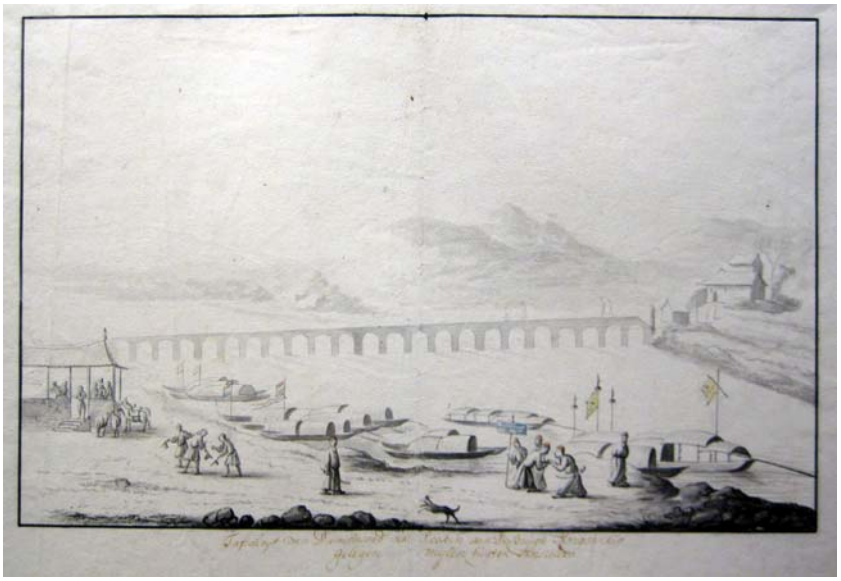

Figure 6.3. Pieter van Doornik, "Tafscheijt van D'ambassadeurs na Peekin aan De Brugh Hongsankio gelegen mijlen buijten Hocsieuw," 1666–68, Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam.

[305] According to Blussé, Thévenot probably lacked sufficient funding to reproduce as many engravings as in the first Dutch edition. See Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 17.

Figure 6.4. Copper engraving from O. Dapper, *Gedenkwaerdig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye, op de kuste en in het keizerrijk van Taising of Sina* (Amsterdam, 1667).

Back to the illustrations in Nieuhof's book of China, one of the principal characteristics of the engravings claimed by the publishers, as mentioned in the Introduction, is that they are made "na het leven". Nevertheless, given the fact that the printed book was published seven years after the submission of the manuscript and that the engravings are much more elaborated than the drawings, people may wonder to what extent these "improvements" made them more reliable and specific.

The following part is dedicated to an investigation of the similarities and differences between the drawings and engravings, especially regarding the kinds of changes that were made in the engravings, how the engravers tried to improve the "na het leven" representation, and to what extent these changes have further articulated the meanings of these drawings.

6.2 Engravings which share similar design as the drawings

In addition to the frontispiece, the rest of the illustrations include one full-page engraved portrait of Nieuhof with a poem by Jan Vos beneath (as shown in figure 1), a large folding map of China, which traces the envoys' route, thirty-four double-page engraved plates and views of Batavia, Canton, Macao, Nankan, Nankin, Peking, and other places, and 110 half-page engraved views and plates of religious and public ceremonies, costumes, animals, fish, and plants mentioned in the text with captions in Dutch.

The first thing to note in terms of the difference between the drawings in the Paris manuscript and the engravings in the book is their quantity. In contrast to the 81 drawings in the manuscript, there are around 150 engravings in the first Dutch edition. Classified according to theme, four categories make up the majority of the engravings: landscapes, cityscapes, and architecture (around ninety-five engravings); historical events (five engravings); plants (fourteen) and animals (seven); and Chinese figures (twenty). Of these 150 engravings, approximately 70 bear a likeness to the drawings in the manuscript, whether it is a corresponding situation or merely contains certain elements of a specific drawing.

Seventy engravings are very closely related to the drawings in the Paris manuscript. Either the drawings in the manuscript provided the principal source for the reproduction of the engravings in the first Dutch edition; or the drawings and engravings shared the same source, namely, Nieuhof's original sketches produced during his travels in China and the Chinese pictorial material he brought back to Holland. Regardless of the source, the engravers had to deal with the rough representations and confusing details in Nieuhof's sketches or drawings. How could engravers who had never beheld China with their own eyes fashion "na het leven" engravings? What

kind of "improvements" were made in the engravings? An interesting example that may shed some light on these issues is the drawing folio 128 (fig. 6.5) representing a Chinese temple. The accompanying text in the manuscript provides no information other than that it is "very beautiful and superlative."[306] However, more specific information can be gleaned from the accompanying text in the printed book, which is set out as the following:

> Not far from Xantsui stands a famous idol-temple, called Teywanmiao, which is held in such great esteem amongst them, that they reckon it for one of the chiefest in all China. It is built very high, with strong walls of grey stone, and gallantly adorned after the Chinese fashion. The top of this temple is covered with yellow glazed tiles, and the walls are also colored after the same manner; so that when the sun shines, it glisters like gold all over.[307]

[306] Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden Van Een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 46. The Dutch text is, "In 't midden der stad op de kant van 't water staat de pagoda van Teywan Miao, die zeer schoon en uitmuntende is."

[307] Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, 94.

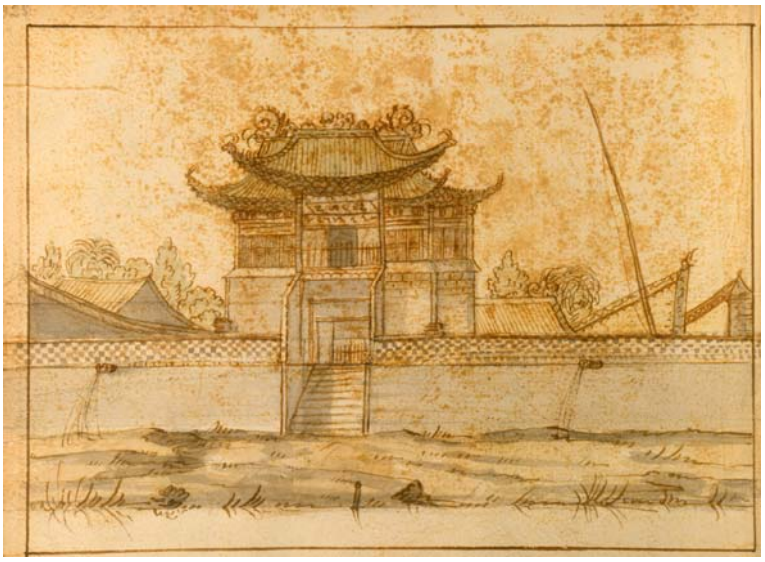

Figure 6.5. Drawing folio 128 in the Paris manuscript.

According to this description, this temple was located in the town of Zhangqiu (张秋镇) and it was built on a magnificent scale and well decorated. The name of the temple, Teywanmiao, appears to be a rendering of its Chinese name Dawangmiao (大王庙, a temple for a king). The gazetteer of the county Yanggu (阳谷县), where Zhangqiu was located in, indicates that there were several religious buildings on the riverbank, including the Chenghuangmiao (城隍庙, Temple of the City God) and the Guandimiao (关帝庙, Temple of Guanyu), but none of them was called Dawangmiao.[308] Nevertheless, records of this temple can be found in the

[308] About the record of such religious architectures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see *The Gazetteer of Yanggu Prefecture (阳谷县志),* (Taibei: Chengwen Publishing House 成文出版社, 1942), 170–71. However, temples to Guan Yu, who was associated with war and loyalty, were found in most major cities. See Jessica Rawson, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 164.

gazetteer of Dongchang (东昌), a town near Zhangqiu.[309] It is possible that either Nieuhof mistook the Dawangmiao temple in the town of Dongchang for another temple in Zhangqiu or he could not remember the name of the temple in Zhangqiu.[310] Regrettably, the Dawangmiao temple in the town of Dongchang no longer exists and there is no way to compare it with the drawing.

The drawing itself may well give some information about the nature of this temple and tell us why Nieuhof depicted it as he did. Nieuhof focuses on the temple's façade, which consists of a splendid roof and strong framing walls. They have been presented in an elaborate manner so that the viewer can appreciate how they are constructed in typical Chinese fashion and decorated with Chinese patterns. The decoration of the roof shows the classic features of traditional Chinese architecture, including tiles, heavy overhangs, and animal ornaments on the roof ridge. There are also some confusing depictions such as the structure of the façade, particularly the roof and the framing wall.

The most attractive part of the façade of the temple is its roof, which is constructed in a form resembling a Chinese arch. Moreover, in contrast to the principle of symmetry so characteristic of Chinese architecture, two eaves appear on the right side and their size is much smaller than the eave on the left. Perhaps to balance the additional eave on the right, an extra wall

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[309] According to the records, Dawangmiao was located on the river bank to worship the Dragon King, see *The Gazetteer of Dongchang Prefecture (嘉庆东昌府志)* (Phoenix Publishing House 凤凰出版社, 2004), 188.

[310] If Nieuhof's memory of the name of the temple is accurate but its location is wrong, this temple might have been the Dawangmiao in Dongchang, because in the gazetteers, the Dawangmiao Temple was located in this place. The problem is that this hypothesis contradicts the sequence of the cities through which the Dutch passed: the drawing of Dongchang appears after the drawing of Zhangqiu, but the drawing of Zhangqiu comes after the drawing of the temple. That is to say, if the sequence of the towns and cities is based on the series set out in their itinerary, this temple should be in Zhangqiu rather than in Dongchang.

is depicted on the right just under the roof, which gives an impression that the façade has an extra section on its right side.

Apparently, this arrangement was not so convincing to the engraver working with this image for the printed book in 1665. In the engraving (fig. 6.6), the "extra" part of the façade was moved to the side of the building, which helped to correct the distorted perspective. In addition, it offered a three-dimensional effect and left a reasonable space for the roof and wall of the side part of the building. Despite these efforts to improve the three-dimensional effect of the stairway and the entrance of the temple, the lack of knowledge of Chinese temples means that the representation of the layout of the temple complex remains confusing.

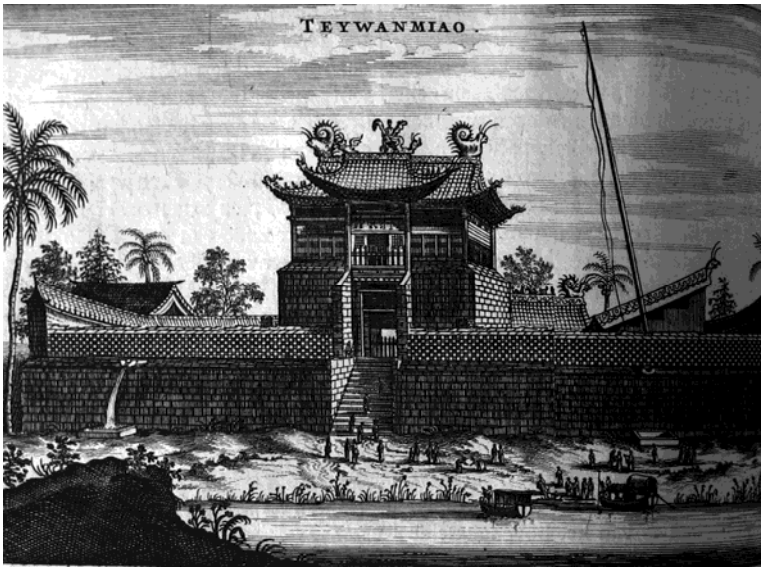

Figure 6.6. Engraving of Teywanmiao from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

As a matter of fact, in many cases, the confusing representations in the drawings carry over to the engravings. For instance, compared with the

drawing (fig. 5.19), the engraving of the cityscape of the town of Taihe (fig. 6.7) is much clearer and more vivid, enlivened with trees, boats, and figures in the foreground, but the two buildings on the left of the city gate and tower are still located on top of the city wall and resemble, against all odds, the city gates and tower. The engravers were in no position to make any more corrections of the inaccurate depictions; all they could do was to refine the rough depictions in the drawings on the basis of their own imagination.

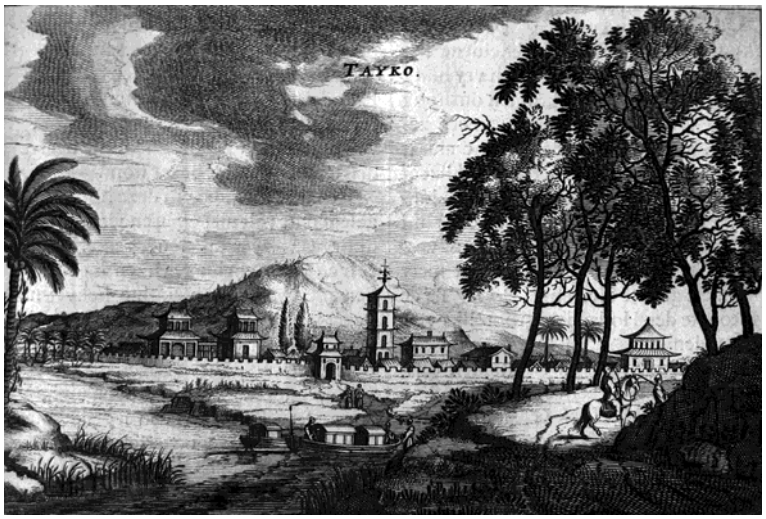

Figure 6.7. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

The engraving of the Chinese temple also reflects another important approach used by the engravers to improve the representations in the drawings, namely, to add various embellishments and exaggerations. In contrast to the plain representation of the temple in the drawing folio 128, this engraving is filled in with clouds in the sky, various boats lying on the shore, tiny human figures walking towards the temple, and extremely tall palm trees appearing here and there. The boats and figures appear so

frequently and in such a specific pattern in many engravings that they can hardly to be regarded as specific, needless to say that their small size is apparently exaggerated to set off the gigantic temple. Most of these subjects serve as kind of decoration for the cityscapes. For instance, the palm tree should not appear in the Zhangqiu, a small town in northern China; but as one of the engravers' favourite subject, palm trees appear in many places regardless of whether they grow in the place shown. Therefore, their presence actually has more to do with decorating of the cityscapes than with providing specific information about a real scene.

In addition, regarding the trees, two points need to be made. First, they set a frame for the whole picture. In this engraving, the tall palm tree on the left side helps frame the picture. This approach is reminiscent of some sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting. In one of Van de Velde's series of the seasons (fig. 6.8), the tree retains a dominant position on the right side, and its upper branches curve to the left to follow the edge of the frame.[311] Apparently here the tree not only plays a role in intimating the season or decoration, but also works as a stage flat to frame the image at the sides. The placement of the tree at the side of the engraving is an artistic device intended to increase the harmonious effect of the whole image.

[311] On Van de Velde's employment of trees to frame pictures, see Roy Bolton, *Old Master Paintings and Drawings* (London: Sphinx Books, 2009), 364.

Figure 6.8. Van de Velde, "Autumn," from the series of "The Seasons," 1617.

Second, it balances the composition of the townscape, as discussed in the example of the drawing folio 49 (see fig. 5.12). In this cityscape, a fanciful, giant tree rises from the ground and stretches beyond the picture plane at the right and top, lending weight to the overall composition. It also reinforces the sense of depth, as do the more deeply etched areas in the foreground.

For most Chinese cityscapes, the engravers adopted a much simpler approach. In the manuscript drawings, most cityscapes and townscapes are observed from a distance, usually from the water. Consequently, the whole fore- and middle grounds are often dominated by a vast stretch of water and the city appears unobtrusively in the background, with or without a number of huge, grotesque mountains towering behind it. The city, which is represented by a wall, a gate, and gate towers, is very blurred, so the viewer obtains no more than a rough impression without elaborated details. In

contrast to the vague representation in the drawings, the engravers tried to present the reader with clearly articulated cityscapes.

The most common approach to this is to pull the city and town in the background closer, just as a camera lens zooms in on a distant subject. When comparing the cityscapes in the drawings and those in the engravings, one finds that either the vast stretch of water in the foreground is foreshortened or the land in the middle ground is cut off; either way, the city in the background is given a better position. For instance, in the drawing folio 81 (fig. 6.9), the town of An'qing (安庆) is observed at a distance, from the water, at a low angle. An ordinary stretch of water occupies the whole foreground, while the town takes up only a narrow sliver in the background. However, the corresponding townscape in the engraving (fig. 6.10) seems to have been observed from a closer, more elevated point, so the town appears much closer and the foreground is no longer a broad expanse of water but is filled with the riverbank and suburb. Moreover, compared with the drawing, the townscape in the engraving is enriched with various elements such as boats on the river, figures dotted around here and there, and trees growing up among the buildings in the background. To a certain extent, this approach compensates for the obscure depiction in the drawing. So the cityscapes in the engravings are clearer, more vivid and seem more natural. Achieving this sharpness required the engravers to clarify and modify the rough, unclear details in the drawings. But these modifications hardly constitute fundamental improvements in the accuracy of the drawings.

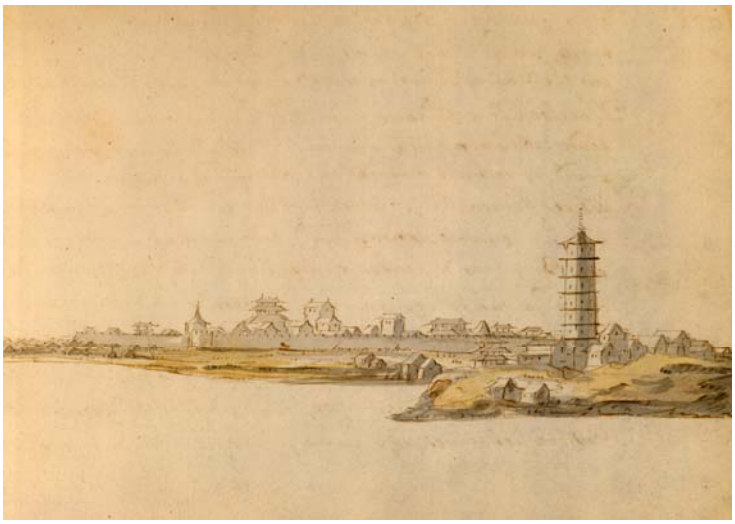

Figure 6.9. Drawing folio 81 in the Paris manuscript.

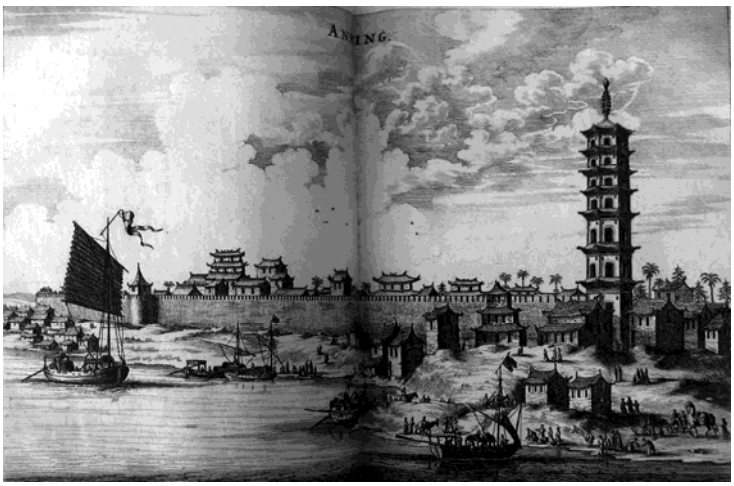

Figure 6.10. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

6.3 Extra engravings

In addition to the seventy engravings that can be identified with drawings in the Paris manuscript, there are around eighty engravings based on material that does not correspond directly with material found in the

Paris manuscript. Many of these eighty engravings deal with exotic plants, animals, and people.[312] As has been discussed previously, the sources for these engravings are very likely other sketches that Nieuhof made on site. This possibility has been discussed previously. Regarding the other sources, it is noteworthy that the majority of these engravings appear in the last part of the book, specifically in the section devoted to the introduction of the local costumes, fauna, and flora. Such an arrangement was actually quite common in seventeenth-century travel accounts in which the introduction to exotic plants and animals was reserved for the end of the book.[313]

What exactly the sources might be is unclear, but some of the engravings do offer clues. For instance, the palm tree in the engraving shown in figure 6.11 strongly resembles the palm tree in Frans Post's painting (fig. 6.12). Likewise, the scene of the stranded whale in the engraving (fig. 6.13) also appears in the late-sixteenth-century Dutch prints, as can be seen in figure 6.14, which shows a beached whale at Katwijk in 1598. Given these similarities, it is highly possible that the representation of plants and animals that do not appear in the drawings in the Paris manuscript might have been taken from various travel accounts and Dutch pictorial sources to which the engravers would have had access. According to Ulrichs, the engravings in *Het Gezantschap* were made by the publisher Jacob van Meurs himself and four other members of his workshop.[314] Their familiarity with contemporary works would likely have influenced their

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[312] Considering the total number of engravings of plants (fourteen), animals (four) and Chinese figures (twenty), it is worth noting that only one picture of a plant (the kapok tree) and a bird (the cormorant) and five pictures of Chinese figures appear in the drawings of the Paris manuscript; the majority of these engravings bear little relationship to the manuscript.

[313] For instance, in many travelogues of Brazil in the seventeenth century, animals, plants, and local people are represented in a style quite similar to that found in the engravings in Nieuhof's book. These pictures can be seen in Peter Whitehead, *A Portrait of Dutch 17th Century Brazil* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1989).

[314] Ulrichs, *Johan Nieuhofs Blick Auf China (1655–1657)*, 153.

handling of the pictorial material made by Nieuhof, so it would be no wonder to see the exotic motifs familiar to the contemporary reader also appear in Nieuhof's books about China.

Figure 6.11. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

Figure 6.12. Frans Post, "A Brazilian Landscape," 1670–75. Oil on oak panel, 22 x 27 cm. Private collection.

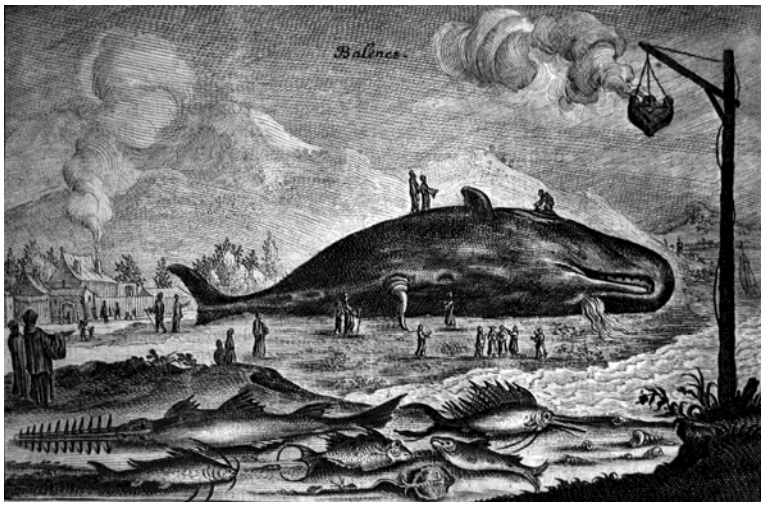

Figure 6.13. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

Figure 6.14. Jacob Matham, "Beached Whale at Katwijk, 3 February 1598."

Unquestionably, such general scenes were fairly accessible to the engravers.[315] As a matter of fact, not only were some of the engravings of China in the printed book derived from illustrations in other travel journals, but Nieuhof's pictures of China were also borrowed for other travel journals. In addition from the reproductions of Nieuhof's pictures of China presented in the later publications about China by Dapper and Kircher, these pictures were appropriated for travel journals about other countries.[316] One of the engravings (fig. 6.15) in Phillipus Baldaeus's book titled *A true and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon* published in Amsterdam in 1672 is a good example.[317] The engraving shows the tyrant Rajasingha's execution of Virasundara, a scion of the Peradernya (Peradenya) branch of the royal house. Both the wall cloth and the tyrant sitting on the platform in the centre remind us of Nieuhof's image of Shang Kexi, the governor of Canton (see fig. 4.1). The background setting, and the decoration and style of the architecture resemble the depiction of Chinese architecture in Nieuhof's book. Apparently, when the engraver or editor sought to represent the tyrant to his reader, he looked for sources and found Nieuhof's representation of the Chinese official fit his image of what the tyrant in Ceylon should look like. It was a common practice for seventeenth-century Dutch engravers to borrow liberally from other travel journals in the process of producing illustrations for their own.

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[315] On how European engravers copied from each other's illustrated travelogues, see Ying Sun, *Wandlungen des EuropäIschen Chinabildes in Illustrierten Reiseberichten des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1996).

[316] See Dapper, *Gedenkwaerdig Bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye op de Kuste en in het Keizerrijk van Taising of Sina*; Athanasius Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri E Soc. Jesu China Monumentis Qua Sacris Quà Profanis, Nec Non Variis Naturæ & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque Rerum Memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata, Auspiciis Leopoldi Primi Rom* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1667).

[317] Phillipus Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon*, trans. Pieter Brohier (Ceylon Historical Journal, 1960), 8–9.

Figure 6.15. Engraving of "The Execution of Virasundara by Rajasingha," from Phillipus Baldaeus, *A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon*, Amsterdam, 1672.

In respect to the representation of Chinese figures, unlike the Paris manuscript which actually has no drawings showing ordinary Chinese people going about their everyday business,[318] the printed book in 1665 contains twenty-one engravings of Chinese figures from different social classes—farmers, priests, monks, soldiers, officials, and the like—and showing details of their costumes and customs.[319] Although the engravings in the printed book offer a survey of all types of Chinese people, it is noteworthy that most of them are depicted in one specific pattern: the same figure is usually displayed from different angles. At first glance one can see

[318] Among the eighty-one drawings in the manuscript, only five of them are on the subject of Chinese figures. These drawings present Chinese Buddhist statues (two drawings), Chinese people either at the top (Chinese officials, two drawings) or at the bottom (beggars and buskers, one drawing) of society. There are no drawings, however, showing ordinary Chinese people going about their everyday business.

[319] As they appear nowhere in the manuscript, it is uncertain whether these additional figures in the printed book were made on the basis of Nieuhof's sketches.

four lamas (Tibetan Buddhist monks) in figure 6.16; but on closer examination, it is clear that these four lamas are actually the same person shown from the front, the left and right sides, and the back. This is a pictorial strategy commonly used in seventeenth-century Dutch travelogues in order to offer a full view of the figures and their clothing. In this way, rather than playing a role within a narrative of lived activity, these figures become a type that stands for a cultural whole. In order to be linked with their social context, they are arranged in a geographically specific spatial background. As we can see in this engraving, the lama stands in an open field while the distant background is filled with a city wall, a pagoda, and a watchtower, all of which obviously are associated with his social status. In this sense, these settings are no longer simple landscape scenes, but are more precisely delineated in order to show the specific context of these figures. Chinese figures wearing bizarre customs and standing in the fanciful environment as illustrated in the printed book reflect the European's curiosity and interest in the exotic and the extraordinary of their day.[320]

[320] See Dematte and Reed, 15.

Figure 6.16. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

This is even more apparent in the frontispiece (fig. 6.17) which reveals the particular style and exotic characteristic of these illustrations.[321] In this engraving, the emperor sits on a throne decorated with strange tiger- and dragon-headed animals. His left arm rests upon a globe showing China and indicating that he is the emperor of China. He is attired in a heavily decorated robe, and wears a fur cap with two peacock feathers and a long necklace around his neck, and he is sentencing four criminals who kneel or lie on the stairs in front of him. Around the emperor stand his courtiers with swords and wearing garments similar to the emperor's; like him, they all sport moustaches.

[321] This engraving has also been discussed in Corbett, "The Dutch Mission to Peking in 1655," 131–36.

Figure 6.17. Frontispiece of J. Nieuhof *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

The highly detailed representation of the scene, such as the physiognomy of Chinese people, the exotic pattern and decoration of their clothes and the Chinese-style trial, not only presents the exoticism of this oriental country to the European reader, but also creates a vivid setting, as if the reader is witnessing the event. And this, to a large extent, reflects the remarkable character of the illustrations highlighted in the title's claim, that they are all drawn from life in China (*na't leven in Sina getekent*).

However, the figure on the throne is not a representation of the Chinese emperor drawn from life, and the setting does not reflect the Chinese imperial court either. Although the Dutch embassy was eventually given an

audience with the emperor, Nieuhof did not have an opportunity to observe him or his court. As he relates in the Paris manuscript, "the ambassadors and the afore-mentioned ambassador were led to a lofty platform, but we remained below. [...] We looked around eagerly to see the Emperor, but he was hidden behind [a screen], in the Chinese manner; nobody should look at him when His Majesty sits on his throne. (Haar E.^{s} wierden met de voornoemde ambassadeur op een verheven tonneel geleid, doch wij bleven beneden. [...] Wij zagen vast om end om na de keyzer, doch hij was verborgen na de wijze der Chijnezen, die niemand zien mach, wanneer zij in haar majesteit op den koninglijken troon zitten.)"[322]

The description of this occasion is more detailed in the published book, which reads as follow:

> The embassadours themselves discerned nothing of him but a little of his Face; […] We endeavour'd what we could to get a sight of the Emperor in his Throne as he sat in state, but the crowd of his Courtiers about him was such, that it eclipsed him from us in all his Glory. […] On each side of the Throne stood forty of his Majestier Life Guard […] These hindered the Embassadours from seeing the Emperour, Jacob Keijser observed the emperor to look back after them, and for as much as he could discern of him, he was young and of fair complexion.[323]

[322] Blussé and Falkenburg, *Johan Nieuhofs Beelden van een Chinareis 1655–1657*, 53.
[323] Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China,* 118–19.

According this account, only the ambassadors observed a very little of the Chinese emperor's face and it is very likely that Nieuhof had no opportunity at all to see the emperor. Moreover, in the Paris manuscript, there is no drawing showing the Chinese emperor, which suggests that this portrait of the Chinese emperor was very likely made by the engravers on the basis of Nieuhof's drawings of some other figure, such as the old viceroy of Canton (see fig. 4.1).

In fact, this portrait has itself been carefully refined in the printed book. As discussed previously, Nieuhof's drawing of the viceroy was based on direct observation, but the representation of the details is very rough, especially in respect of the background. According to the accompanying description, the official sits on a 'square seat, covered with a curious carpet." Judging from the spatial relationship between the column in the background and the carpet in the foreground, the carpet seems to be floating in mid-air rather than lying on a seat on the ground.

This unrealistic background setting was apparently unacceptable to the engravers, so they made certain alterations. As we can see, in the corresponding engraving (fig. 6.18) the seat is set on a square platform. The carpet covering the seat seems much larger and softer while the column, which works as a reference showing the position of the seat in the drawing, is replaced by a row of officials seated in front of a draped cloth. Even though all these alterations are intended to create a more convincing spatial arrangement, the background still looks like a stage set rather than the interior of a real Chinese house.

Figure 6.18. Portrait of Shang Kexi from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

Unlike many of the engravings illustrating Chinese plants, animals, and people that are derived from other sources, although the representations of Chinese architecture, cities, and towns do not necessarily share exactly the same design or refer to the same object, they are still closely connected to the drawings in the manuscript. As discussed above, these engravings were probably made on the basis of the drawings in the Paris manuscript, or the original sketches made by Nieuhof on site, or both. Generally speaking, the engravers adopted three approaches to produce engravings with designs similar to those of the drawings in the manuscript.

The first approach, often applied to Chinese architecture, was to simply copy the design from the aforementioned sources. For instance, figure 6.19 presents a nine-storey pagoda taking a dominant position to the right of center. Crowned with a finial, it has the classic, gradually-tiered eaves from which bells are suspended. With these characteristics, this pagoda is very

impressive. But it is noteable that although this pagoda is named "BY LINOING" as shown in the engraving, it bears a strong resemblance to the well-known Porcelain Pagoda shown in the drawing of the Bao'en temple (see fig. 4.33). The great resemblance in their form strongly suggests that there must be a close relationship between them—that this pagoda might be more or less a copy of the Porcelain Pagoda in Nanjing.

Figure 6.19. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

However, the engravers were doubtless aware that such a simple, unvarnished repetition might arouse doubt about the trustworthiness of these engravings in the mind of the perspicacious reader. Therefore, to evade such invidious criticism, a more commonly used approach in producing extra engravings was to collect various elements from different drawings in the Paris manuscript and rearrange them to create new pictures of China. The engraving of the town of Pekkingsa (fig. 6.20) is an interesting example of this approach. In this engraving, the foreground is taken up by raised ground

on which stand two huge palm trees and a group of figures. In the middle ground, a meandering path leads downhill towards the city in the distance while three wheat-fields occupy the right side. A number of Chinese buildings and a pagoda are located at the foot of the mountains in the background. The first impression of the whole scene is convincing and harmonious, especially considering the Chinese figures in typical costume in the foreground and the buildings displaying their classical Chinese architectural features in the background. However, a closer look at the composition of this image and its individual components reveals a different case regarding the working process and the credibility of this engraving.

Figure 6.20. Engraving "Pekkingsa" from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

First, the way of handling the foreground is typical of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape artists. By engraving the foreground more densely to give it more ink, the engraver separates the middle ground

in both the geographical and psychological sense. In fact, the foreground gives the impression that this is where Nieuhof was standing to observe the townscape, while the group of Chinese figures constitutes an audience that witnesses the whole scene. Such an approach is commonly found in the landscape paintings and prints of, for instance, Frans Post. In many of his paintings of Brazil, Post showed raised ground in the extreme foreground, creating a stage on which to display the exotic flora and fauna of a foreign land, as can be seen in figure 6.12. Instead of those Brazilian curiosities, the foreground of the engraving of Pekkingsa has a group of Chinese figures and some tall trees on raised ground that is strongly reminiscent of Post's composition. This foreground is not necessarily part of the real scene that Nieuhof beheld; instead, rather like a stage set, it seems more likely to have been added to create a fanciful yet more credible effect.

The artificial composition of this engraving becomes even more obvious when the viewer's line of vision turns to the middle ground, which is divided into two parts by a meandering path along which a number of people are strolling. On the left side of the path is a plain and on its right side are three fields of wheat. The sinuous form of this path is very reminiscent of that illustrated in folio 199 (picture *d* in fig. 6.20.1), which also appears in the middle of the picture and leads to the city in the background. These three fields of wheat seem very specific, but they can also be discovered in the drawing folio 120 (fig. 6.20.1(e)). Behind these fields, there are three pieces of grotesque rockery. While being amazed by the fanciful shape and size, people would immediately recall the rockeries depicted in the manuscript drawing (fig. 6.20.1(f)) the shape of which is identical. Directly copied from the drawing, these rockeries are inserted in the open field just at the foot of a group of huge mountains, which can be

found in the manuscript drawings, including folio 40 (6.20.1(b)). Last but not least, glimpsing the Chinese buildings in the background, the viewer will again feel a sense of déjà vu, because the pagoda on the left closely resembles the Porcelain Pagoda and the other two-storey buildings all bear the typical Chinese design of up-turned eaves.

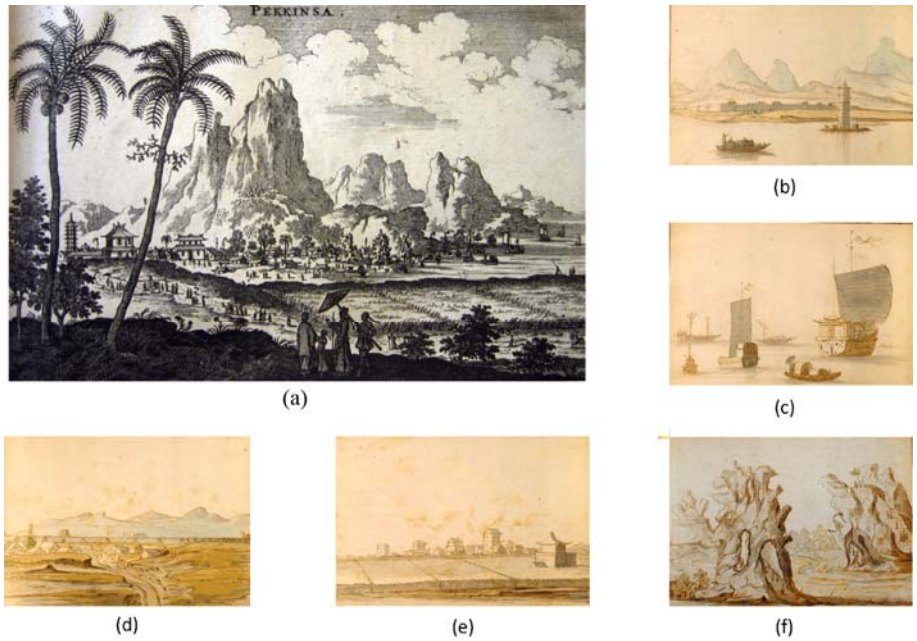

Figure 6.20.1. Comparison between the engraving in the printed book and the drawings in the Paris manuscript.

After a close examination of each individual component of this engraving, it becomes quite obvious that, although there is no corresponding drawing of the town of Pekkingsa in the Paris manuscript, the design of this engraving borrows liberally from different drawings. Based on this finding, the engravers' working procedure may be probably went something like this: they first extracted some typical elements from different drawings or the original sketches made by Nieuhof, and then inserted them in a well thought

out, reasonable place so as to invent a new image of Chinese city and town. Because these elements all have typical Chinese characteristics, the newly invented image still has the sense of naturalness and it will not have stirred reader's doubts about its authenticity.

Another way of producing extra engravings was simply to make things up. In this approach, engravers did not restrict themselves to borrowing from Chinese sources; they also incorporated purely Western components to create a visual fantasy of this mysterious land. An interesting example is the arch in Canton shown in figure 6.21. In the printed book, Nieuhof gives the following detailed description of the first arch he came across:

> Here also are several triumphal arches, which have been erected to the honour of such as have done their country service. They are no small ornament to the place; for from the water-gate, going directly on to the King's palace, I counted in that lane only, no less than thirteen stately triumphal arches made of hewn stone, which are so set out with figures and inscriptions in caved work, that all who behold them, admire them as wonders.
>
> And this being one of the greatest and most considerable ornaments wherewith the Chinese adorn their cities, I have for the better demonstration of the workmanship, set before you the following printed draught of one of them, that you may take a full view of every part, and so to judge of all the rest, which are generally built after one and the same fashion.
>
> These arches are commonly built with three stories, so artificially, that we may very well say that neither wit nor ingenuity was wanting in their contrivance. Round about the

pillars, and in other places, were writ several Chinese characters, and also cut several flowers, beasts, birds, and other curious ornaments, as I suppose, emblematical.[324]

Figure 6.21. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, etc.* (Amsterdam, 1665).

Corresponding to the description in the text, the arch in the engraving consists of carved boards proclaiming its purpose, four typically Chinese upturned eaves, and eight large pillars far above the ground, most of them fully decorated with unrecognizable patterns. With its eaves, boards, and decorations, this arch does resemble a traditional Chinese arch to a certain extent. However, its enormous size and strange structure—which seems to be two arches pushed together each with four pillars and one half of the top part—is a far cry from a traditional Chinese arch, an example of which can

[324] Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, 37.

be seen in figure 5.18. Moreover, its position in the middle of a square is not in keeping with Chinese custom, because traditionally Chinese arches are erected in the middle of the street for people to pass through, which intensifies their spiritual function. Moving on to look at the spacious square, it is not like a traditional Chinese square which is usually in a form of a courtyard; it is instead much more after the fashion of a European square, like the Waag, or weighing house, on the Dam Square in front of what was then the Amsterdam Town Hall (now the Royal Palace), as shown in the painting *The Dam in Amsterdam* by Gerrit Berckheyde (1638–1698, fig. 6.22).

Figure 6.22. Gerrit Berckheyde, "The Dam in Amsterdam," 1697, 41 x 55,5 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

Summing up these findings about a Chinese arch depicted in this way, the following questions present themselves: Is this indeed a Chinese arch? And, how did the engravers come up with the designs they did? One interesting detail throws some light on these questions. Close observation

shows that on the top board of the arch it is possible to discern that the inscription is not in Chinese characters. The letters can be made out to be "IHS," a monogram of an abbreviation of the name of Jesus as it is written in Greek (IHΣΨΣ).[325] As a symbol of the Christian church, it is incredible that this inscription would appear on a seventeenth-century Chinese arch. The only plausible explanation for this unexpected monogram is that the engravers created what they imagined a Chinese arch would look like and capped it with a familiar religious emblem. Curiously a statue appears on top of the arch in the British copy (fig. 6.23). This is obviously an armed Western hero.[326] It would seem that this engraving was composed by the engravers who created an arch containing some Chinese and some Western characteristics.

Figure 6.23. Drawing of a triumphal arch in Canton in the British Library, Add Mss. 5253.

[325] A. Hauck, "Jesus Christ, Monogram of," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by Philip Schaff, 6.168.
[326] This edition is reserved in the British Library and the manuscript number is Ms Add. 5253.

Conclusion

As the discussions in this chapter demonstrates, the engravings in the first Dutch edition and the drawings in the Paris manuscript are closely related, not only because many of them have a similar design, but also on account of their common components. Confronting the rough depictions in the drawings, the engravers would only have made corrections to those details that apparently ran counter to common understanding and Western pictorial convention. However, hampered by a lack of knowledge about China, they could not go far towards making any fundamental improvements. Therefore, most of their refinements consist of making more clearly delineated images and adding embellishments; but they were actually more concerned with aesthetics and creating a natural-looking effect in support of the “na het leven” claim.