



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

'Sensitive plates' and 'sentimental keepsakes' the social life of reverse glass painting: from Canton to Leiden

Poel, R.H.M. van der

Citation

Poel, R. H. M. van der. (2019). 'Sensitive plates' and 'sentimental keepsakes': the social life of reverse glass painting: from Canton to Leiden. *Revista De Cultura = Review Of Culture*, 59, 64-94. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/87540>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/87540>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

‘Sensitive Plates’ and ‘Sentimental Keepsakes’

The social life of reverse glass paintings: From Canton to Leiden

ROSALIEN VAN DER POEL*

ABSTRACT: Chinese export painting had a strong appeal to foreign powers active in China and neighbouring Asian countries in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. As a result, today, Chinese export paintings can be found in eighteen public collections in the Netherlands. These collections have an historic, an artistic, and a material value and are closely related to the overseas historical China trade, either brought back by VOC employees, private merchants, diplomats or government workers. These integrated economic relations produced, among other things, integrated art objects such as paintings, which, as a result of their representative and social functions, over time formed a special artistic phenomenon, and a shared cultural visual repertoire with its own (EurAsian) character.

This article focuses on the social life of two coherent collections of reverse glass paintings from China in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Netherlands. The first set consists of 19 eighteenth-century ‘sensitive plates’ with an interesting provenance back to 1824, the year when they entered the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague. This set of oil paintings, probably produced between 1785-1790, contains elements suggesting a strong link with this period. Secondly, a set of three nineteenth-century ‘sentimental keepsakes’ with two harbour views and one interior-garden scene is treated. Van der Poel contacted one of the descendants of their first owner, whose narrative made it possible to compile a cultural biography of these private owned paintings until they were donated to the Leiden museum.

Having disentangled their provenance, Van der Poel draws some careful conclusions about the degree of importance and, consequently, the extent to which she notices any value accrue ment and value dwindle of these sets of artworks in their lengthy afterlife. It is clear that these commodified artworks with their cohesive values make this painting genre distinctive and a class in its own right.

KEYWORDS: Chinese export paintings; Reverse glass paintings; Qing dynasty; Value assignment; Exchange; Commodities

* From 2010 to 2016, Rosalien van der Poel has held a Ph.D. position at the Graduate School for Humanities at Leiden University, affiliated to the Leiden University Centre for Arts in the Society. Currently (2019), she combines her job as Institute Manager of the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts at Leiden University with her position as a research associate China at Museum Volkenkunde, part of the National Museum of World Cultures, and as a board member of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands (<https://www.vvak.nl/en/>). With her profound knowledge of Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections she emphatically advocates the significant value of these collections.

De 2010 a 2016, Rosalien van der Poel foi Doutora na Escola de Pós-Graduação em Humanidades da Universidade de Leiden, afiliada ao Centro das Artes na Sociedade da Universidade de Leiden. Atualmente (2019), congrega o trabalho de Gerente do Instituto da Academia de Artes Cênicas e Criativas da Universidade de Leiden com a posição de pesquisadora associada no Museu Volkenkunde, parte do Museu Nacional de Culturas do Mundo, e como membro do conselho de administração da Sociedade Real de Arte Asiática na Holanda (<https://www.vvak.nl/en/>). Possuindo conhecimento aprofundado sobre pintura chinesa de exportação do acervo holandês, defende vivamente o valor significativo dessas coleções.

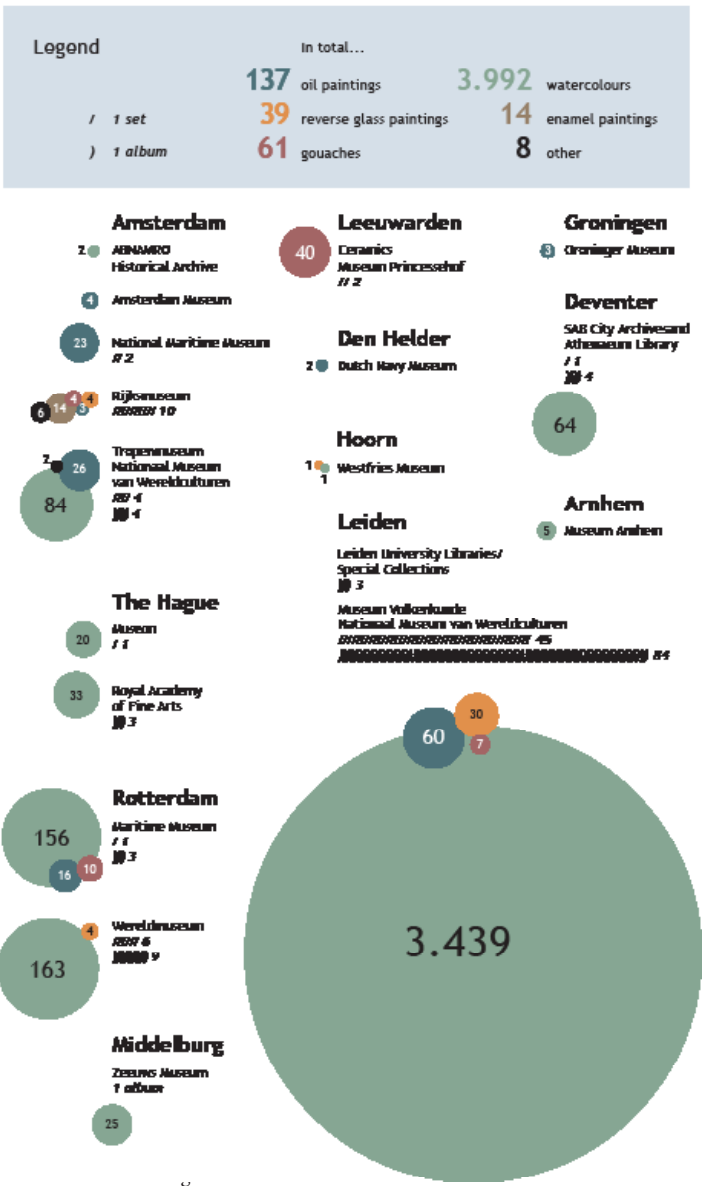
INTRODUCTION

Chinese export painting had a strong appeal to foreign powers active in China and neighboring Asian countries in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. As a result, today, Chinese export paintings can be found in eighteen public collections in the Netherlands.¹ It is believed that the term ‘Chinese export painting’ was coined by Western art historians, following the precedent set by the term ‘Chinese export porcelain’, in order to distinguish this type of painting (yáng wài huà or wài xiǎo huà) from literati (traditional) Chinese (national) painting (wén rén huà or guó huà). It also references the fact that these works were made for export to the West.² This term only came into use after 1950. In that year, Margaret Jourdain and Roger S. Jenyns introduced the term ‘export painting’ in their early survey of Chinese export art in the eighteenth century.³ These artworks are also called ‘China trade painting’ or ‘historical painting’, referring to the fact that they were part of the historical China trade, the most important forms of which were porcelain, tea and silk. These terms are used interchangeably in Europe, Asia and North America. From the place and time of their production in Canton (present-day Guangzhou) and Macao (present-day Aomen), later spreading to Hong Kong and Shanghai, until long after, these paintings were described by their contemporary makers as ‘foreign paintings’, ‘foreign pictures’, ‘paintings for foreigners’ or ‘Western-style paintings’, whilst foreign, Western buyers in that period just called them ‘Chinese paintings’.⁴

In 2015, Anna Grasskamp, Research Assistant Professor Art History, Material Culture, Hong Kong Baptist University, introduced a new term for artworks derived from trade and cultural interactions between Chinese and Western nations within the framework of visual culture.⁵ With the use of the term ‘Eurasian’ it is possible, she argues, to escape “binary divisions into ‘European’ and ‘Asian’ elements, clear-cut ‘Netherlandish’ or ‘Chinese’ components.”⁶ This term is high-

ly appropriate for objects and images that are labeled ‘Western’ and which, in turn, are modified, re-framed and re-layered by Chinese artists and artisans into new, innovative and complex ‘Eurasian’ objects. An analysis of some of the categories of Chinese export paintings reveals that they possess the characteristics of ‘Eurasian’ images; other categories, though, do not. The characteristics that Chinese export paintings possess, in tandem with some of Grasskamp’s examples, include an entanglement of foreign and recognized lay-

Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections



The Emperor ploughing, inv.no. RV-360-113.



A dragon boat race, inv.no. RV-360-1114.



Set of 19 reverse glass paintings, anonymous, c. 1785-1790, paintings on glass, 81x52.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures, inv.nos. RV-360-1113 to 1131.

The rice harvest, inv.no. RV-360-1125.



Kite-flying beside the river, inv.no. RV-360-1123.



From clay to pot, inv.no. RV-360-1126.



A palace feast, inv.no. RV-360-1117.



The Emperor's audience, inv.no. RV-360-1122.



The roadstead of Whampoa, inv.no. RV-360-1115.vv



The quayside at Canton, inv.no. RV-360-1116.



Enjoying eating fruit, inv.no. RV-360-1119.



Kowtowing, inv.no. RV-360-1118.



The hunt, inv.no. RV-360-1120.



On the tea plantation, inv.no. RV-360-1128.



In the palace garden, inv.no. RV-360-1121.



The silk-spinning workshop, inv.no. RV-360-1130.



Domestic bliss, inv.no. RV-360-1131.



A summer garden scene, inv.no. RV-360-1129.



Bride and bridegroom, inv.no. RV-360-1127.



All Souls (or All Hallows), inv.no. RV-360-1124.



ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

ers in the representation of landscapes, interior scenes and in portrait painting, a blurring of exotic and native architectural elements and sites in interior and garden scenes, and, among other elements (borrowed from Western print models?), painted frames and curtains on oil paintings with various themes. This is a materialization of the interesting and complex intertwining of transnational and transcultural creation. Yet, it goes too far to say that all Chinese export paintings fit the features of 'Eurasian' images as defined and framed by Grasskamp. Clearly, the roots of some of the subject matter of Chinese export painting can be traced to the literati-painting canon (birds-and-flower painting, local street customs/peddlers, manufacturing silk fabrics and cultivating rice). Paintings in these genres, however, also underwent deliberate, innovative and complex adjustments in order to please a Western audience.

COLLECTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch collections of Chinese export paintings have an historic, an artistic, and a material value and are closely related to the overseas historical China trade, either brought back by VOC employees, private merchants, diplomats or government workers. These integrated economic relations produced, among other things, integrated art objects such as paintings, which, as a result of their representative and social functions, over time formed a special artistic phenomenon, and a shared cultural visual repertoire with its own 'Eurasian' character. Moreover, these kinds of paintings, to a greater or lesser extent, can be considered as objects giving tangible form to spoken metaphors of success, money, sea travels, and trade deals. Their particular means of production under specific conditions and their exchange and use also illustrates contrasting Dutch and Chinese notions of value and utility of this painting genre. These notions oscillate between a dyad of high and low appraisal and assert contradictory attitudes towards this genre across different places and in the course of time.

This article focuses on the social life of two coherent collections of reverse glass paintings from China in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Netherlands.⁷ The first set consists of nineteen eighteenth-century 'sensitive plates' with an interesting provenance back to 1824, the year when they entered the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague.⁸ This set of oil paintings, probably produced between 1785-1790, contains elements suggesting a strong link with this period. Secondly, a set of three nineteenth-century 'sentimental keepsakes' with two harbor views and one interior-garden scene is treated.⁹ (Figures 21-23) To understand the arrival of Chinese export paintings in Dutch museum collections in general and the paintings central in this article in particular, it is essential to take a closer look at the Dutch China trade practice in previous centuries.

DUTCH SEA TRADE AND CHINA

It is well known that the Dutch have been an important trading community with China through the ages. From the early seventeenth century on, as Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann puts it, China undoubtedly had "a huge impact on European cultures that was mediated through the United Provinces (Dutch Republic, 1581-1795)."¹⁰ The early interest in China rapidly spread from the Netherlands throughout Europe, via the re-selling of porcelain in France, England, Germany and other countries, and through the publication of illustrated books depicting this unknown empire. The result of this was the genesis of a new European style called chinoiserie, a fashion that entered the European stage in the late seventeenth century and reached its height between 1740 and 1770.¹¹ This style, states Catherine Pagani, "had very little to do with China per se but rather reflected an idealized and highly decorative concept of the Far East, loosely combining motifs from Chinese, Japanese, and even Indian repertoires."¹² This movement had a deep influence on interior design, architecture and decorative art. The

Garden scene, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 34 x 49 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures, inv.no. RV-6166-6.



ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

CHINESE EXPORT ART

idealized vision of the Chinese empire was expressed in the arts and gradually developed into an autonomous style, which, in turn, modified the European picture of the East. As chinoiserie expert Hugh Honour remarks in his seminal study *Chinoiserie: The vision of Cathay*, this style phenomenon declined once European eyes began to view it as the antithesis of Neoclassicism, the dominant movement from the late-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the fashion shifted from baroque and rococo chinoiserie style to a more neo-classical one.¹³ Despite this downturn in European Chinese style, European commerce increased and, instead of buying Chinese-style objects made by Europeans, Western merchants purchased actual Chinese objects and paintings from China. In fact, the extensive corpus of Chinese export art executed in the nineteenth century proves that after the peak of the chinoiserie fashion in the middle of the eighteenth century, international art exchange between China and the West showed no signs of decreasing.

In the long nineteenth century, the trading practice was not booming as it had been in the centuries before, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the period 1602-1799 had a flourishing shipping link with Canton. This observation not only applies to principal trade products, but also to material culture transfer or exchanges linked to commerce, such as the trade in spices and tea. From the seventeenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the VOC used Batavia as its base for the Chinese tea trade between Europe and Asia, with Chinese trade junks visiting the town every year. Until the eighteenth century, the VOC had been sending a limited number of ships directly to China, in response to the increasing European demand for tea.¹⁴ In 1727, the company received permission to establish a so-called hong or factorij (trading post) in Canton and, together with traders from other European nations and America, they chased lucrative profits in all areas.¹⁵ In 1728, the VOC started a direct shipping link between Holland and Canton.¹⁶ The trading season usually lasted

less than six months, from August to January. Western ships wanted to make the return voyage to Europe well before the monsoon winds in February changed direction. Those who remained in China in the months when no business was done usually visited their families in Macao. After the decline of the VOC at the end of the eighteenth century, France occupied Holland until 1813. This situation did little for the Dutch trade with Asia. Although all Dutch trade in Canton came to a virtual standstill as a result of the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) and “when our independence went into hiding for a moment,” the flag on the Dutch factory in Canton was still flying, as the Dutch publicist Hendrik Muller (1859-1941) wrote in the magazine *De Gids*.¹⁷

As we know from research of maritime historian Frank Broeze (1945-2001), one of the results of the French-English war – also fought on the oceans – was that Dutch ships were often taken by the English in this period or were required to seek refuge in neutral harbors, where they were confined to port.¹⁸ Although the Americans went on trading until 1807 and the Indian country traders remained active throughout the whole period, trade in Canton diminished greatly during these years. Soon after the French period, from 1815 onwards, the Dutch made several attempts, using independent shipping firms, to regain hegemony of the European tea trade. However, these attempts were not very successful and suffered from a lack of continuity. After a fire in 1822, the Dutch factory in Canton was rebuilt on the same plot by the Netherlands Indies government, but different ships took on board the loads this time. The Dutch shipping, “destroyed during the Napoleonic era, had not recovered in an instant, and our world market for Chinese tea was gone, for good.”¹⁹

In 1824, the Netherlands Trading Society (NTS, 1824-1964), one of the forerunners of today's Dutch ABN AMRO banking company, started their sailing business in Asia. This initiative by the Dutch King William I, who was nicknamed the Merchant Monarch because of his active support for trade and

industry, was aimed at stimulating Dutch maritime private trade, promoting commercial activities and expanding Dutch trade relations with Asia, especially with the Netherlands East Indies. As we can read in an archival document about the history of ABN AMRO, the king's objective was “to resuscitate the national economy in the wake of the period of French rule (1795-1813).”²⁰

From 1825 to 1830, the NTS, the national import and export company set up to expand existing trade relations and open up new channels, undertook five expeditions directly to Canton.²¹ Although this initiative was praiseworthy, their English and American rivals, who had taken over the China trade and dominated this field in Europe, overshadowed the Dutch. From research conducted by Leonard Blussé, Broeze et al. and Muller, we know that the Netherlands' pole position in the global tea trade was gone forever by the 1830s.²² Exceptions to this decline were commercial enterprises based in Leiden, where wools like laken and polemieten were produced, and in tropical products from Java, like edible bird's nests, which funded their Chinese wares. Indeed, trading activities between Holland and China only continued on a small scale. After a while, in the 1840s, the Dutch regained some ground in the textile market. And, due to the so-called Cultuurstelsel (Cultivation System) introduced on Java in 1830, there was extensive trade with the Netherlands East Indies in various colonial products, including raw materials, dyes, spices, coffee, sugar and indigo. Consequently, the total picture of Dutch trade with China was not as desolate as some Dutch colonial officials depicted at that time. In 1843, Dutch colonial officers like Modderman, Hueser and Freyss were ordered by the NTS to investigate what the prospects were for the growth of trade between Holland and China in the years to come. Their reports concluded that the prospects looked rather dim.²³ Nevertheless, only a few years later, in 1847, Muller discovered that Dutch ships were importing more than 3¼ million guilders worth of merchandise into China and ex-

porting about 13¼ million guilders worth of Chinese goods.²⁴ People mainly bought tea and sent Dutch products (mostly tropical products from the Netherlands Indies) in return; however, there was almost no opium, unlike the Scottish Jardine Matheson & Co., or the American trading house Russell & Company. The NTS documents only record one consignment of 55 cases of opium.

1856 is an important year in the history of Dutch relations with Canton. During an uprising in Canton, the so-called Arrow War (1856- 1860), which resulted in the Qing government opening up eight more treaty ports, all the consular buildings went up in flames, including the new Dutch commercial office, established in Canton in 1844 (which was serving as a consular building at this time). Consequently, Canton ceased to be home to the Dutch consulate after more than a century of trading there. From that moment, Dutch nineteenth-century trading activities on the South Chinese coast were undertaken either from the “significant Dutch house on the Praya Grande”, which served as the Dutch consulate in Macao or, later, from the Dutch posts in Hong Kong and Amoy (Xiamen).²⁵ The last Dutch professional consul, Piet Hamel (1845-1900), was stationed in Amoy in China. He left the country in 1892.

In retrospect, as Ferry de Goey concludes in his paper ‘The business of consuls; consuls and businessmen’, “the nineteenth century promised more to westerners than it delivered.”²⁶ In the late nineteenth century, foreign enterprises became interested in China as a destination for – rather than a source of – products. As Frans-Paul van der Putten mentions in his study on the evolution of Dutch enterprise in South China in early twentieth century, various Dutch companies concentrated their agencies, branch offices or subsidiaries primarily in Hong Kong.²⁷ Other significant locations for Dutch business activities in this region were Guangzhou, Shantou and Xiamen. Many of them were specialized in specific colonial activities, such as banking, shipping, sugar and tobacco planta-

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

CHINESE EXPORT ART

tions in the Netherlands East Indies. These colonial enterprises had their headquarters in the Netherlands, but their assets and operations were entirely in 'the East'. As Geoffrey Jones declares in his book *Multinationals and global capitalism from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century*, in which he examines the role of entrepreneurs and firms in the creation of the global economy over the last two centuries, these enterprises, based in Dutch South Asia, were referred to as independent companies and they were the first Dutch companies to invest in China.²⁸

Returning to the Dutch sea trade and China in the nineteenth century, we can conclude that the scope of the Dutch trading activities was still extensive, and Chinese export paintings in the Netherlands are silent witnesses to this. Notwithstanding the difficulties the Dutch had at that time in terms of maintaining their position on the world sea-trade market, the (colonized) Dutch East Indies trading stations and other cities on the Chinese southern coast were very important for facilitating Dutch operations in international and Asian waters and, besides their main trading products, make it possible for seafaring staff members to acquire emblematic objects (such as paintings) to remind them of their stay over there.

THE PAINTINGS – FORMAL ASPECTS

Looking at corpus of the Dutch collections, we can divide the paintings into different categories and into a range of qualities, all produced to sell on various markets and to diverse clients. In the Dutch collections we can distinguish unique singular paintings, identical pairs on different media, companion pieces, obvious sets of oil paintings or gouaches and albums with watercolors. They are executed in oil on canvas, paper, Bodhi tree (*Ficus Religiosa*) leaves, bone or copper, as a reverse glass painting, watercolor or gouache on regular Chinese or European paper, or on Chinese pith paper made from the *Tetrapanax Papyrifera* (tóng cáo zhǐ).²⁹ Almost all export paintings, either individu-

ally authored by a well-known Chinese master or produced anonymously, represent a Chinese subject matter. The following section will deal with the medium that feature this article: reverse glass paintings.

REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS

The technique of reverse glass painting, as researched and described in *Sensitive Plates* by Paul van Dongen, former curator China at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, in 'Chinese Glass Paintings in Bangkok Monasteries' by Jessica Lee Patterson, and in 'Copying in Reverse: China Trade Paintings on Glass' by Maggie M. Cao, has been in Europe for centuries.³⁰ It is generally believed that the technique went from Europe to China, where already in the 1730s reverse glass paintings were being produced in Canton. The transport of six reverse glass paintings ('6 Glass Pictures') from Canton to England in 1739 is noted in the MS account book of captain Bootle of the English East India Company (EIC).³¹ The EIC day registers also provide information about this early practice: "Purchased from Quouqua in 1738: 18 painted glass with lacquered frames and 6 painted glass with rosewood frames."³² This suggests that paintings on this medium were amongst the earliest examples of Chinese export art. We know via their writings that many contemporary eyewitnesses were intrigued by the procedure of this special painting technique.³³

In comparison to 'normal' paintings, reverse glass paintings are created in reverse order (mirror image).³⁴ The Chinese painter worked backwards, painting the image in reverse and laying down the highlights and foreground features first. Van Dongen explains this process as follows: "The things which, seen in perspective, are closest to the viewer, or somewhere close, are painted in first. Where necessary the background or ground is applied in a subsequent phase over the picture already painted. For this reason the reverse side of a glass painting shows much less detail than the front side."³⁵ Thus, the painter begins with the finish-

ing touch and ends with the foundation. This means that to paint on mirrors, therefore, a painter first outlines his subject and has to remove the reflecting layer of quick-tin or quicksilver amalgam on the reverse side of the mirror that he does not want. Then he paints with oil color paint and works in a reverse order, in comparison with the 'normal' painting method.

A closer examination of a group of Chinese reverse glass paintings in Winterthur Museum in 2007 revealed that the paintings are created with thin, translucent paint layers.³⁶ Highlights and shadows are painted in the same plane. Particular details to be represented, and which were in fact sited in, or on, another material, had to be painted first on the surface of the glass. Only then could the ground, or background, be painted over or around it." Furthermore, Van Dongen, after his research into the way the paint was applied, observed that:

*Partly for the sake of convenience, and partly to avoid having successive layers of paint lying too thickly on top of each other, the painters tried to apply as many sections of the picture as possible in the first layer(s) on the glass. This means that the paintings on glass can also be viewed as puzzles composed of smaller and larger areas of color, and lines, which must accord with each other down to the smallest detail in form and color, and must fit into each other with the utmost precision. This care was all the more necessary because, owing to the order of the painting, it was impossible to use over-painting for re-touching or correcting forms once they had been applied to the glass. This was another factor increasing the difficulty of this painting technique, in comparison with other forms of painting.*³⁷

This observation means that to achieve precision, the painter must think very carefully in advance, before applying his paint. Moreover, any painter aiming to consistently deliver high quality work, must have mastered the right skills for an attractive color palette and possess a steady hand for self-assured lines and paint application.

Regular glass was favored for this type of color painting- and ink work, rather than mirror glass, which was thicker and did not show the colors as well and was more complex to work on. Furthermore, the reflective amalgam layer of tin or mercury on the back of mirror glass first had to be scraped away, before the transparent space could be painted on.

Reverse glass paintings were often made using models or templates. Three of the reverse glass paintings of the set of nineteen in the Museum Volkenkunde, which can be dated 1785-1790, have "small and fragile remnants" of small black ink lines on the front of the glass plate.³⁸ These ink lines once formed part of the draft of the image that was subsequently painted and then colored in on the reverse side of the same sheet of glass. Figure 14 is such a painting and shows small lines in black ink along the edge of the painting, where there was once a frame.³⁹

Probably, the ink sketch on *The rice harvest* had been working as a kind of 'color plate', but it is not known whether the painter added new compositional elements after the ink drawing had been set up. I argue, in tandem with the ideas of Van Dongen and on the basis of research by Mary McGinn, Winterthur Museum painting restorer, that the black lines were added after the glass had been originally framed.⁴⁰ Famous Chinese export art scholar Carl L. Crossman asserts too that reverse glass paintings were painted at least in part after they were fitted in the frames.⁴¹

As is also observed by Maggie M. Cao 'Copying in reverse: China trade paintings on glass', the glass painter has to apply a left-right reversal, because "the painter worked on a transparent support, he could naturally begin his copying mechanically, tracing the print through the glass sheet laid directly over it. Yet in order to render the finished painting in the correct orientation, the glass painter had to turn over the glass to fill in a now-reversed composition free-had from sight."⁴² A framed sheet of glass could be placed on a table, front-side up, without causing any harm to the glass. In addition

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO



Garden scene, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 34 x 49 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures, inv.no. RV-6166-6.

to this advantage of framing before painting the glass, the edges of the frame served as support for the flat piece of wood used by the painter to paint the image. This Chinese watercolor clearly documents some key characteristics related to the process of reverse glass painting. The artwork shows a painter “painting on a horizontal glass surface with an original framed print hanging vertically before him. The composition on which he works is flipped left to right: the foliage on the right of the original print is on the left in the unfinished copy.”⁴³ Cao continues that “[T]his compositional flipping had to be managed carefully, especially in the case of text, which was typically preserved in the glass images copied after inscribed prints.”⁴⁴

After the painting was finished, the painter only needed to wipe away the ink lines from the front, the unpainted side. It is quite possible that, in doing so, some lines remained, especially along the edges of the frame.

ROYAL ‘SENSITIVE PLATES’

Museum Volkenkunde owns a noteworthy set of nineteen reverse glass paintings of oil paintings, which deserve attention for a variety of reasons.⁴⁵ This set of oil paintings probably produced between 1785-1790, contains elements suggesting a strong link with this period; for example, the flags of Western countries, the house construction, or the types of ships. Similarities in technique, quality and size lead us to surmise that all these paintings were created at approximately the same time. On top of this, the scenes depicted in these technically inventive, detailed and colorful paintings, which are nearly all in a fine state of preservation, give us valuable information about aspects of Chinese society at the end of the eighteenth century.

The set has an interesting provenance back to 1824. The *Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden* (Visitors’ guide to the Royal Collection (Cabinet) of Rarities) from 1824 describes the collection in terms of its physical layout, and the geographic origin of its contents.⁴⁶ The items in the catalogue however are not numbered, so that it is very difficult to identify the objects involved. The first and second rooms contain ‘artistic products of Sinitic origin’, displayed in cabinets along the walls, showcases in the centre of the rooms, with paintings on the walls. The nineteen Chinese reverse glass paintings are not included in the list of items. This fact, perhaps, tells us that the Visitors’ guide was written well before the Royal Cabinet acquired these paintings in 1824. Another reason could be that Reinier van de Kastele’s inventory ledger with his records, in which all the gifts and purchases were entered with the names of the benefactors, was lost during the regime of Abraham Anne van de Kastele (1840-1876).

The *Korte handleiding ter bezigtiging der verzameling van zeldzaamheden in her Koninklijk*



The roadstead of Whampoa, inv.no. RV-360-1115.

Kabinet op het Mauritshuis in ‘s Gravenhage (Brief visitors’ guide...), prepared by Abraham Anne van de Kastele in 1860, only twice mentions exhibits related to painting: “381: Some paintings in oils”, and “383: Nineteen paintings, beautifully painted on glass, depicting the sowing and harvesting of rice, picking tea, views of Canton, Wampo and Makkao, a camp where the emperor is reviewing troops, and interiors and verandahs.”⁴⁷

The inventory list prepared by David van der Kellen in the years 1876-1879 affords the best overview of the objects that were present in the Royal Cabinet of Rarities.⁴⁸ This list incorporates data from the original registers, letters, archive files and books. But again it is not a museum inventory in a modern sense. The archive of the Royal Cabinet informs us that on May 1, 1824, there was a purchase of paintings from China.⁴⁹ Further research, in particular in the National Archives of the Netherlands, supplement the provenance information about this set of reverse glass paintings. The

original documents learn us that following a request to the Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences, and after a Royal Decree of 17 April 1824, the then director of the Royal Cabinet, Reinier van den Kastele, was able to buy the set.⁵⁰

FROM THE HAGUE TO LEIDEN|

Under the administration of Abraham Anne van de Kastele (1840-1876) the Royal Cabinet degenerated into a real curiosity cabinet. It was popular with the public, but it was completely divorced from any connection with the developments in scientific and museum thought in the nineteenth century. In 1880 the Minister of Home Affairs urged Van der Kellen, the director of the Royal Cabinet, and Lindor Serrurier, assistant-director of the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, to make a proposal for the dispersal of the cabinet. The collection should be split into

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

CHINESE EXPORT ART

a department of 'pure ethnographic objects' and a department for 'the museum of comparative art and industry'. Cooperation between the two men proved difficult, running around principally in arguments about what objects belonged to one domain or the other. Van der Kellen ultimately agreed with a report drawn up by Serrurier in 1882, with a proposal for splitting the collection.⁵¹ In the last analysis, the division is rather artificial. In March 1883, a premise on the Rapenburg in Leiden was taken over, and the diverse national collections of ethnographica were united. This meant the end of the popular Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague. At the same time Leiden received a treasure-trove of ethnographic material within its city walls, along with this set of Chinese reverse glass paintings. Paid for from state coffers, the set enriched the Royal collection from 1 May 1824 to its surcease in 1883.⁵²

VALUE ASSIGNMENT

The value of these artworks as a coherent set cannot be overestimated. Sets of oil paintings, gouaches or watercolors, and sets of single-sheet watercolors can be understood as 'sets' because the images clearly belong together. They form a coherent whole in terms of style, color use, materials used, or as a genre. They carry identical original frames or were commissioned and/or produced simultaneously. The documentary and serial nature of an album or a set, which is often thematically constructed, contributes to the individual images within such a set or album accruing value. Together, the images form a narrative that, in a logical and coherent manner, makes the unknown 'exotic' scenes familiar and thus tells a meaningful story.

In the course of time, however, it became quiet around this set of paintings. On the whole, from the mid-twentieth century and the years thereafter, the perception of the hybrid character attached to these paintings lead to the idea that they were identified as

mixed, inferior, and not objects d'art at all.⁵³ This attitude explains their currently largely forgotten and 'frozen' state.⁵⁴ The society at large in general, at least in the Netherlands, and the management of Museum Volkenkunde in particular, for a long time did not value Chinese export paintings. This attitude has nothing to do with identity marking or with unique, artistic and historic value of the paintings; rather, it has everything to do with priorities and strategies in collection management, whether or not motivated by valuation of Chinese export painting in general and/or by financial considerations. In their turn, we can assume that these considerations are fed by existing ignorance about the high use value of these artworks.

These 'sensitive plates' enriched the Royal collection until 1883. After more than a century, Van Dongen again rightly assigned the set. He researched all aspects of the different Chinese subject matters represented in the paintings, including their technical and compositional aspects; moreover, he had them restored and subsequently organized an exhibition. In 2001, they were put on public display in the museum and also at Akzo Nobel Coatings in Sassenheim for some months; 'Sensitive Plates'. Nineteen Chinese paintings on glass, and informative catalogue to accompany the exhibition was published.⁵⁵ Van Dongen's efforts must be understood as a positive exception given the prevailing museum practice in relation to this painting genre at that time. Besides the fact that the Leiden reverse glass paintings can be treated as a set, their appropriate conservation, and the financial support of Akzo Nobel Coatings, helped enormously in convincing everyone to exhibit them.

'SENTIMENTAL KEEPSAKES' IN MUSEUM VOLKENKUNDE

This section presents the social life of a small, cohesive collection of three nineteenth-century Chinese reverse glass paintings that can be considered 'sentimental keepsakes'. These artworks with identical original hardwood frames depict two harbor views and one

interior-garden scene.⁵⁶ Having disentangled the set's provenance, we can draw some careful conclusions about the degree of importance and, consequently, the extent to which we can notice any value accrument and/or dwindle of this set of artworks in its lengthy afterlife.⁵⁷

The depicted interior scene with three figures in an open room and on a garden terrace could be a scene from a story from Chinese classical literature: Dream of the red chamber, *The story of the Western wing* or *The romance of the three kingdoms*. On a paper strip, at the right of the painted painting on the wall, three characters are visible, 江山千 (jiāng shān qiān). This is only part of the text of the couplet; there should be another couplet on the other side of the painting. Furthermore, these three characters are only part of the text of the paper strip, with probably two more characters hidden behind the sitting woman, namely 古秀 (gǔ xiù). The whole sentence on this strip must

probably be: 江山千古秀 (jiāng shān qiān gǔ xiù), which literally means 'the landscape is eternally beautiful'.⁵⁸

On the second painting it is not exactly sure which location is presented.⁵⁹ It can either be the Bund in Shanghai or the port of Yuezhou (nowadays Yueyang) with the custom building Shangyang guan. The painting shows the foreign factories along with a customs office. The inscription on the banner on the roof of one of these buildings reads either 洋関上海正堂 (yáng guān shàng hǎi zhèng táng), meaning the office of the 'Chinese Maritime Customs' or 'the Shanghai County Magistrate', or it reads 上洋海関正堂 (shàng yáng hǎi guān zhèng táng), meaning 'Customs Office of Shangyang'.⁶⁰ As a whole, however, these four characters make no sense, suggesting that they are hand painted by a foreign painter or by an illiterate local artist.⁶¹

The third painting shows a view of Hong Kong harbor with white buildings and hills in the background.⁶²



View of the foreign factories and custom office in Shanghai or Yuezhou, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 50 x 34.4 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures, inv.no. RV-6166-7.

CHINESE EXPORT ART



View of Hong Kong, anonymous, 1860-1900, oil on glass, 50 x 34.4 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/
National Museum of World Cultures, inv.no. RV-6166-8.

(Figure 23) At a glance, it is clear that it was not a master who produced the paintings. The color palette used for the three paintings is sober. The overall execution of the paintings is quite limited. The Chinese painter tried to apply a linear perspective in the paintings of the harbor cities, but did not succeed very well. Furthermore, the proportions and composition of the people, buildings and ships depicted are out of proportion with the elements (ships) on the foreground, rendered smaller than those supposed to be farther away (building). The quays on both harbor views are empty, which results in a rigidity and a feeling the painter had not finished his work yet.

FROM 'THE EAST' TO LEIDEN

The paintings belonged to the couple Mr. J.C. and Mrs. C.M.E. Reinders Folmer, who lived in Shanghai, Kobe and Tokyo between the 1930s and 1940 and where Mr. Reinders Folmer (1903-1973)

worked for the Nationale Handelsbank, as well as the Netherlands Trading Society, another forerunner of today's Dutch ABN AMRO bank. In a talk with their daughter, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer (1948) in November 2014, it became apparent that her mother, Mrs. C.M.E. Reinders Folmer (1908-2005), had talked at great length about her "good and dear life" in Shanghai in the 1930s, where she fully participated in the expat society parties in this city, regularly visited exhibitions and bought art. When the Second World War broke out in 1940, the couple left Japan, where they were living at that time, to visit family in the United States. They stored their art in a warehouse of the Swedish embassy in Japan and in a warehouse in San Francisco. The warehouse in Japan was robbed during their stay in the United States, but 'the silver', their painting collection and the Japanese netsukes stored in San Francisco were preserved. In 1942, the Reinders Folmer family boarded a ship again, back to 'the East'; back to work

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

In the correspondence with her, it became clear that the daughter of Reinders Folmer had seen similar paintings to those that form the focus of this section, in the homes of both Chinese and European families and in public places such as restaurants, both in Indonesia and in the Netherlands. At the end of the 1950s, many Dutch had to leave Indonesia because of the Sukarno regime, which resulted in many objects, including all kinds of furniture and paintings, being shipped back to the Netherlands. A decade later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the prevailing view in the Netherlands was hostile to those who had lived in 'the East'.

The negative connotations of 'the East – colonial – exploitation' often caused embarrassment for the children of parents who had lived there. According to Reinders Folmer's daughter, there was a considerable 'anti' club in those years. By contrast, it was very fashionable, for example, to support the freedom movement in Cuba.

Despite the difficult time he had experienced there – and his wife and son having been imprisoned in Indonesia – until his death, Mr. Reinders Folmer always had warm feelings about 'the East', even though he could not easily express such feelings in the last decades of the last century.⁶³ Society's 'anti' attitude towards objects that symbolized 'the East' at this time explains why many of these paintings came onto the market via auction houses or were gifted to museums in these years.⁶⁴

In 1956, the family and the three paintings arrived in the Netherlands and settled in Aerdenhout, the domicile of the family at that time. The paintings of Shanghai/Yuezhou and Hong Kong hung in the study, behind the Mr. Reinders Folmer's desk. This room, his daughter recalls, was a special place, "a real treasure chamber" with an extensive library of books about 'the East'. The Reinders Folmer children loved to sit and read there. After the death of her husband in 1997, Mrs. Reinders Folmer moved, together with the three artworks, to an apartment in Overveen, a small city near the Dutch coast, where she hung the interior- and garden scene with Chinese ladies in the guest room. In the interview, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer, the daughter, expressed her feelings and memories about visiting her mother and told that she always went into the guest room to have a look at 'the ladies'. Her mother passed away in 2005, after which she and her family inherited the paintings as lawful heirs.

There is little we can say with certainty about the so-called 'condensation of ideas' relating to this acquisition. Due to the Chinese subject matter and her knowledge about her acquisition, Mrs. A. Reinders Folmer believes that her mother bought the paintings in the 1930s in Shanghai. Her mother always spoke

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

CHINESE EXPORT ART

lyrically about these years and the Chinese time she was so attached to, her daughter remembers. The knowledge that she always bought one or more iconic artworks in the places on earth where she lingered for a while, which made her remember 'the good old days', feeds the idea that the paintings came into the family's possession there.⁶⁵

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

It is striking that there was never any discussion about taking the paintings to auction. They agreed unanimously that these paintings should stay in the Netherlands, given that they were so connected with the history of this Dutch family. Today, when many Chinese art connoisseurs are buying these kinds of paintings for museums in China, there is an almost 100% guarantee that 'auctioning off' would result in a life beyond the borders of the Netherlands. Instead of treating the painting as an ordinary and saleable commodity and putting it up for auction at the art market, it was still considered to be a valuable item, worth preserving for future generations. Moreover, the family must have felt that selling the painting was, as Igor Kopytoff calls it "trading downward."⁶⁶ This idea springs from the notion that things called art or historical objects are superior to the world of commerce.

To communicate the fascinating story adherent to Chinese export painting in general, this set of three, in particular, is a good example for arguing that modified artworks with their cohesive values makes this painting genre distinctive and a class in its own right.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Finally, I conclude that value always exists in the eyes of someone else. Due to a prevailing narrow definition of art, for a long time Chinese export paintings were seen as indigenous works of art and were, as Howard Morphy states in his paper on the movement towards a more inclusive art history, "excluded from the art museum or gallery and often sat unrecognized in the ethnographic museum."⁶⁷ These non-European artworks were more or less denied primary display spaces in the art museums where their distinctive features could be viewed to maximum effect. However, for the future, we need to acknowledge that art museums, together with ethnographic museums, maritime museums, libraries, and archives, will become partners in collecting and collection management. As "the shifting boundaries of art require overlapping institutions that together over time can maintain the material resource that is both an integral part of the human heritage and central to understanding the past."⁶⁸ This movement, currently being embraced by scholars in the field, will lead to a new outlook on these kinds of paintings by developing new overlapping partners in collection management, by designing (virtual) institutions in which these artworks are compatible.

The narratives of this pictorial art produced for export purposes tell something about the interests and evaluation of the works by Westerners in 'the East'. The importance of Chinese export paintings merges in action towards it. In order to avoid them becoming 'frozen' in the Leiden museum depot, it would be wonderful the paintings central in this article with their associated stories could form

part of a future exhibition. Although the set of three do not compare to the superior quality of the previously discussed nineteen reverse glass paintings, this subject matter remains current. Indeed, nowadays there are again (new) heirs who do their business in 'the East', giving these specific images, together with their stories and memories, an important use value. Their current worth is compiled by their cultural biography that started at the entwined Chinese export painting market and by their trajectory with an increasing value accrue ment during their social life in China, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and in the Netherlands, which, in turn, add to their (art-) historical and material value. Furthermore, through these paintings a history of the late-eighteenth, and late-nineteenth and twentieth century emerges. What did they communicate across time and space? They convey many stories, rather than that they bear witness to one single place or moment in time. The narratives just told, should persuade Museum Volkenkunde, as an arena where meaning of objects with their relation to identity are continuously at stake, to have a closer look at these sets. New conservation technologies, new questions and new museum scholarship will open up new meanings.

The sketches of the biographical fragments of the Chinese reverse glass paintings and their

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

Today, thanks to these material hybrid signifiers with Chinese cultural dimensions in Dutch museums – from major national art museums, ethnographic and maritime museums, to a specialized naval museum – China has a substantial (visual) artefactual presence throughout the Netherlands. Most China export art collections form part of the history of the museum itself. It is interesting to discover how the biography of a museum can be used to reflect on this nineteenth-century inheritance and "to develop new ways of knowing."⁶⁹ The Netherlands still has a thriving sea transport industry in China and so should value this artistic commodity that has so much to do with earlier overseas trade. The future, therefore, holds the promise of change for this particular painting phenomenon with its representative function. **RG**

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

NOTES

1

Van der Poel 2016. After she completed her dissertation Made for trade – Made in China. Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections Van der Poel discovered two more (new) collections: Museum Arnhem and Leiden University Library Special Collections.

2

This research uses labels such as ‘the West’, ‘Westerners’ and ‘Western’, referring to a specific geographic and cultural domain. These labels are controversial, as using them as descriptors for European and North American regions neglects the multiple perspectives and nuanced differences within the specific cultural groups and classes in these areas. However, they are terms of convenience – a simplification for the sake of brevity – rather than being useful anthropological or art-sociological terms.

3

Jourdain & Jenyns 1950; Wilson & Liu 2003, 10; Dikötter 2006, 26, 39.

4

Wang et al. 2011, 29. Huang & Sargent 1999, 15. The term ‘foreign painting’ (yáng huà) is found on the back cover of an album by the export master painter Tingqua, held in the Peabody Essex Museum. He also identified his shop on the cover of this album as ‘foreign painting shop’ (yáng huà pù). Pinyin romanisation is used for places and names throughout, with the exception of names and terms better known in a different spelling, e.g. Canton rather than Guangzhou and Macao rather than Aomen. The current South China port city of Guangzhou was called Canton by Westerners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is believed that the romanization ‘Canton’ originated from the Portuguese: Cantão, which was transcribed from Guangdong (source: wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangzhou). Before the Portuguese settlement in the mid-sixteenth century, Macao was known as Haojing (Oyster Mirror) or Jinghai (Mirror Sea). It is thought that the name Macao is derived from the A-Ma Temple, a temple built in 1448 dedicated to Mazu, the goddess of seafarers and fishermen. It is said that when the Portuguese sailors landed at the coast just outside the temple and asked the name of the place, the natives replied Māgê. The Portuguese then named the peninsula ‘Macao’. The present Chinese name Àomén means ‘Inlet Gates’ (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macau).

5

Grasskamp 2015, 363-399.

6

Ibid., 393.

7

Since 1 April 2014, Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, Africa Museum in Berg en Dal, and Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam have merged. Together, the three collections now belong to the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures). The three existing public locations and public brands remain. The three ethnological museums already worked closely together. Furthermore, in September 2016, the National Museum of World Cultures and the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam agreed on a new and far-reaching cooperation.

8

Inv.nos. RV-360-1113 to 1131.

9

Inv.nos. RV-6166-6 to 6166-8.

10

Kaufmann 2014, 207.

11

Pagani 2001, 125. The term ‘chinoiserie’ appeared much later in an 1883 issue of Harper’s Magazine. Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford: Clarendon, 1989. Catherine Pagani is Professor of Asian Art History and Associate Dean of the Graduate School, University of Alabama. She has published several articles on Chinese material culture in the eighteenth century.

12

Pagani 2001, 125.

13

Honour 1961, 175-177.

14

Kaufmann 2014, 208.

15

A trading post was often made up of buildings with several functions, such as warehouses, offices and accommodation.

16

Cai 2004, 5.

17

Muller 1917, 171-172. Hendrik Pieter Nicolaas Muller was a Dutch businessman, diplomat, explorer, publicist, and philanthropist. He wrote ‘Onze vaderen in China’ (Our Fathers in China) in De Gids, about the presence of the Dutch in China in the period 1585-1901. De Gids is the oldest literary and general cultural magazine in the Netherlands and one of the longest existing magazines of this kind in the world. It has existed since 1837 and pays attention to literature, philosophy, sociology, visual arts, politics, science, and history.

18

Broeze Bruijn and Gaastra 1977, 290.

19

Muller 1917,176.

20

https://abnamro.com, NHM_(UK).pdf.

CHINESE EXPORT ART

21

Broeze 1978, 40-65. First expedition: 1825-1826, supercarga M. v.d. Abeele, tea taster W. Loots, ships: Jorina (Varkevisser, Dorrepaal & Co., Rotterdam), captain F. Rietmeyer; Vijf Gezusters (Van Hoboken, Rotterdam), captain M.A. Jacometti; Schoon Verbond (Voûte & Co., Amsterdam), captain D. Kraijer; Rotterdam (H.J. Coster & Co, Amsterdam) captain T.S. Waters. Second expedition: 1826-1827, supercarga G.N. Stulen, tea taster P.E. Thuere , ships: De Zeeuw (Van de Broecke, Luteyn & Schouten, Middelburg), captain C. Riekels; Ida Aleyda (J.H. Bagman & Zoon, Amsterdam), captain C. Swaan; Neerlands Koning (Van Hoboken, Rotterdam), captain K. Schinkel; Cornelis Houtman (Gebr. Hartsen, Amsterdam), captain J. Duijff. Third expedition: 1827-1828, supercarga A. Meijer, tea taster J.I.L. Jacobson, ships: Neerlands Koningin (Varkevisser, Dorrepaal & Co., Rotterdam), captain W. Verloop; Prins van Oranje (Societeit van Nederlandsche Scheepsbouw en Scheepvaart), captain W. Blom; Helena (Nederlandsche Scheepsrederij, Amsterdam), captain D. Grim; Stad Rotterdam (Reederij van Vier Scheepen, Rotterdam), captain C. Poort. Fourth expedition: 1828-1829, supercarga A.H. Büchler, tea taster P.E. Thueré, ships: Neerlands Koning (Van Hoboken, Rotterdam), captain K. Schinkel; Henrietta Klasina (Nederlandsche Scheepsrederij, Amsterdam), captain L.T. Heijde; Susanna (Nederlandse Scheepsrederij, Amsterdam), captain P.C. de Roth; Raymond (J. Roelands & Co., Antwerpen) captain G. van den Broecke. Fifth expedition: 1829-1830, supercarga J. Valcke de Knuyt, tea taster J.I.L. Jacobson, ships: Johanna Cornelia (C. & A. Vlierboom, Rotterdam), captain P.S. Schuil; Olivier van Noort (Gebr. Hartsen, Amsterdam) captain J. Duijff.

22

Blussé 2004, 63-67. Broeze, Bruijn and Gaastra 1977, 294-297. Muller 1917, 327-350.

23

Blussé 2004, 65.

24

Muller 1917, 346.

25

Ibid., 358.

26

De Goey 2010, 26. Amongst other references he refers to ‘The myth of the China market, 1890-1914’. The American Historical Review, vol. 73, 3, 1968.

27

Van der Putten 2004, 81-82.

28

Jones 2005, 21, 23-24.

29

Clunas 1984, 15. Pith paper is often wrongly called ‘rice paper’. This paper has nothing to do with rice, but it is probably called rice paper because people believed that the rice plant was used in the manufacture of pith paper, or because it looks like the edible rice paper that is used in cooking. Currently, a soft type of Chinese paper is sold in the West as ‘rice paper’.

30

Van Dongen 1995 and 2001. Patterson 2016. Cao 2019. The technique of painting on glass has existed in some parts of Europe (mainly South-East) and Russia since the Middle Ages. The earliest surviving examples even date from the Roman Empire.

31

Jourdain & Jenyns 1950, 64. Conner 1998, 420, MS account book G/12/44, India Office Library and Records, ff. 153-156 (British Library, London).

32

Email Paul A. Van Dyke (Sun Yat-sen University Guangzhou), 15 May 2008, with short list of Cantonese artists, a number of which features in the day registers of the Dutch East India Company of 1762-1763. Van Dyke and Cynthia Vialle (Leiden University) have translated these registers into English and they were published in 2008.

33

Amiot & Cibot 1786, 163-166. Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727-1780) was a French Jesuit missionary at the Imperial court in Peking and lived for twenty years in China. Many of his notes and observations on the history and literature of the Chinese were published in the Mémoires concernant l’histoire, etc., at the time the chief source of information in Europe regarding China and its people. De Guignes 1808, quoted in Jourdain & Jennyns 1950, 34.

34

Van Dongen 1995, 71-109, and 2001, 30-31, Van der Poel 2016, 99-101. Cao 2019, 78-83.

35

Van Dongen 1995.

36

McGinn et al. 2010, 281. www.winterthur.org/pdfs/winterthur_primer_glass.pdf.

37

Van Dongen 1995.

38

Van Dongen 2001, 31. Mr M. de Keijzer of the Physics department of the Central Research Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science, Amsterdam, has carried out technical research on the used binding agents, paint samples (indigo and ochre mixed with silicon for the colors blue and green/yellow) and pigments. During his research he also discovered remnants of tiny black ink lines on the paintings with inv.nos.

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

RV-360-1120, 1121 and 1125.

39 The original wooden frames of all paintings of the set of 19 have disappeared, for unknown reasons. In 2001, before these paintings were exhibited in the Sikkens Schildermuseum in Sassenheim and in Museum Volkenkunde, new frames have replaced the original ones. These new frames approximate to the forms of the traditional Chinese framing which probably surrounded the paintings in former times.

40 Van Dongen 1995 and 2001. McGinn 2010, 282.

41 Crossman 1991, 208.

42 Cao 2019, 78.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 78-79.

45 Inv.nos. RV-360-1113 to 1131, Van der Poel 2016, 118-119.

46 R.P. van de Kastele 1824.

47 A.A. van de Kastele 1860, 29.

48 David van der Kellen Jr. (1827-1895), painter and director of the Nederlands Museum in Amsterdam. He succeeded Abraham Anne van de Kastele as director of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1876. Effert 2003, 260.

49 Effert 2003, 263: NA 2.04.01-4925; ANH 836: 134a.

50 NA 2.04.01, 4855, 12 April 1824, and 26 April 1824, no.99, A-series. 12 April 1824: “Voordragt aan ZM om autorisatie te verleen tot het aankopen, voor het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden van eene verzameling van schilderijen uit China ten getale van 19 stuks.” 26 April 1824: “Besluit ZM, d.d. 17 april, n. 115, de minister magtigende tot den aankoop van voorwerpen, ten behoeve van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden ’s Hage, volgens bijgevoegde nota.”

51 Effert 2003, 225.

52 NA 2.04.01, 4925, Index 1824, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Fifth Dept. Education, Arts and Sciences 1815-1848. “Excutie 1 mei 8.F”; NA 2.04.01, 4882, 1 May 1824, F-series; NA 2.04.01, 4917, 1 May 1824.

53 Mr Gan Tjiang Tek (1919-) indicated that all inventory numbers under no. RV-1000, including the many Chinese export paintings, were seen as unimportant during his curatorship in Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden (i.e. 1950s to 1984), due to the fact that these objects were made by anonymous artisans (conversation with Boen Ong, relative

of Gan, on 9 March 2015).

54 I came across the term ‘freezing’ in Van Binsbergen 2005, which gave me an essential insight into the Dutch collections, many of which are currently ‘deep frozen’, or, in other words, ‘overlooked and neglected’, taken out circulation. Some scholars (Gerritsen), however, believe that a work never can be ‘frozen’, because even when a work of art is overlooked and neglected, it always shares a dynamic cultural context (email 13 July 2016). Happily, many Dutch museums are actively digitising more and more of their objects, including their collections of Chinese export paintings. Once they are accessible through the Internet, I would argue that they are no longer ‘frozen’.

55 Van Dongen 2001. In Sensitive Plates Van Dongen describes each of the paintings individually in terms of its iconography and iconology. He also provides a sketch of the history of this art form, which began in eighteenth-century China. Apparently the Jesuits introduced the technique and the accompanying use of materials into China around 1760.

56 Inv.nos. RV-6166-6 to 6166-8.

57 For the information on the three paintings I am indebted to Mrs. A. (Angela) Reinders Folmer (1948), one of the descendants of their first owner. Her narrative made it possible to compile their life story of these private owned paintings until they were donated to the Leiden museum. I have spoken to her on 24 November 2014 and with whom I corresponded (email 16 August 2015). I have asked her the following questions: Where and when were the paintings obtained? Are there any stories known about the buying process and the time the first documented owner stayed in China or in the Dutch East Indies (diary, logbook)? Who inherited the paintings, or who owned them from the moment of their purchase to their location in the museum rack? Do you know what meaning or value was assigned to the paintings by consecutive heirs? Can we draw any conclusions from this information? How was the decision taken to donate the painting to a museum rather than take it to auction? As a donor, do you have any wishes with respect to the artworks? How would you describe their value to future generations? Although Mrs. A. Reinders Folmers has checked the narrative of these paintings with some of her relatives, I would, however, add a caveat,

CHINESE EXPORT ART

because of the fact that this story is just one source and that memory can play ‘tricks’ when remembering the past.

58 Email Guan Shu, 10 June 2016. Translation in English: Foreign (or ocean), Shanghai, principal (or main). Guan Shu, teacher of Chinese language at Leiden University Academic Language Centre, has been very helpful with the translation of Chinese texts.

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

60 Email Li Runhui, 22 October 2018. Paintings of Yuezhou port are quite rare. As there are no hills in the environments of the Bund in Shanghai, it very well could be this harbor city presented here. Yuezhou port was opened in 1899 and administrated by the British. The custom building of Shangyang customs, built in 1901, is still preserved today and located in/on a small hill.

61 Email Ching May Bo, 1 December 2016.

62 Inv.no. RV 6166-8. On the buildings, painted in a repeating motif, 11 house flags flutter on the back row of foreign shipping companies. From left to right we can distinguish: 1. Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., Dundee & Newcastle

Steam Schipping Co. Ltd., or Indo China China Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. London; 2. & 3. Both, United Kingdom with the Union Jack in the top corner: the British red ensign; 4. United States; 5. English house flag; 6. France; 7. Unknown; 8. R & C Allen, Glasgow of International Line Steamship Co. Ltd. (Christoper Marwood Whitby); 9. Denmark; 10. England; 11. Richard Irvin & Sons Ltd., Aberdeen, Eastern Shipping Co. Penang of Dolphin Steam Fishing Co. Ltd., Grimsby. In the foreground of the painting we can see three black British screw propellor steamships, recognisable from the flags. From left to right, a ship with a red flag with the Union Jack in the top corner, the red ensign. In the middle is a ship with a flag divided diagonally into four quarters: white on the top, blue on the left side, red on the right side, yellow on the bottom (which has fallen off the painting). This is the house flag of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Nav. Co., London, 1834.

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

64 See Van der Poel 2016, Appendix 1, for information about dates when Chinese export paintings entered the Dutch museum walls, either by donation or purchased through auction houses or via private Asian art dealers.

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

66 Kopytoff 1986, 82.

67 Morphy 2009, 62.

68 Ibid.

69 Hill 2012, 1.

ARTE CHINESA DE EXPORTAÇÃO

CHINESE EXPORT ART

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amiot, Jean-Joseph Marie & Pierre-Martial Cibot et al., ‘Diverses remarques de feu M. Cibot, Missionnaire à Péking, sur les Arts Pratiques en Chine. II. De l’art de peindre sur les glaces’. Mémoires concernant l’histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages (etc.) des Chinois: par les missionnaires de Pékin (16 vols.). Paris, 1786, vol. 11, 363-366.

Blussé, Leonard, ‘Dutch consular representation on the Southeast coast of China during the nineteenth century’. Cai Hongsheng & Leonard Blussé (eds.), *Sailing to the Pearl River. Dutch enterprise in South China 1600-2000*. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 2004.

Broeze, F.J.A., ‘De Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij en haar vijf expedities naar Cantonm(1825-1830)’. Mededelingen van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Zeegeschiedenis 36. The Hague, 1978, 40-65.

Broeze, F.J.A., J.R. Bruijn & F.S. Gaastra, *Maritieme geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 3. Achttiende eeuw en eerste helft negentiende eeuw, van ca. 1680-1870. Bussum: De Boer Maritiem, 1977.

Cai Hongsheng, ‘Dutch enterprise in the Pearl River delta during the 17th and 18th century’. Cai Hongsheng & Leonard Blussé (eds.), *Sailing to the Pearl River. Dutch enterprise in South China 1600-2000*. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 2004.

Cao, Maggie M., ‘Copying in reverse: China trade paintings on glass’. Ten Doesschate Chu & Jennifer Milam (eds.), *Beyond Chinoiserie. Artistic exchange between China and the West during the Late Qing Dynasty (1796-1911)*. Leiden and Boston: Koninklijke Brill, 2019.

Clunas, Craig, *Chinese export watercolours*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984.

Conner, Patrick, ‘The enigma of Spoilum and the origins of China trade portraiture’. The Magazine Antiques, vol. 153, 1998, 418-425.

Crossman, Carl L., *The decorative arts of the China trade: paintings, furnishings and exotic curiosities*. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 1991.

De Goey, Ferry, ‘The business of consuls; consuls and businessmen’ (paper). 14th Annual conference of the EBHA 2010: Business beyond the firm. Glasgow: The Centre for Business History, University of Glasgow, 2010.

Dikötter, Frank, *Exotic Commodities. Modern objects and everyday life in China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Effert, Rudolf A.H.D., *Volkenkundig verzamelen. Het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden en het Rijks Ethnographisch Museum 1816-1883* (dissertation). Leiden, 2003.

Grasskamp, Anna, ‘EurAsian layers: Netherlandish surfaces and early modern Chinese artefacts’. The Rijksmuseum Bulletin, vol. 63, 2015, 363-399.

Hill, Kate, *Museums and biographies. Stories, objects, identities*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012.

Honour, Hugh, *Chinoiserie. The vision of Cathay*. London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1961.

Huang Shijian & William Sargent (eds.), *Customs and conditions of Chinese city streets in 19th century – 360 professions in China*. The collection of Peabody Essex Museum. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1999.

Jones, Geoffrey, *Multinationals and global capitalism from the nineteenth to the twenty first century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Jourdain, Margaret & Roger S. Jenyns, *Chinese export art in the eighteenth century*. London: Country Life Limited, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950.

Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta, ‘Scratching the surface. The impact of the Dutch on artistic and material culture in Taiwan and China’. Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta & Michael North (eds.), *Mediating Netherlandish art and material culture in Asia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014, 205-238.

McGinn, Mary, Anne Verplanck, Noel Fahden Briceno, et al., ‘Reverse paintings on glass’. Antiques and Fine Art Magazine. Winterthur primer, 2010, 280-282.

Morphy, Howard, ‘Not just images but art. Pragmatic issues in the movement towards a more inclusive art history’. Anderson, Jaynie, *Crossing cultures: conflict, migration and convergence. The proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2009.

Kopytoff, Igor, ‘The cultural biography of things. Commoditization as process’. Appadurai, Arjun, *The social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Muller, Hendrik, ‘Onze vaderen in China’. De Gids, vol. 81. Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen & Son, 1917.

Pagani, Catharine, *Eastern magnificence & European ingenuity: clocks of Late Imperial China*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.

Patterson, Jessica Lee, ‘Chinese glass paintings in Bangkok monasteries’. Archives of Asian Art, vol. 66, no. 2. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016, 153-185.

Van Binsbergen, Wim, ‘Introduction’. Van Binsbergen, Wim & Peter Geschiere (eds.), *Commodification: things, agency, and identities* (The social life of things revisited). Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005, 9-51.

Van de Kastele, A.A., *Korte handleiding ter bezigtiging der verzameling van zeldzaamheden in het Koninklijk Kabinet op het Mauritshuis in ’s Gravenhage*, The Hague: Bakhuijzen, 1855.

Van de Kastele, R.P., *Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden op Mauritshuis, in ’s Gravenhage*, The Hague, 1824.

Van der Poel, Rosalien, *Made for trade – Made in China. Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections: art and commodity* (dissertation), Leiden: Leiden University 2016.

Van der Putten, Frans-Paul, ‘The evolution of Dutch enterprise in South China, early twentieth century’. Cai Hongsheng & Leonard Blussé (eds.), *Sailing to the Pearl River. Dutch enterprise in South China 1600-2000*. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 2004, 81-89.

Van Dongen, Paul, ‘Sensitive plates’. Archiv für Völkerkunde, vol. 49, 1995, 71-109.

-----, *Gevoelige platen*. Negentien achterglasschilderingen. Leiden: Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, 2001.

Wang Chicheng, Andrew Lo, Song Jiayu & Frances Wood, *Chinese export paintings of the Qing period in the British Library*, vol. 1-8. Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2011.

Wilson, Ming & Liu Zhiwei (eds.), *Souvenir from Canton: Chinese export paintings from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (exhibition catalogue). Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2003.

The depiction of watercraft by Chinese artists in export paintings of the Canton Trade between the 1770s and the 1840s

SUSAN E. SCHOPP*

ABSTRACT: Without watercraft, the Canton Trade could not have taken place. It is therefore not surprising that so many of the scenes depicted in paintings of that trade are set on the water, and that in these scenes, boats, junks, and East India ships figure so frequently and so abundantly. The works are executed in a variety of media, including oil, gouache, and watercolor; supports range from canvas, pith paper, and silk to ivory, copper, and brass, depending on the medium. Paintings feature a wide range of settings, of which four were particularly popular with the artists’ clientele: the Praia Grande of Macau, the Bocca Tigris, the anchorage at Whampoa, and the riverfront outside the hongts at Canton. A basic composition, with some variation over the decades, may be noted for each of the four. However, scenes on the water were not the only works in which watercraft played an essential role; ship portraits and sets on pith paper showing types of Chinese craft were also in demand.

KEYWORDS: Canton Trade; Cantonese artists; Chinese export art; East India ships; Junks; Sampanns.

Tea, textiles, and porcelain were not the only items that European and American merchants took home from Canton. Also sailing home with them were paintings, lacquerware, fans, and carved items, as well as items in pewter and silver, tea caddies, and furniture.¹ “There’s not a single Englishman who doesn’t

take home a picture of Canton when he returns to Europe,” remarked French visitor Charles Hubert La Vollée when he visited the Cantonese artist Lamqua’s studio in the summer of 1844 with an English friend.² But the English were not the only ones. The paintings, which are today referred to as “export paintings” and sometimes as “historical pictures,” belong to the much larger family of Chinese export art. Created for the European and North American markets, they functioned not only as visual documentation, but also as souvenirs, status symbols, and tangible proof for western merchants and other visitors to Canton that “I was here.” Watercraft featured heavily in these paintings, and this article examines their depiction.³

And why watercraft? Without watercraft, there would have been no Canton Trade. From tiny barber’s boats to fast-moving chop boats and East India ships, watercraft were essential. Perhaps not surprisingly,

* Independent scholar whose current research interests include French trade with China during the era of the Canton Trade; the boats and vessels of that trade; and the portrayal of that trade in written accounts and in art. In 1997 she identified the wreck of the English East India Company ship Earl Temple. She holds two graduate degrees from the École du Louvre in Paris and a PhD in history from the University of Macau, and is a crew member of Friendship of Salem, the full-size, fully operational reconstruction of the 1797 American East Indiaman Friendship.

Acadêmica independente, tem por interesses actuais de pesquisa o comércio Francês com a China na era do comércio de Cantão, os barcos e embarcações desse comércio e os relatos desse ofício nos escritos e na arte. Em 1997, identificou o naufrágio do navio Earl Temple, da Companhia Inglesa das Índias Orientais. Possui dois graus de pós-graduação, pela École du Louvre em Paris e um Ph.D. em história pela Universidade de Macau. É membro da tripulação do Friendship of Salem, a réplica totalmente operacional do navio mercante de 1797, American East Indiaman Friendship.