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. 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 accrual 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

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. 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 (yàng wài huà or wài xiāo huà) from literati (traditional) Chinese (national) painting (wén rén huà or guò huà). It also references the fact that these works were made for export to the West. 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 art in the eighteenth century. 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’.

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. With the use of the term ‘Eurasian’ it is possible, she argues, to escape ‘binary divisions into ‘European’ and ‘Asian’ elements, clear-cut ‘Netherlands’ or ‘Chinese’ components’. This term is highly 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-
The Emperor ploughing, inv.no. RV-360-113.

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

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

Kite-flying beside the river, inv.no. RV-360-1128.

Set of 19 reverse glass paintings, anonymous, c. 1785-1790, paintings on glass, 81 x 52.5 cm, Museum Volkenkunde/National Museum of World Cultures, inv.nos. RV-360-1113 to 1131.
'SENSITIVE PLATES' AND 'SENTIMENTAL KEEPSAKES': THE SOCIAL LIFE OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS: FROM CANTON TO LEIDEN

CHINESE EXPORT ART

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

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

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

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

The roadstead of Whampoa, inv.no. RV-360-1115.cr
ROSALIEN VAN DER POEL
'SENSITIVE PLATES' AND 'SENTIMENTAL KEEPSAKES': THE SOCIAL LIFE OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS: FROM CANTON TO LEIDEN

CHINESE EXPORT ART

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

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

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

The hunt, inv.no. RV-360-1120.
ROSALIEN VAN DER POEL

'SENSITIVE PLATES' AND 'SENTIMENTAL KEEPSAKES': THE SOCIAL LIFE OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS: FROM CANTON TO LEIDEN

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.
‘SENSITIVE PLATES’ AND ‘SENTIMENTAL KEEPSAKES’: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS: FROM CANTON TO LEIDEN

CHINESE EXPORT ART

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

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

All Souls (or All Hallows), inv.no. RV-360-1124.
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. 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. 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. 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).” 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. 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.” This movement had a deep influence on interior design, architecture and decorative art. The
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.23 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 junk 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, “de-stroyed 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 Blusé, 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 wool like laken and polemien were produced, and in tropical products from Java, like edible bird’s nests, which funded their Chinese trades. 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, Hueter and Freys 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 31⁄4 million guilders worth of merchandise into China and exporting about 134 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 businesses”, “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-
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 Multinational 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.  

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, collections we can distinguish unique singular paintings, and can divide the paintings into different categories and to acquire emblematic objects (such as paintings) to remind them of their stay over there.

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. 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 Boote of the English East India Company (EIC). 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.’ 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. In comparison to ‘normal’ paintings, reverse glass paintings are created in reverse order (mirror image). 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.’ Thus, the painter begins with the finish-
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. The 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. 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 Kasteele’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 Kasteele 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.”

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. 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. Further research, in particular in the National Archives of the Netherlands, supplements 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 Kasteel, was able to buy the set.

From The Hague to Leiden

Under the administration of Abraham Anne van de Kasteele (1840-1870) 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...
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. 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 ethnography 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 sucresse in 1883.\(^2\)

**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 of art at all.\(^3\) This attitude explains their currently largely forgotten and ‘frozen’ state.\(^4\) 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.\(^5\) 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.\(^6\) 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 accruement and/or dwindles of this set of artworks in its lengthy afterlife.\(^7\)

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, 江山千秀 (jiāng shān qiān xiù). 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 qīng sì xiù), which literally means ‘the landscape is eternally beautiful’.\(^8\)

On the second painting it is not exactly sure which location is presented.\(^9\) 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 洋關上海正堂 (yáng guān shàng hái zhèng táng), meaning the office of the ‘Chinese Maritime Customs’ or ‘the Shanghai County Magistrate’, or it reads 上海洋關正堂 (shàng hǎi yáng guān zhèng táng), meaning ‘Customs Office of Shangyang’.\(^10\) 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.\(^11\)

The third painting shows a view of Hong Kong harbor with white buildings and hills in the background.\(^12\)
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. 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.

In 1956, the family and the three paintings arrived in the Netherlands and settled in Aardenhout, the residence of the family at that time. The paintings of Shanghai/Yuezhou and Hong Kong hung in the study, 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 with 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 ladie’s’. 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...
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.\(^5\)

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 heritage and central to understanding the past.”

**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.” 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 part of a more inclusive art history, “excluded from the art museum or gallery and often sat unrecognized in the ethnographic museum.” 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 part of a more inclusive art history, “excluded from the art museum or gallery and often sat unrecognized in the ethnographic museum.” 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 part of a more inclusive art history, “excluded from the art museum or gallery and often sat unrecognized in the ethnographic museum.”

The narratives of this pictorial art produced 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 entrance Chinese export painting market and by their trajectory with an increasing value accruement 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.”\(^6\) 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.\(^7\)
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 Europeans and North American regions neglect 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 archaeological terms.


4 Wang et al. 2011, 29. Huang & Sargent 1999, 15. The term ‘Canton’ originated from the Portuguese: Cantão, which was transcribed from Guangdong (source: wikipedia.org/wiki/Canton). ‘Canton’ is found on the back cover of an album by the export master painter Tienging, held in the Peabody Essex Museum. He also identified his shop on the reverse of the cover of this album as ‘Svensk painting shop’ (written in blue).

5 Peeters' 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 Macau.

6 The current South China port city of Guangzhou was called Canton by Westerners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is believed that the romanisation ‘Canton’ originated from the Portuguese: Canton, which was transcribed from Guangdong (source: wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangdong). Before the Portuguese settlement in the mid-sixteenth century, Macao was known as Haojing (Oyster Mirror) and general cultural magazine in the Netherlands and one of the earliest surviving examples even date from the Roman Empire.

13 Bergman & Jennyns 1950, 34.

17 Muller 1917, 171-172. Hendrik Pieter Nicolas Muller was a Dutch businessman, diplomat, explorer, publicist, and philanthropist. He wrote ‘Onze vaderen in China’ (Our Fathers in China) in 1780) was a French Jesuit missionary at the Imperial court in Beijing 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 1806, quoted in Joustra & Jorren 1950, 34.

18 The tallest post was often made up of several functions, such as warehouse, offices and accommodation.


22 Blusse 1825, 37-38.

23 Blusse 1825, 37-38.


25 Muller 1917, 177-178.


33 Amiot & Cibot 1786, 163-166. Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727-1780) was a French Jesuit missionary at the Imperial court in Beijing 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 1806, quoted in Joustra & Jorren 1950, 34.

37 Blusse 1826, 29-30, 1825.


91 \[297. Muller 1917, 327-350. \]

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The original wooden frames of all paintings of the set of 19 anonymous artisans (conversation with Boen Ong, relative numbers under no. RV-1000, including the many Chinese export companies. From left to right we can distinguish: 1. Aberdeen, Newcastle & Hull Steam Co., from Aberdeen. On the bottom (which has fallen off the painting). This is 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 red flag with the tricolore. This ‘WW’ is an inverted ‘MM’, indicating the French tricolore. Then, pictured in the foreground are thes black screw-propeller 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 triangles in the corners and two large black cartouche letters ‘WW’. This ‘WW’ is an inverted ‘MM’, indicating the house flag of the Cie. des Monumetiques Mountains 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 main cornets, in the water in front of the quay, a small dipples in full sail is visible. Source flags: Lloyd’s book of house flags and funnels: http://www.myshipspaint.-org/library/initiative/ImPage.cfm. Email Li Runhui, 22 October 2018. Paintings of Yeuhau port are quite rare. As there are no flags in the environments of the Band in Shanghai, it will very well could be this harbor city presented here. Yeuhau port was opened in 1899 and administered by the British. The custom building of Shang- yang customs, built in 1901, is still preserved today and located in the house corner. Email Ching May Bo, 1 December 2016. 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. Reinders Folmer 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. Bregman of the University of Amsterdam. All the sector notes and diaries of Mr and Mrs Reinders Folmer from this time were transferred to his Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD). See Van der Paul 2016, Appendix 1, for information about what Chinese export paintings entered the Dutch museum walls, either by donation or purchased through auction houses or via private Asian art dealers. Although some employees of companies were paid in names for lost 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. Kopytoff 1986, 82. Murphy 2009, 62. Ibid. Hill 2012, 1.
The depiction of watercraft by Chinese artists in export paintings of the Canton Trade between the 1770s and the 1840s

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, junk, and East Asia ships figure so frequently and so abundantly. The works are executed in a variety of media, including oil, gouache, and watercolor, support range from canvas, pith paper, and silk to paper, copper, and brass, depending on the medium. Paintings feature a wide range of settings, of which four particularly popular with the artists’ clientele: the Praia Grande of Macau, the Bocca Tigris, the anchorage at Whampoa, and the riverfront outside the hongs 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; Junk; Sampans.

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 Viole 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.

¹ Independent scholar whose current research interests include French trade with China during the British Whampoa period. The work of 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 de Lettres 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 recreation of the 1770 American East India Friendship.

² The depiction of watercraft by Chinese artists in export paintings of the Canton Trade between the 1770s and the 1840s

Susan E. Schoop

BIBLIOGRAPHY