Framing China: performativity and narrative in museum displays of Chinese porcelain

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Performativity and Narrative in Museum Displays of Chinese Porcelain

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INTRODUCTION

The Agency of Porcelain Display

Performativity and Museum Display

This study explores the performativity in museum displays of Chinese porcelain. The lens of performativity offers a framework for examining the ways the meanings and values of porcelain are produced and altered through the techniques of display. It enables us to investigate the power of porcelain display to *build* messages, rather than just describe a state of affairs. Museum display, the main focus here, refers to a composite of all factors that mark curatorial intervention and mediate encounters between viewers and displayed objects within the contexts of both temporary and semi-permanent exhibitions. These factors include, for example, the spatial layout of galleries in a specific architectural environment, the organization of objects, the design of installations, the explanatory labels and text-panels, and the choice of wall colors and lighting. Viewing museum display through the lens of performativity poses the question of how a display *acts*; this question is related to what the performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls "the agency of display:" the notion that display "not only shows and speaks, it also *does*."[1]

The word performative, as both a noun and an adjective, was coined in a 1955 lecture by the philosopher John Langshaw Austin as a part of his influential speech-act theory, which is outlined fully in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Rooted in the verb "to perform," the word performative enables Austin to indicate that "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something."[2] As a complement of his conceptualization of saying-as-doing, Austin further distinguishes illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of speech. The former describes what is accomplished *in* saying something (i.e. the conventional force of an utterance), while the latter refers to the intentional or unintentional effects produced *by* the act of speaking.[3] Of course, these two acts are not necessarily

[1] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 1-2, 6 (emphasis in original).

[2] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 6-7. Austin begins the book by distinguishing "constative utterances" from "performative utterances:" in principle, constative utterances refer to declarative and vertifiable sentences that state or assert facts, while performative utterances are ones in which the utterance has the power to carry out certain actions beyond simply generating true or false picture of reality. However, later in the book, Austin admits that there is no clear-cut distinction between constative and performative utterances. See Ibid., 54, 67.

[3] Austin argues that it is important to distinguish "intended" effects from "unintended" ones: "when the speaker intends to produce an effect it may nevertheless not occur, and […] when he does not intend to produce it or intends not to produce it it may nevertheless occur." Ibid., 105.

incompatible, as speech types are not always so easily disaggregated. Nevertheless, Austin's particular emphasis on the performative qualities of language does draw attention from what an utterance says to what it does: namely, the utterance's performativity and the effect of this performativity.[4] With this in mind, the idea of performativity in relation to museum display suggests a shift in attention from what a display depicts to the potential effects the display produces, whether these effects are intended in or produced by the display. A performative perspective thus enables us, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, "to get at agency—that is, what performance and display do."[5] Furthermore, given that the performativity in museum display is co-constructed by the acts of curating and viewing, it is essential to identify how certain effects and messages that the display performs are connected with specific viewing orders and experiences, and to assess whether a display has the desired effect germane to its curatorial intent, and if not, why not.[6]

Attempts to explore the agency of museum display are not unprecedented. As mentioned, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's call for attention to the agency of display underpins this dissertation. Before delving into Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea, the term agency needs to be further clarified here. In his book *Art and Agency* (1998), Alfred Gell puts forward an anthropologist approach to consider the relationship between human and art that focuses on "the social context of art production, circulation, and reception."[7] This approach eschews both the aesthetic and semiotic perspective of art. For Gell, the emphasis on aesthetic appreciation and evaluation inevitably suggests a Western ideology of equating "the reactions of the ethnographic Other, as far as possible, to our own."[8] He also avoids considering art objects as "texts" serving symbolic communication as this semiotic perspective ignores "the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process."[9] Different from these two perspectives, Gell's approach frames art objects as "social agents" that exercise agency to affect people in "specific social settings."[10] To quote the art historian Caroline van Eck, Gell's idea of agency permits the analysis of how art works can "act on their viewers that makes [the viewers] act as if they are engaging not with dead matter, but with living persons,"

[4] The idea of performativity was famously taken up by the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in her conception of gender performance theory, in which gender is performative given that "We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman." See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531; see also Butler's talk "Your Behavior Creates Your Gender." Online at: https://bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender [Accessed March 31, 2021].

[5] Adrian Franklin, "Performing Live: An Interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett," *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 3 (2001): 218.

[6] It has long been recognized that museum visitors are not a homogeneous group but are diverse, active agents who make their own decisions and enter exhibitions with their own biases. See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 67.

[7] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3. The concept of agency is also taken up in the 1980s by the sociologists Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law to develop the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The theory aims to dissolve the dualism of nature and culture, subjectivity and objectivity, with emphasize on the collaborative processes of both human and non-human agency in constructing scientific knowledge. See, for example, Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[8] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 6.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 5, 7.

without taking art objects as "living beings in the biological sense."[11] Gell's interests, however, differ from those of this dissertation in that his concern is primarily with the "social relationships" in which art objects can act upon their viewers, and not with understanding how an object's meanings and values are changed when staged in a museum setting for audiences.[12] This dissertation departs from Gell's conception of 'the agency of objects' and draws on Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea of 'the agency of display'. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that objects in museums are by and large defined by specific techniques of display built around them, which is more pertinent to my purpose here; that is, to explore what display does to affect the meanings and values of Chinese porcelain, and what display and porcelain do together to create messages that porcelain alone could not do.

In considering the question of "what does it mean to show," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that there is hardly an unmediated encounter between viewers and viewed objects in the sense that objects shown are "vested" with certain interests through specific techniques of display to serve the purpose of exhibition-making.[13] "Exhibitions are fundamentally theatrical," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes, "for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create."[14] An example she provides here is ethnographic objects: in her view, ethnographic objects are not innately ethnographic, but "*became* ethnographic" by virtue of being detached from their specific social and cultural contexts and being recontextualized into the classification of ethnography and arrangement in museum settings.[15] The agency of (ethnographic) display, therefore, is manifested in its power of identifying the objects shown as ethnographic within the framework of ethnography. In this sense, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's focus here, to paraphrase Austin, lies more on the "intended" than the "unintended" effects produced by displays.[16] In this dissertation, however, I will examine how certain meanings and values are attributed to Chinese porcelain both intentionally and unintentionally (even undesirably in some cases) by their display in museums.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis of the agency of display stems from the duality of what she calls informing museology and performing museology. The former refers to "the exhibit as a neutral vehicle for the transmission of information," while the latter "reveals the very nature of the museum as an active agent in constituting knowledge and experience."[17] The move from an informing to a performing museology thereby marks a shift of attention from how the particularity of objects conveys information to the agency of display to build messages. In this way, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea of performing museology is aligned with the art historian Peter Vergo's call for a "new museology" in 1989.[18]

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[11] Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Boston: De Gruyter; Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2015), 20-21.

[12] Gell refers to social relationships as "relationships between participants in social systems of various kinds." For him, social relationships are the "subject-matter" of anthropology as a "social science discipline." Gell, *Art and Agency*, 3-4.

[13] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 2.

[14] Ibid., 3.

[15] Ibid., 3, 17-23 (emphasis in original).

[16] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 105.

[17] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Exhibitionary Complexes," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, eds. Ivan Karp et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 41; and Bruno S. Frey and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Current Debate: The Dematerialization of Culture and the De-accessioning of Museum Collections," *International Museum* 54, no. 4 (2002): 59.

[18] Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989). As early as the 1960s, the primary criticism around museum exhibitions turned from the objects on display towards the display itself. See Paul O'Neill, "The

Vergo's new museology advocates a close examination of how museum display acts to shed light on "an underlying though usually unspoken sense of purpose" in exhibition-making.[19] Echoing this emphasis on the purposes of museums, an existing body of research on museum display has contributed to denaturalizing the institution of the museum by identifying how techniques of display *work* to promote particular modes of seeing and place selected meanings upon the objects in order to fulfill the various guiding ideologies behind the systems of values to which museums adhere.[20] In general, art historians and museum professionals involved in this type of study bring with them a critical and meticulous eye that is capable of seeing the performative force, or constructive nature, of display. However, they rarely spell out their specific research approaches. Hence the question remains: what analytical approaches are especially promising for disclosing the performativity of museum display? What also remains obscure is how movement in gallery spaces creates a specific viewing order, and how this impacts the underlying performativity of displays. These questions are relevant because museum display is engaged in manifold relationships between the act of viewing and the viewed object.

In regard to the matter of method and the importance of the relationship between the performative effect of display and the specific viewing order in museum spaces, this dissertation is inspired by the work of the narratologist and cultural theorist Mieke Bal. In her book *Double Exposures* (1996), Bal analogically considers the display in museums as "a particular kind of speech act."[21] Viewed in this way, displayed objects become "illustrations" for substantiating certain statements: "The thing on display comes to stand for something else, the statement about it. It comes to *mean*."[22] The analogy between museum displays and speech acts makes visible the otherwise elusive "signifying effects" of arrangements of objects and explanatory labels in relation to gallery spaces.[23]

Particularly, Bal emphasizes the power of the viewer's walking tour to generate specific signifying effects.[24] For example, a problematic consequence of the juxtaposition of galleries of Asian/African peoples and Asian/African mammals on the second floor of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, according to Bal, is that it presupposes a walking tour in which animals and Asian/African peoples are somehow equated.[25] This artificial equivalent implied in the spatial narrative constructs a "visual discourse of animals and foreign peoples as the two *others* of dominant [Western] culture."[26] This

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Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse," in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, eds. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2007), 13.

[19] Vergo, *The New Museology*, 46.

[20] A few examples are sufficient to illustrate the body of scholarship which concerns the museum's political and ideological dimension of collecting, classifying, and display. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, (1980): 448-469; Robert Lumley, *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); and Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1995).

[21] Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 88.

[22] Ibid., 4, 6 (emphasis in original).

[23] Mieke Bal, "Exposing the Public," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 526.

[24] Bal, *Double Exposures*, 96.

[25] Ibid., 19-22. See also Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 556-594.

[26] Bal, *Double Exposures*, 19 (emphasis added).

case shows the potential political dimension in the design of display. Bal's focus on the signifying effects of display helps to expose the unintended or even undesirable effects produced by the combination of the exhibition narrative constructed by the curator and the spatial narrative created by the visitor's walking path in the museum space.

Furthermore, in terms of a research method for exploring the agency of display, Bal proposes narrative as an analytical tool through which to view elements of display not as loosely scattered in a museum space but integrated into a coherent whole, allowing for a close reading of their performative dimension.[27] As I will demonstrate later in this introduction, narrative is indeed a useful approach to look into the potential performative effects intended in and produced by museum displays.

An important premise when trying to access and assess the performative effects resulting from display is to recognize that an analyzed exhibition practice is not a direct reflection of curatorial intention. As Bal reminds us, "the target of that assessment is a cultural practice and the cultural politics and divisions that enable that practice, not an individual and his or her personal intentions."[28] What should be further added here is that museum presentations, by their very essence, are an art of compromise and negotiation. In her work, Bal is not specifically concerned with questions pertaining to the relationship between the analyzed exhibition practices and the limitations of the museum's holdings, facilities, and institutional context. Another thing worth considering here is how the specific visions of museum curators and directors have potential impacts on the performativity in displays. These factors will be given attention in this study to portray a more dynamic understanding of the ways in which the techniques and effects of display are deeply entangled with various tensions and relationships between people and objects.

So, how exactly does this study expand on the exploration of the agency of display in museums given that this issue has attracted long-standing attention? In order to explicate the complex performativity of display, I propose case studies based on a specific category of object: Chinese porcelain, more specifically, Chinese porcelain of the Ming and Qing dynasties in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a historical period which is marked by intensified cultural interaction via overseas trade. This object-based approach enables an intensive analysis of what different techniques of display do to the same kind of object, and a more extensive set of connections between the resulting effects and the different institutional and socio-political contexts of the museum.

Aims: The *China* Display and Self-Other Configurations

The choice of china (porcelain) is intentional. Focusing on multicultural practices of collecting, there are studies exploring how 'china'—as an object type that has the same pronunciation and spelling as 'China' (as a geo-cultural entity)—can serve the expression of multiple cultural identities other than 'Chinese'.[29]

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[27] Ibid., 7.

[28] Ibid., 8.

[29] See Vimalin Rujivacharakul, "China and china: An Introduction to Materiality and a History of Collecting," in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, eds. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 15-28; and Stacey Pierson, *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 31-56. The play between 'china' and 'China' is also used by the art historian Ellen Huang to explore how "china (porcelain) became a quintessential

The present study sets out to focus on the multivalence of china as expressed through museum displays. It attempts to contribute an analysis of the discursiveness of museum display by de-naturalizing what may seem like the most apolitical and purely informative china displays, with emphasis on certain Self-Other relations they are capable of performing.[30]

An existing body of literature brings the display of Chinese things into view as a process of constituting European national and imperial identities in terms of possession and consumption.[31] In particular, focusing on institutions of exhibition such as museums and fairs in Britain between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this body of literature reveals how the display of Chinese objects in these institutions participated in the discourse of cultural difference in which a desired British self-image as owners and powerful rulers was shaped in contrast to the possessed, patronized objects from the Chinese Other that was defeated in the two Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860).[32] This dissertation attempts to expand the existing discussion on the discursive framing of Chinese things in museums by exploring more dynamic Self-Other configurations, including but not limited to the ways the idea of otherness is constructed by museum display.[33] The anthropologist James Clifford astutely notes that "self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence."[34] Indeed, the Self and the Other have no finite identity, but are defined by a given context; they are a pair of *shifters*, to borrow a linguist term, between which the boundary is not fixed but fluid.[35] These boundaries between Self and Other are a matter of ideology not of essence; depending on the performative effects of the porcelain display, the boundaries can be erected, dismantled, blurred, consolidated, or redrawn. With this in mind, this

symbolic marker of the nation of China during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." Ellen Huang, "China's china: Jingdezhen Porcelain and the Production of Art in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD dissertation., University of California, San Diego, 2008), 5.

[30] In the present study, the term discourse (and discursive/discursiveness) is understood literally, as a body of surplus meanings with ideological undertones beyond informational content. It refers to what the literary theorist Robert Scholes defines as "those aspects of a text which are appraisive, evaluative, persuasive, or rhetorical, as opposed to those which simply name, locate, and recount." Robert Scholes, *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 144. For this definition of discourse used in the analysis of museum display, see Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," 562.

[31] See for example Catherine Pagani, "Chinese Material Culture and British Perceptions of China in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1988), 28-40; Craig Clunas, "China in Britain: The Imperial Collections," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1998), 41-51; Amy Jane Barnes, "Exhibiting China in London," in *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, eds. Simon J. Knell et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 386-399.

[32] For a general discussion of how collecting in Europe contributes to the constitution of a possessive Self, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 218-220.

[33] Ethnographic display has been the subject of much discussion in connection to museums' construction of otherness. See Henrietta Hamilton, "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Cultures," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 151-222; and Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street, eds., *Cultural Encounters: Representing 'Otherness'* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2000).

[34] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 14.

[35] In linguistics, common examples of shifters are those of time (e.g. now, today) and space (e.g. here, there). See Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb," in *Roman Jakobson: Russian and Slavic Grammar Studies 1931-1981*, eds. Linda R. Waugh and Morris Halle (Berlin [etc.]: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 41-58.

dissertation aims to investigate how museum presentations of china enact various Self-Other configurations.

Chinese Ming-Qing porcelain is especially pertinent to the analysis of the varied mappings of Self-Other boundaries enacted by the techniques of display because of its movement across geo-cultural boundaries. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, a wave of enthusiasm for Ming-Qing porcelain swept through Asian and European markets via diplomatic and commercial channels.[36] It was consumed and appropriated by different cultural groups as a category of enduring luxury product, collectable art, and tableware for daily use; it became an inspiration for artistic creation, a cornerstone of interior decoration, a gendered object symbolizing the physical, moral, and social fragility of women, and a mark of owners' taste, wealth, worldly status, and far-reaching spheres of influence. Blue and white porcelain of the Ming and Qing dynasties, in particular, has a timeless and placeless charm, as it used to be a creative inspiration for potters and artists throughout the world, and now remains an iconic muse for haute couture fashion designers to fabricate a collective imagination of China. The widespread transfer and influence of Ming-Qing porcelain make it a material interface for cultural contact, reflecting wide-ranging transformations of art, design, technique, overseas trade, and domestic life. Ming-Qing porcelain, therefore, plays a significant role not only in Chinese material culture, but also in the cultures involved in its distribution, exchange, and consumption.[37] The multivalence of Ming-Qing porcelain in museum settings is manifested in that it is readily collected and displayed in a way that crosses the boundaries of curatorial departments (i.e. Chinese porcelain might be collected and displayed under different categories and in the galleries of departments besides Chinese/Asian art), and crosses the boundaries between the Self and the Other as well (i.e. the china display might serve the image-building or identity-construction of different cultural groups who are not porcelain producers but have become involved in its widespread circulation and consumption).

Considering the china display (at least in the case studies here) as not only a celebration of material beauty and exquisite craftsmanship but also a discursive activity enables a close reading of its ideological subtext. Significantly, to grasp the performativity of porcelain display, we must look not only at porcelain alone, but also at the framework of categorization it is put into and the objects it is juxtaposed with. The juxtaposition of objects, according to the art historian Ivan Gaskell, is what needs to be attended to in "any

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[36] The export of Chinese ceramics to Japan, Korea, South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, and East Africa flourished as early as the ninth century. After the sixteenth-century, Chinese porcelain was exported to European markets in large quantities. See Christian J.A. Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1982); Hsieh Ming-Liang 謝明良, *Maoyi taoci yu wenhuashi* 貿易陶瓷與文化史 [*Trade Ceramics and Cultural History*] 台北 (Taipei): 允晨文化 (Yuncheng Wenhua Press, 2005).

[37] The historian Robert Finlay's book *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010) contains early study that draws on a global view to explore the transfer of Chinese porcelain and ceramics and their usage by different cultural groups. Coming later, Stacey Pierson's *From Object to Concept* provides comprehensive research on the movement, consumption, and appropriation of Ming porcelain on a global scale (see especially its second chapter). More recently, drawing upon Chinese primary sources, the historian Anne Gerritsen's new book *The City of Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) offers a new approach to explore the interaction between local manufactures and global consumption of Chinese porcelain by focusing on the history of the so-called porcelain capital of China, the city Jingdezhen, between the eleventh and the late seventeenth century.

exploration of exhibiting as a discursive activity."[38] Indeed, when objects are set together they are likely to acquire meanings that may not be readily perceivable when they are viewed in isolation.[39] For my purpose here, it is crucial to subject juxtapositions of objects to critical analysis and, more to the point, to recognize that juxtaposition *does* more than just balance visual stimuli in pleasing ways. Rather, it is a cultural practice that projects interpretations, manifests values, and serves ideological ends.

The discursiveness of object juxtaposition has long attracted scholarly attention, with research focusing especially on the production of narrative and interpretation in the grouping of European paintings in European art museums.[40] In comparison, this dissertation seeks to contribute close readings of the meaning-producing aspects of juxtaposing Chinese porcelain with other objects from different places, made by different cultural groups and of diverse materials—Afghan metalworks, Dutch paintings, French haute couture, and Taiwanese ceramics shards, to name just a few. I aim to explore the ideological implications of such cross-cultural juxtaposition scheme in terms of the varied set of Self-Other relationships it catalyzes.

The object juxtaposition, following Mieke Bal, is analogous to "syntax" in the sense that it produces otherwise inaccessible interpretations and propositions.[41] Of course, this syntax cannot be explored in isolation but rather in conjunction with the overall framework of museum narrative.

Methods: Narrative Framings and Close Reading

The performativity in china display can be analyzed through a multiplicity of narrative framings built around Chinese porcelain. Narrative here refers to both the story (what is told in museum displays) and the means of telling (how the techniques of display work as framing devices to set up specific narratives).[42] The term framing points to process, to agency; it reminds one that, to quote the art historian Norman Bryson, "framing is something we *do*, not something we *found*, that it is a process of making—and thereby avoids the positivistic connotations of 'givenness.'"[43] The term, as Bal puts it, avoids confusing "explaining

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[38] Ivan Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager: Speculations on Art History, Theory and Art Museums* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 86; see also Ivan Gaskell, "Display Displayed," in *The Agency of Display: Objects, Framings and Parerga*, eds. Johannes Grave et al. (Dresden: Sandstein, 2018), 22-43.

[39] David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 94.

[40] Mieke Bal, for example, proposes careful consideration of "the museum wall on which the painting hangs," as the collocation of paintings might be "syntactical" and brings up some "politically loaded interpretation[s]." See Bal, *Double Exposures*, 87; and Mieke Bal, *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 169. For discussion of the power of the juxtaposition of paintings in European art museums, see Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*; and Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager*. For a general discussion of object juxtaposition as a display strategy to make arguments, see Steven Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum: Curating, Past and Present* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 176-191.

[41] Bal, *Looking In*, 162.

[42] For the definition of narrative as both the story and the means of telling, see Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton, *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 3.

[43] Norman Bryson, "Art in Context," in *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Mieke Bal and Inge E. Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), 67-68 (emphasis added); see also Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1988), especially the preface.

with interpreting."[44] Framing, as the process of selecting and highlighting a specific narrative, making it more prominent while omitting others, emphasizes the constructive nature of a museum display.[45] Importantly, this constructive nature is two-way. Not only the exhibition makers do framing; in the process of this research, I also do framing. The is especially evident in that every gallery photo I take and attach in this dissertation inevitably shows my own frame. Hence, the narrative analysis of this dissertation is grounded in the interaction between the framing of museum makers and my own framing, as the viewer and analyzer.

This dissertation investigates narrative framings in museum settings with special attention to the coordination between spatial, visual, textual, and directional aspects. The design of museum buildings and gallery layout has considerable impact on the visual experience and meaning production of a display. The layouts and groupings of objects in galleries and showcases express underlying orders of classification. Gallery guides and object layout may also designate visiting routes and regulate viewing positions. Each route and position paves the way for specific narratives that might otherwise go unnoticed. The museum space is, therefore, not just a physical container in which objects are situated, but also a discursive medium through which a selected narrative is spatialized.[46] Particularly, this study will explore the spatial narratives constructed by the interplay between the positioning of objects and movements in gallery spaces (that is, what Mieke Bal notes as the "sequential nature of the visit"), including but not limited to movements that are clearly intended by curators.[47] Lighting schemes and wall colors also act as a form of framing as they can selectively highlight some qualities of an object while casting shadows over others. Even the purest seemingly white wall has long been recognized as having potential ideological effects.[48] Text panels and object labels filter and contextualize information, providing only what is deemed worthy of explanation to make a point. Catalogues accompanying exhibitions are also informative for better grasping curatorial framings. Equally, the visual images provided in catalogues and the way they are laid out may swell with potential connotations. In concert with all this, a museum's self-positioning and an exhibition's stated objective give the ideological frameworks with which to consider the meaning intended in a given arrangement of objects.

My narrative inquiry into museums aims not to mechanically appropriate manifold aspects and terms of literary narratology into the analysis of museum narratives, nor to set up a generalized norm to define and characterize museum narratology.[49] Rather, the aim here is to use narrative as an analytical

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[44] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 134.

[45] The idea of framing as the process of selecting and highlighting is widely discussed in work on mass media, especially news organization. See for example: William Anthony Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media as Interacting System," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528, (1993): 114-125; and Robert Mathew Entman, "Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.

[46] This dissertation will not deal with the digital space of online museum collections.

[47] Bal, *Double Exposures*, 4.

[48] Brain O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1999).

[49] For a more general discussion of the construction of narrative environments in museums and its influence on the viewing experience, see Suzanne Macleod, Laura Hourston Hanks, and Jonathan Hale, eds., *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); and Chang Wan-Chen 張婉真, *Dangdai bowuguan zhanlan de xushi zhuanxiang* 當代博物館展覽的敘事轉向 [*The Narrative Turn of*

tool to bring together disparate elements of display, thereby enabling a close-reading of the chosen porcelain displays as if they are *texts*.[50] Reading museum exhibition as text contributes to assessing the effectiveness of display strategies for constructing the intended exhibition narratives. Furthermore, as the museum scholar Rhiannon Mason points out, close readings of museum exhibitions as texts can raise "the questions of unintentional meanings, omissions, and contradictions present within displays."[51] Thus, investigating the narrative framing devices in museums fosters a deeper understanding of the performative dimension of museum presentation. At the same time, however, it is essential to note that museum presentations are *not* necessarily a definitive expression of the curatorial intentions behind them, but an upshot of a complex process of compromise and negotiation involving many aspects, such as space, time, and finances.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that, following the museum scholar Sharon Macdonald, my readings of the selected porcelain displays and exhibitions are themselves "a particular and positioned act of interpretation."[52] My readings are by no means necessarily aligned with all "the *motives* of exhibitors and the *messages* picked up by visitors."[53] This dissertation is not a visitor study and my point is not to claim that my readings exhaust all possibilities. Research on museum visitor input is important in that it shows "interpretative agency of visitors" by revealing how exactly visitors interact with displays through interviews and observations.[54] Visitor studies indeed provides rich information for the institution to understand the public's perception and to improve its visitor experiences. However, this dissertation does not carry out an audience survey, given that the methodology of visitor studies is commonly caught in the quantitative-qualitative debate: a quantitative visitor study collects data targeting project-specific questions, but it often fails to elaborate cause-effect relationship; a qualitative visitor study may reveal more details about the museum visit, but it is often conducted on a small scale and therefore may not provide a representative picture. On top of that, an important goal of museum visitor studies is to evaluate and document the real impact of the museum visiting experience, which is not my purpose here.[55] Rather, my aim here is to explore how particular close-readings of the porcelain displays that I focus on can reveal certain ideological undertones.

This dissertation sought to avoid an overly arbitrary reading of porcelain display in three ways. First, I will point out how my readings are based on specific ways of seeing, and more importantly, I will draw on conceptual tools from the fields of research that are particularly relevant to underpin my readings,

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Contemporary of Museum Exhibition] 台北(Taipei): 國立台北藝術大學(The Taipei National University of the Arts, 2014).

[50] On the idea of museum exhibition as text, see Bal, *Double Exposures*, 16; Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 128; and Louise J. Ravelli, *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 123-125.

[51] Rhiannon Mason, "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 27.

[52] Sharon Macdonald, "Theorizing Museums: An Introduction," in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 5.

[53] Ibid. (emphasis in original).

[54] Ibid.

[55] For more about the methodology and purposes of museum visitor studies, see Stephen Bitgood and Harris H. Shettel, "An Overview of Visitor Studies," *The Journal of Museum Education* 21, no. 3 (1996): 6-10.

including art history, material culture, narratology, anthropology, and postcolonial studies. Second, in order to provide more dynamic readings, the source material in this dissertation includes interviews with curators via email, as well as published accounts of exhibitions written by curators and museum staff. These materials help to shed light on the purposes and limitations in the exhibition-making process from the curatorial side of things. Third, I will examine the historical and socio-political contexts within which the relevant museums are embedded, and consider their missions, so as to provide yet another dimension to understand the porcelain displays of my case studies.

Justification of the Selected Case Studies

This dissertation is comprised of six case studies, including both semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions in some of the most highly visible museums in Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, and Taiwan. I will juxtapose the produced effects with the specific self-positioning and visions of the selected museums and their curatorial ideas around exhibition-making to show how they are connected or contradictory. Generally, semi-permanent exhibitions are readily associated with the museums' visions, while temporary exhibitions dedicated to specific themes allow for unexpected strategies when it comes to presenting objects. I have personally travelled to and photographed most of the selected case studies, or at the very least, have acquired installation photos, archival photos, floor plans, gallery guides, and object lists with the help of the museum departments and curators.

The first two case studies are semi-permanent exhibitions in the British Museum in London and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. These two prominent national museums have distinct public profiles. With its encyclopedic collection largely gathered during the period of imperialism, the British Museum today strives to brand itself as a "world country" to bring forward the cultural interconnections that weave through history.[56] The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam functions as a national monument to celebrate the heroic past of the Netherlands. Although their self-positionings are different, these two museums both have fine collections of Ming-Qing porcelain on display. More importantly, the spatial arrangements of Chinese porcelain in these two museums both conjure up a particular conception of the boundary between the Self and the Other.

Following these two semi-permanent presentations are three high-profile temporary exhibitions that all incorporate blue and white Chinese porcelain to demonstrate some form of cultural contact: the co-curated exhibitions *Asia > Amsterdam* (2015-2016) at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* (2016) at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem; and *China: Through the Looking Glass* (2015) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Under the overarching theme of the seventeenth-century Dutch reception of Asian luxury goods, Chinese porcelain in *Asia > Amsterdam* was displayed to tell a quite different story than in *Asia in Amsterdam*. *China: Through the Looking Glass* was a blockbuster exhibition featuring a fascinating, yet contentious, juxtaposition between Chinese objects and haute couture fashion.

[56] See Charlotte Higgins, "British Museum Director Hartwig Fischer: 'There are no Foreigners Here—the Museum is a World Country'," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/apr/13/british-museum-director-hartwig-fischer-there-are-no-foreigners-here-the-museum-is-a-world-country [Accessed January 20, 2021].

Finally, I shift the focus to a national museum in my hometown, one that compared to the institutions of the previous case studies has a more intimate yet also a more confrontational relationship with mainland China: The National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan. The changing perspectives of the semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions of Chinese porcelain in this museum correspond to the dynamic political relationship between China and Taiwan, shifting from the mid-twentieth century up to today.

While the chosen scope of these case studies has limitations (obviously, there are many museums, in many other parts of the world, that hold rich porcelain collections and are not included), it is far from arbitrary. These case studies are selected to create points of reference with which the performativity of porcelain display in museums is assessed. The porcelain display in the British Museum shows how the transformation of a museum's narrative scheme and spatial configuration can yield new interpretations of objects. The Rijksmuseum case study demonstrates the importance of collection history in exploring the agency of display. Comparing the way porcelain is laid out in *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* exemplifies the power of focalization, as both a narrative technique and an analytical tool, in analyzing the potential ideologies of exhibitions. The exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass* illustrates the possible discrepancy between the exhibition makers' intentions and the resulting messages. The National Palace Museum case study shows the importance of the wider socio-political environment in considering a museum's changing policies of collection and display.

The Dissertation Framework

This study aims not to provide a comprehensive assessment of the analyzed exhibitions' entire plans, but rather to focus on a set of selected arrangements that are pertinent to the issue of each chapter. By bringing together conceptual tools from fields of research such as art history, material culture, narratology, anthropology, and postcolonial studies, this study seeks to explore the effects that are both intended in and produced by these museum displays of Chinese porcelain.

Chapter 1, 'Trans-Bordering: The Trans-Border Arrangement of Ming Pilgrim Flasks and the Narrative of Transculturation in the British Museum', revolves around the concepts of trans-border arrangement, the global lives of things, and transculturation and their significance to a critical theme in the British Museum today: cultural connectivity.[57] The trans-border arrangement that I discuss highlights how the historical circulation of material objects across cultural-geographical boundaries is represented in the museum space today. It shows the British Museum's potential to accommodate the narrative of transculturation into its spatial configuration. Applying the concept of transculturation proposed by the art historian Monica Juneja, this chapter explores the changing meanings and identities of Ming pilgrim flasks by tracing their multiple appearances in the galleries of China, India, and Europe. This chapter also explains how a trans-border arrangement of objects closely parallels the concerns of the global turn in art history that blossomed in the late 1990s, and echoes the call to redraw existing art-historical categorizations in the museum world.

[57] Part of this chapter is published in the *Journal of Museum and Society* 19, no. 1 (2021): 32-47.

Chapter 2, 'Self-Fashioning: The Multiple Values of Chinese Porcelain in the Rijksmuseum', explores how the evolving collection/presentation history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum attaches multiple values to china. Archival photos and old gallery guides provide a visually rich but largely overlooked bank of material for this chapter to show how the museum's changing display schemes from the 1930s to today have given Chinese porcelain decorative, historical, aesthetic, art-historical, and symbolic values. Drawing on the idea that collecting and possessing objects can act as a strategy for constructing selves as owners, developed by James Clifford and the scholar of material culture and consumption Russell Belk, this chapter explains how the various values attributed to Chinese porcelain serve Dutch self-affirmation and national identity.

Chapter 3, 'Focalization: Comparison of the Exhibition Narratives of *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the Peabody Essex Museum', aims to show the importance of focalization, as both a narrative technique and an analytical tool, in the analysis of potential ideologies of these two co-organized exhibitions. Both exhibitions share an interest in showing how Asian luxuries transformed Dutch styles of life and artistic creation in the seventeenth century. Despite this common ground, however, they tell very different stories based on their distinctive use of focalization. As an analytical tool, focalization allows observers to distinguish who *sees* from who *speaks*, and thus enables a better understanding of the communicative conception of vision in a narrative. In particular, this chapter draws on Mieke Bal's focalization theory to argue that an instance of internal focalization is found in the gallery of *Asia > Amsterdam* where Chinese porcelain is juxtaposed with Dutch still life. By comparison, *Asia in Amsterdam* tends to employ external focalization in an attempt to provide its audiences a less Dutch-centric narrative. My purpose is not to argue that each of these two exhibitions only uses a specific type of focalization, nor to evaluate which type of focalization is the most desirable. Rather, I aim to show how the operations of different types of focalization in certain galleries of the two exhibitions highlight specific messages.

Chapter 4, 'Fetishization: Stereotypes and Exoticism in *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art', proposes that the curatorial strategy of showing "an aesthetic of surface" through the juxtaposition of Chinese objects and fashion garments does not effectively deconstruct Edward Said's discourse of Orientalism, as the exhibition sets out to do. Rather, what the exhibition shows is a resurgence of clichéd cultural stereotypes. This chapter examines how the exhibition's display techniques reduces the complex matrix of meanings of Chinese objects (including blue and white porcelain) into a set of *fetishized surfaces*—a term that I borrow from the art historian Kobena Mercer—given the power to evoke exoticism. In this way, the exhibition establishes a fixed Self-Other boundary where China, as a cultural entity, is the Other to be imagined. In addition to the fetishized surfaces, an Orientalist stereotype is also fashioned through feminine gender-coding. Femininity is one of the primary signifiers of exoticness and otherness in Orientalist narratives. Drawing on the historical connection between Chinese porcelain and femininity, widely explored by art historians and literary scholars, this chapter shows how a metonymic reading of the object layout in this gallery space reveals the implied gender-coding in the exhibition's porcelain display, in which china becomes a metonym for female skin and flesh.

Chapter 5, 'Repositioning: The Politics of Identity as Constructed by the National Palace Museum in Taiwan', analyzes the multiple configurations of the Self and the Other suggested in the museum's semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions in terms of transfer and transformation. With transfer, I refer to the movement of the Qing imperial collection from mainland China to Taiwan between late 1948 and early 1949, following the second Chinese Civil War (1946-1950) between Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government and Mao Zedong's Communists. With transformation, I indicate the museum's shifting self-positioning based on changing political frameworks from the international situation during the Cold War in the second half of the twentieth century to the contemporary intimate and yet remote relationship between China and Taiwan. Focusing on some recent exhibitions at the museum and its southern branch (opened at the end of 2015) with Chinese porcelain on display, this chapter explores what different narratives are produced following the museum's commitment to move beyond a Sinocentric perspective and towards a pan-Asian interregional framework, which has developed over the last decade.

The conclusion recapitulates the complex ideological aspects explored in the previous case studies. It traces how china is imbued with manifold meanings and values in the selected museum practices and how these processes are associated with particular Self-Other configurations. Overall, this study aims to explore the agency of these porcelain displays, asking what discursive messages they could perform beyond their ostensibly immediate arrangements.

CHAPTER 1 Trans-Bordering: The Trans-Border Arrangement of Ming Pilgrim Flasks and the Narrative of Transculturation in the British Museum

The British Museum is the History of the World…

Edward Verrall Lucas, *A Wanderer in London*

Introduction: Trans-Border Arrangement in a Transcultural Perspective

Since 2017, the British Museum has undertaken a significant transformation in its narrative scheme. According to the current museum director, Hartwig Fischer (appointed in 2016), this transformation will last for a decade and aims at reorganizing the museum's collections to tell "more coherent and compelling stories [with] an emphasis on the interconnectedness of cultures."[58] So, how exactly does the museum make its narrative structure and spatial organization more coherent to better express the "interconnectedness of cultures"? For Fischer, this goal means that the museum, as a "world country," needs to deploy and interpret its collections not only based on their places of origin but also the context of cultural exchange across regions.[59] As an initial result of the transformation plan, the new *Gallery 33 China and South Asia* (opened at the end of 2017) displays Chinese and Indian objects and incorporates products from Japan, Europe, and West Asia to amplify a sense of cultural connection and diversity. Indeed, in the British Museum, which boasts encyclopedic collections, walking through galleries delineated according to regional/continental boundaries provides a *space* to discuss cultural connections embodied in material objects that have circulated through different places. As the museum has begun to re-display objects in an attempt to blur boundaries between cultures, it seems pertinent to explore how such a tactic of display,

[58] Mark Brown, "British Museum to Bring Back Reading Room as Part of Revamp," *The Guardian*, July 4, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/jul/04/british-museum-to-bring-back-reading-room-as-part-of-revamp [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[59] John-Paul Stonard, "How Hartwig Fischer plans to transform the British Museum," *APOLLO*, September 13, 2017, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/how-hartwig-fischer-plans-to-transform-the-british-museum/ [Accessed January 20, 2021]; Charlotte Higgins, "British Museum Director Hartwig Fischer: 'There are no Foreigners Here—the Museum is a World Country'," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/apr/13/british-museum-director-hartwig-fischer-there-are-no-foreigners-here-the-museum-is-a-world-country [Accessed January 20, 2021].

which I call *trans-border arrangement*, transforms the narrative presented in the physical layout of the museum.

Trans-border arrangement refers to displaying and classifying an object based on its provenance (its context of production) as well as its relations with other objects and people; its transfer, gifting, collection, consumption, and appropriation. This display scheme represents, in museum space today, the circulation of material objects across territorial boundaries over a period of time in the past. The prefix *trans-* in a trans-border arrangement means traversal and transformation; it highlights the transformation of meaning, identity, and value of objects along their movements across cultural boundaries. Trans-border arrangement, as a display scheme that the British Museum has begun to put into practice, echoes the art historians Monica Juneja and Anna Grasskamp's call for a critical curatorial and pedagogical practice that helps articulate objects' meanings in a dynamic process of displacement and integration from one cultural-geographical context to another.[60] Juneja and Grasskamp urge a rethink of the validity of conventional categories, such as nation-states, regions, and period styles that are prevalent in the discipline of art history and the institution of the museum.[61] They propose to develop new strategies of display and interpretation to allow "a polyphonous object to narrate its many stories," instead of being anchored in "a self-contained geographical location [and thus freezing its] identity within a myth of origin."[62] This mode of curating, as Juneja and Grasskamp note, lies at a critical intersection between the spatial organization of museum collections and the concept of material objects' social/global biographies.[63]

According to the anthropological concept of object biographies, the objects' meanings are contextual, accumulated, and flux, rather than inherent, monolithic, and fixed. In the landmark volume *The Social Life of Things* (1986), the anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff point out that things, like people, have *social lives*. Their biographical approach seeks to understand objects' meanings in terms of their life cycles "from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption."[64] Taking up the idea of the social lives of things, the historians Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello further explore things' *global lives*, following the global turn in the field of history, in which "the connected histories that led to the circulation of objects throughout the various parts of the world" are brought to the fore.[65] This approach emphasizes circulation and re-contextualization on a global scale to see how objects acquire multiple meanings and identities as they travel across regions. It thus helps navigate the tension between

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[60] Monica Juneja and Anna Grasskamp, "EurAsian Matters: An Introduction," in *EurAsian Matters: China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800*, eds. Anna Grasskamp and Monica Juneja (Cham: Springer, 2018), 7.
[61] The establishment of art history as an academic discipline was accompanied with "the growth of nationalism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe that militated for the formation of nation states." See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "The 'Netherlandish model?' Netherlandish art history as/and global art history," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 66, (2016): 274.
[62] Juneja and Grasskamp, "EurAsian Matters: An Introduction," 4.
[63] Ibid., 4-7.
[64] Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13, 18; Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66-68.
[65] Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connection in the Early Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

the sense of cultural compartmentalization suggested in the British Museum's spatial organization (the museum's main galleries are divided by geo-cultural regions) and the museum's objects that have global trajectories and biographies (e.g. Ming-Qing porcelain).

There are studies adopting an object-biographical approach to consider how museums can better express cultural diversity in their displays. An example is the volume *Islamic Art and the Museum*, which is comprised of papers presented at the conference "Layers of Islamic Art and the Museum Context" held in Berlin in 2010.[66] To avoid a homogeneous understanding of Islamic art, the volume emphasizes the importance for museums to display Islamic objects in ways that can highlight their "affiliations with other objects in different spheres of life."[67] Most of the case studies in the volume focus on the arrangements in the museums of Islamic art in Europe or in the galleries of Islamic art within European museums. This chapter, as I will explain further later, focuses on the displacements of Ming porcelain across the British Museum's galleries of China, India, and Europe, and demonstrates how this trans-border arrangement of Ming porcelain foregrounds the object's multiple meanings and changing identities.[68]

The trans-border arrangement of objects in the British Museum, as a display scheme that enables one to conceive of cultural boundaries (which roughly overlap with the museum's departmental boundaries) as porous, maps out the narrative of transculturation.[69] The term transculturation was coined in 1940 by the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz as an alternative to the more Eurocentric term acculturation.[70] According to Ortiz, the idea of acculturation has a Eurocentric stance. It suggests that immigrants and indigenous people have to acculturate themselves to the superior European culture. For Ortiz, acculturation suggests a unilateral process of acquisition and adaption. Comparatively, transculturation better expresses the diverse transformations and repercussions that occurred "in the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another."[71] Later, in the early twenty-first century, the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch reconfigures the concept of transculturation/transculturality in order to dismantle the Enlightenment idea of culture as a bounded and homogeneous sphere.[72] In the lens of modern societies, Welsch argues that a monolithic idea of culture is untenable, in that "Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other."[73] With Welsch, transculturality moves beyond the ideas of multiculturality and interculturality by highlighting "the inner differentiation

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[66] Benoit Junod, et al., eds. *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archaeology in the Muslim World* (London: Saqi, 2012).

[67] Ibid., 14.

[68] The idea of the social lives of things has also been incorporated in studies of museum exhibitions to reconstruct historical developments and to see how objects have been imbued with multiple meanings by collectors and exhibition makers before and after they enter museums. See Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1999): 169-178; Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, "Objects and the Museum," *Isis* 96, no. 4 (2005): 559-571; and Kate Hill, ed., *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2012).

[69] I will not delve into the British Museum's digital space built in such online platforms as Google Arts and Cultures, as it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[70] Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970[1940]), viii.

[71] Ibid., 102. For Ortiz, the word transculturation also highlights the "the loss or uprooting of a previous culture [and] the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena." He refers to the former as a process of "deculturation" and the latter as "neoculturation." Ibid., 102-103.

[72] Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Changing Form of Cultures Today," *Filozofski vestnik* 22, no. 2 (2001): 59-86.

[73] Ibid., 68.

and complexity of modern cultures;" the term avoids "the old homogenizing and separatist idea of cultures."[74]

Welsch's critique of a bounded notion of culture helps reflect on the dominant modes of museum categorization based on a cultural-geographical division. Yet, this chapter departs from his understanding of transculturation in two ways.[75] First, Welsch takes a somewhat restricted view of transculturation. His concept pertains specifically to modern societies following the wave of globalization, and so it excludes a historical perspective. Welsch is concerned more about how the concept of transculturation can be used to understand the features and forms of cultures today, so as to correct ideas of cultural exclusiveness generated in ethnocentric frameworks of belonging. Hence, his notion of transculturation is not so germane to my examination of the display of the history of material culture in the British Museum, given that most of the museum's collections were gathered in earlier historical epochs. Second, and more importantly, Welsch considers transculturation as a trait of modern cultures, without explicitly accounting for the dynamic processes of transformation within the circuit of cultural exchange. This obviously differ from my focus here with regards to the objects' identity-transformation as expressed in their trans-border arrangement in museum space. In view of these two factors, this chapter draws on Monica Juneja's position on the notion of transculturation, which is more relevant to my purpose here in this chapter.

Instead of designating border-crossing and cultural mixing as exclusive to modern societies, Juneja proposes to "go back to Antiquity and extend [the research lens] into the present in order to understand historical forms of mobility."[76] Juneja refers to transculturation as both "a concrete object of investigation as well as an analytic method," and conceives of a transcultural perspective that challenges the existing narratives of cultural solidarity and signals a view of culture that highlights "contact, interaction and entanglement."[77] Viewed in this transcultural perspective, boundaries between cultures and regions are not a given but rather constitute a subject of analysis. A transcultural framework of analysis enables an intensive engagement with questions of "different kinds of relationships between actors, objects and cultural groups which follow from encounter and mobility."[78] Indeed, as this chapter will show, the trans-border arrangement of Ming porcelain pilgrim flasks—a category of Chinese porcelain that I focus on here—in the galleries of China, India, and Europe in the British Museum today not only maps out the objects' spatial mobility across boundaries between geo-cultural regions. It also indicates various relationships between the objects and people of different cultural groups who produced, customized, owned, transferred, and appropriated them.

Additionally, this chapter is grounded in Juneja's transculturation concept because she specifically draws on transcultural thinking to revisit the existing frameworks of museum

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[74] Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 197.

[75] For a critical take on Wolfgang Welsch's development of transculturation/transculturality, see Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Model House Research Group (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 22–33.

[76] See Mariachiara Gasparini, "Interview with Monica Juneja about Global Art History," *TRAFO*, January 29, 2014, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/567 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[77] Juneja and Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," 24-25.

[78] Gasparini, "Interview with Monica Juneja about Global Art History."

categorization.[79] Recent years have seen the burgeoning of a transculturally-framed art history that sought to, as Juneja notes, "use connected material cultures to unsettle many narratives of style and civilizational uniqueness, in scholarship as well as in the expanding world of curation and display."[80] The trans-border arrangement of objects in the British Museum can be seen as an initial attempt on the part of the museum to incorporate a transcultural perspective in its narrative. However, the attempt has been barely conceptualized in the museological domain and poorly promoted to the museum's visitors. As the importance of trans-border arrangement in constructing a narrative of transculturation in the museum remains merely implicit, this chapter aims to make it explicit.

This chapter has three sections. It begins with an analysis of narratives of the oneness of the world suggested in the British Museum's famous project *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, launched in 2010. This project and its suggestion of Enlightenment ideology of de-bordered universality work as a point of comparison for the ideas of trans-border arrangement and transcultural narrative proposed in this chapter. To illustrate a trans-border arrangement, the second section provides an empirical investigation of the multiple placements of Ming pilgrim flasks in the museum's galleries of China, India, and Europe. Ming pilgrim flasks are a potent example to explore how trans-border arrangement is relevant to rethinking the existing regionally-bounded categorization in the museum, because they were produced by cultural connections and for global markets. These flasks being Ming also has its importance, which will be discussed in this section in conjunction with the British Museum's particular interest in Ming china/China as reflected in its spatial layout in the Chinese gallery and exhibition-planning. The third section contextualizes the trans-border arrangement in the British Museum in terms of the global turn in art history that blossomed in the late 1990s, and shows how such a display scheme can motivate a rethinking of the museum's role as a cartographic tool that spatializes relationships.[81]

1-1 From De-Bordering to Trans-Bordering: Transfer and Transformation

[79] Monica Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…' Art History, Transculturation, and World-Making—With and Beyond the Nation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 81, no. 4 (2018): 478-480.

[80] Ibid., 469. An example Juneja provides here is Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). The painting is displayed at the Museo Reina Museum in Madrid but without reference to a conventional art-historical framework, such as genre. Rather, it is combined with works of different materials (e.g. magazines, sketches, and posters) from the same historical moment to make visible a wider web of cultural connections between these works and Latin America. See Ibid., 479.

[81] The proposition of critically reflecting on national compartmentalization and the nationalist understandings of art historical styles was developed in the German-speaking scholarship around the turn of the twentieth century. However, partly because of growing German nationalism between the World Wars, this non-nationalist approach to art history lacked success. See Ulrich Pfisterer, "Origins and Principles of World Art History—1900 (and 2000)," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 69-89. For detailed documentation and analysis of the earlier development of an intercultural perspective in the study of art in Europe before the twentieth century, see Wilfried van Damme, "'Good to Think': The Historiography of Intercultural Art Studies," *World Art* 1, no. 1 (2011): 43-57. In the 1990s, the study of art history from a pluralistic perspective and through a multidisciplinary approach in order to transcend essentializing national boundaries was developed in European universities. For an introduction, see Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans, "Art History in a Global Frame: World Art Studies," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, eds. Matthew Rampley et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 219-220.

In 2004, a year after the celebration of its 250th anniversary, the British Museum branded itself with a new image: *A Museum of the World, for the World*.[82] This image is certainly rhetorical in that the British Museum uses it to affirm its importance and uniqueness in the museum world and to legitimize keeping a worldwide collection.[83] The image was circulated widely in various forms, such as a statement of museum strategy, annual reports, and posts on social media. The most effective reinforcement of this new image may be the project *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (hereinafter referred to as *A History of the World*).

Launched in 2010, *A History of the World* aimed to portray a large-scale tableau of humanity's social and material developments. The project was presented on multiple platforms, including a radio series (on BBC Radio 4), book, website, gallery display, and series of internationally touring exhibitions.[84] The project has a grand narrative structure. It sought to present the public a vista of worldwide and millennia-spanning connections through a single object; a close-up of how materials from different cultural groups have been exchanged and have interacted at particular times; a long take of a particular object's changes in meaning along with its chronological movements across different parts of the world.[85] Although the project officially concluded in the end of 2010, its legacy continues to grow today, as its radio podcasts remains downloadable, its website is archived, and its touring exhibition remains on display in various museums around the world.[86] Additionally, the worldwide popularity of this project seems to have successfully saved the museum from the potential embarrassment of being outdated.[87] Offering audiences a grand view of how all human beings have a shared past was praised by the museum director of the time, Neil MacGregor (in office 2002-2015), as what a universal museum is meant to do.[88]

Echoing the British Museum's potential to shape "the oneness of the world," *A History of the World* underscores the eighteenth-century Enlightenment idea of universality.[89] In the age of the Enlightenment, it was believed that the mysterious world would be unlocked by collecting things from all over the world and bringing them together in one place to further categorize, observe, and inductively reason through

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[82] "A Museum of the World, for the World" is the title of the *British Museum Review 2004-2006*.

[83] This chapter will not make an argument about how the museum balances (if this is really possible) its shadowy past of imperial looting with repatriation claims made today, as such issues have been discussed in detail elsewhere. See Mark O'Neill, "Enlightenment Museums: Universal or Merely Global?," *Museum and Society* 2, no. 3 (2004): 190-202; Neil G. W. Curtis, "Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, no. 2 (2006): 117-127.

[84] The radio series contains 100 episodes with Neil MacGregor as the narrator. Each features an object from the British Museum collection. The book *A History of the World in 100 Objects* by Neil MacGregor is based on the radio transcripts with some modifications and additions.

[85] Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

[86] For the radio podcasts, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/about/british-museum-objects/ [Accessed January 20, 2021]. For the website of 'A History of the World in 100 Objects': http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/exploreraltflash [Accessed January 20, 2021]. The *A History of the World in 100 Objects* project also relates to other programs. One example is the interactive microsite created in cooperation with Google *The Museum of the World* (launched in 2015): https://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/ [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[87] Jonathan Jones, "Neil MacGregor saved the British Museum. It's time to reinvent it again," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/apr/08/neil-macgregor-british-museum-legacy-future-challenge [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[88] Neil MacGregor, "To Shape the Citizens of 'That Great City, the World'," in *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities*, ed. James Cuno (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39-54.

[89] Ibid., 43.

them. Based on Enlightenment ideology, the British Museum was established to be an encyclopedia of world knowledge.[90] By constructing a linear narrative that covers an extensive span of time (2,000,000 BC–AD 2010) with a selection of twenty themes sequenced in a roughly developmental order, *A History of the World* emphasizes how the same values have been shared in different times, in different places, and by different people.[91] Regardless of the debates that such historical directionality towards a universality might trigger (i.e. restoring the paradigm of progress and subordinating cultural differences to the familiar quest for a European model of universal civilization drenched in teleological connotations), a potential limitation of this project lies in its multiplatform nature.

Arguably, not every platform is equally effective at presenting a sprawling narrative without undermining the sense of mobility in cultural interactions. At the heart of *A History of the World* are the complex processes through which an object can tell stories not limited to one cultural context but extending temporally and spatially across many.[92] In this sense, as MacGregor argues, "the object becomes a document not just of the world for which it was made, but of the later periods which altered it."[93] In practice, however, such a perspective is probably better communicated via radio or books than an exhibition, for the former platforms accommodate detailed descriptions of the global biographies of material things, while each object can only be placed in one thematic framework at a time when put on display in a museum. This inevitably limits the degree to which the mobility of material objects can be visualized to audiences.

Such difficulty is evident in the 2010 floor plan of the British Museum (**Figure 1.1**). Instead of gathering the one hundred objects together in one space as an exhibition, the curators decided to leave the pieces in their original semi-permanent galleries. Their association with *A History of the World* was highlighted through extra captions attached beside each object and a special floor plan highlighting the locations of the selected objects with yellow-circled numbers. This floor plan can be seen as a visual manifestation of the Enlightenment idea of housing "the world under one roof."[94] It recalls this Enlightenment universalism by shaping the spatial sense of *A History of the World* into a de-bordered container, in which geo-cultural boundaries are dissolved in the face of a higher universality. It reinforces senses of oneness and stability, as the dynamic processes through which the objects are given multilayered identities in their movements around the world are not mapped out. At the same time, paradoxically, these boundaries are mapped in the museum's floor plan: galleries are demarcated into a series of square grids that are colored differently to delineate a series of regions in line with regional, national, and continental borders (as well as departmental boundaries) (**Figure 1.2**).

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[90] For more about the British Museum's Enlightenment roots, see Kim Sloan, ed., *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The British Museum Press, 2003).

[91] The developmental perspective suggested in this project is revealed in its thematic titles, especially in the choice of vocabulary to create a sense of temporal process. For example: Making Us Human (2,000,000–9000 BC), After the Ice Age: Food and Sex (9000–3500 BC), The First Cities and States (4000–2000 BC), The Beginning of Science and Literature (1500–700 BC), Empire Builders (300 BC–AD 1), The Rise of World Faiths (200–600), The Threshold of the Modern World (1375–1550), and The First Global Economy (1450–1600).

[92] MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, xxi.

[93] Ibid.

[94] MacGregor, "To Shape the Citizens of 'That Great City, the World'," 39.

The British Museum repeatedly emphasizes its role in telling an interconnected story of the world, and the importance of this telling, but is this equivalent to putting objects into an overarching framework called oneness? Is it really possible or necessary to dissolve any form of boundary in the museum world? The word (inter)connection seems to suggest a sense of mobility: people, materials, and information moving across various regions forming connections and exchanges. However, the word oneness seems to evoke a rather static picture: objects are gathered together to indicate a higher-level, ultimate universality.

The idea of oneness is equally expressed in the world maps provided in the book *A History of the World in 100 Objects* accompanying the project. Looking down on the world as if from outer space, these maps show only the silhouettes of continents, without national or geo-cultural boundaries dividing them (**Figure 1.3**). They serve not merely to indicate the origins of the displayed items, but also to persuade audiences that what they are looking at—a de-bordered world materialized by the selected objects—is an objective reality. But, is it? The geographer John Brian Harley reminds us that "cartographic facts are only facts within a specific cultural perspective."[95] These world maps are not neutral but rhetorical, and this is manifested in two ways. First, the objects on the maps are selected purposefully in order to match the twenty themes of the project. Second, Europe is put at the center of the world on this projection. Notably, when the touring exhibition *A History of the World* reached the National Museum of China in Beijing in 2017, the world map provided in the exhibition's venue there became centered around China (**Figure 1.4**). This contrast, perhaps, suggests different interpretations of which place symbolizes the navel of the world.

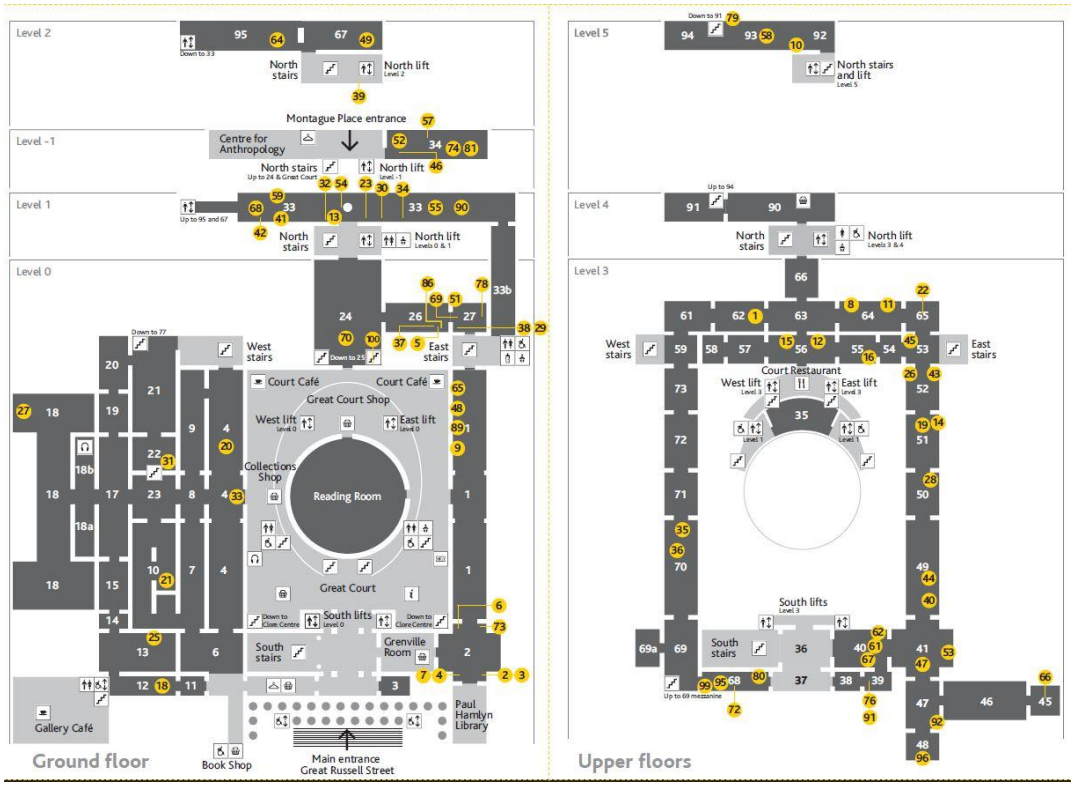

Figure 1.1 British Museum Map for *A History of the World in 100 Objects* in 2010 – Ground and Upper floors. Published by The British Museum Press. © The Trustees of the British Museum

[95] John Brain Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 3.

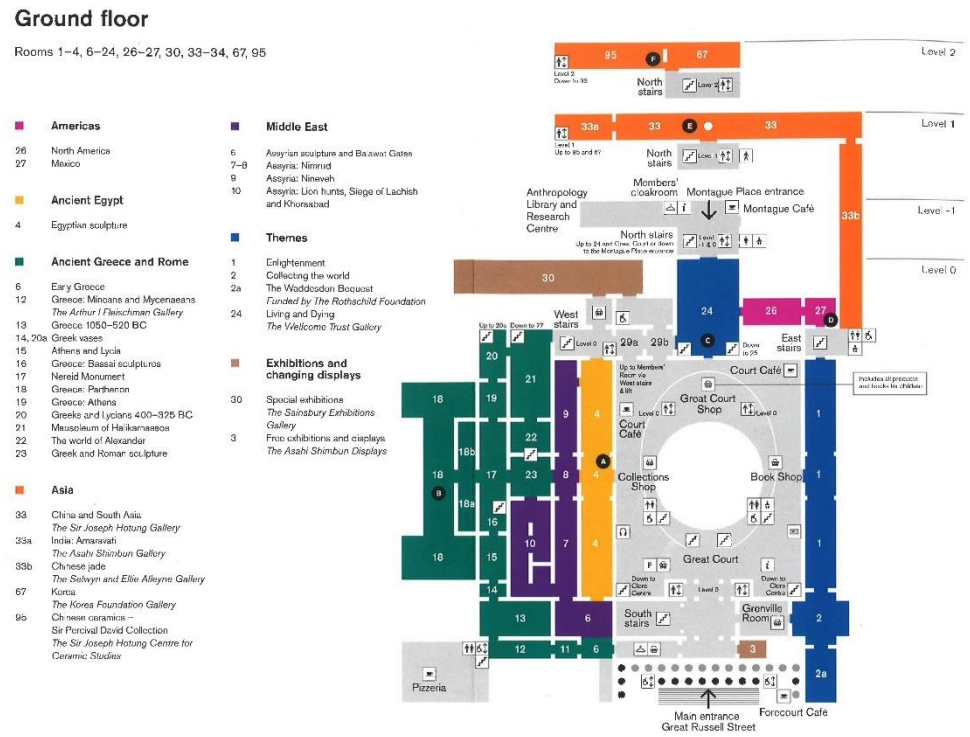

Figure 1.2 British Museum Map 2019 – Ground Floor. Published by The British Museum Press. © The Trustees of the British Museum

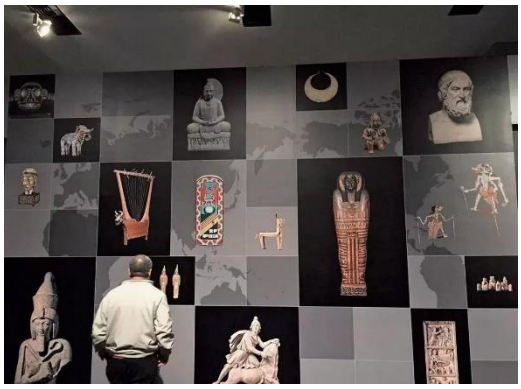

Figure 1.3 (left) The world map for objects numbered 26-50, from Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010). Other world maps for the rest of the objects provided in this book are all in the same Eurocentric format
Figure 1.4 (right) Pacific Centered World Map overlaid with some images of the objects on display in the exhibition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* at the National Museum of China. © *Meishu guancha* 美術觀察 [*Art Observation*]

Of all *A History of the World*'s platforms, the international touring exhibition is where the idea of oneness can be expressed most clearly. The touring exhibition has been exhibited in different countries around the world since 2014. In these international venues, the group of one hundred and one objects (the additional one is chosen from the hosting museum's own collection) was displayed in one or several galleries allocated specifically for holding special exhibitions. The idea that a condensed world history is enclosed in a de-bordered container is suggested by some advertising slogans. For example: "2 million years of human history—*in one room*" at the National Museum in Australia; and "Zhexie wenwu neng jiang gushi, tamen jujiyichu, gongtong jiangshu le yi ge zui wei da de gushi—shi jie li shi! 這些文物能講故事，

它們聚集一處，共同講述了一個最偉大的故事—世界歷史！[These objects are gathered together *in one place* to tell the greatest story—the world history]" at the National Museum of China.[96]

In terms of the poster design, the poster created by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Japan expresses a sense of de-bordering quite evidently. It shows an assemblage of various objects from different places to create a sense of oneness (**Figure 1.5**). In comparison, the exhibition posters designed by the Shanghai Museum and the National Museum of China seem to convey more a sense of cultural comparison. The Shanghai Museum created a pair of flag posters for the exhibition: one in blue, on which most of the objects come from China, Japan, and South Asia; another in dusty-rose, on which most of the objects come from Egypt and Europe (**Figures 1.6-1.7**). According to the museum, this pair of flag posters were intended to show a sense of "dongxi wenhua de pengzhuang he jiaorong 東西文化的碰撞和交融 [the collision and confluence of the East and West cultures]."[97] Similarly, the exhibition's poster for the National Museum of China displays a split image of the silver medal commemorating Sir Francis Drake's 1577-80 voyage around the world (**Figure 1.8**). Collected in the British Museum, the silver plate has two sides: on one side the eastern hemisphere and on the other the western. This poster only shows the side with the eastern hemisphere and splits in half; the left is engraved with the word Asia and the right Europe. Compared to the exhibition poster designed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the posters designed by the Shanghai Museum and the National Museum of China highlight more the contrast between the East and the West, which inevitably loosens the sense of de-bordering implied in the idea of the oneness of the world.

Figure 1.5 (left) The poster for the special exhibition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. © The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
Figures 1.6-1.7 (middle and right) Two flag posters, one in blue (with most, but not all, objects from Asia), the other in dusty-rose (with most, but not all, objects from Egypt and Europe), for the special exhibition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* at the Shanghai Museum. © The Shanghai Museum

[96] See the National Museum of Australia's advertising video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMz0A6VliX0; and the National Museum of China's exhibition website: http://www.chnmuseum.cn/Portals/0/web/zt/20170301ahow/index.html [Accessed January 20, 2021] (emphasis added).
[97] See *Zzi mei ti* Z 字媒體 [*Zi.Media*]: https://zi.media/@yidianzixun/post/eWjJtn [Accessed January 20, 2021].

Figure 1.8 Poster for the exhibition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* at the National Museum of China. © The National Museum of China

As a celebration of universality, the formula of *xxx history in 100 objects* has become popular in the museum world since the British Museum's project achieved great success.[98] This formula and its accompanying macro-historical perspectives indeed provides some novel insights to reinterpret the meanings of, and to restructure associations between, museum collections. However, they simultaneously run the risk of neutralizing the significant roles museums play in constructing the meanings of their materials. Particularly, the emphasis on macro-level narrative structures does not seem like an ideal approach to show in the museum space how the meanings and identities of objects can transform in patterns of circulation. Although *A History of the World* intends to take on a biographical perspective to explain the changing meanings of objects along with their movements across time and space, this objective is, as argued earlier, undermined in the physical exhibitions. In the end, the dynamic process of objects' traversal cannot be presented if there are no traversable boundaries.

In pursuing the question of how to deploy a transcultural perspective to conceive a new display scheme, I propose trans-border arrangement worth exploring. In contrast to the Enlightenment ideology of de-bordered universality, trans-border arrangement and the implied narrative of transculturation makes the British Museum a place where the identity-transformation of objects can be spatialized.

[98] In 2017, the History Colorado Center in Denver's Golden Triangle Museum District unveiled a new semi-permanent exhibition, *Zoom in: The Centennial State in 100 Objects*. Based on a sweeping overview of 13,000 years of human history in Colorado, it aims to explore "the ways objects define who we are as Coloradans." See the website of 'Zoom in: The Centennial State in 100 Objects': https://www.historycolorado.org/exhibit/zoomin [Accessed January 20, 2021]. Similarly, the Wrexham County Borough Museum in Wrexham launched the special exhibition *A History of North-East Wales in 100 Objects* (April 21 to June 30, 2018). From a 4,000-year-old burial urn to a modern-day Airbus wing rib, the exhibition intended to show "an outstanding diverse representation of our region's past, stretching over centuries and including items from every part of our corner of North East Wales." See the report "The History of North East Wales in 100 Objects," *Wrexham Council News*, April 18, 2018, https://news.wrexham.gov.uk/the-history-of-north-east-wales-in-100-objects/ [Accessed January 20, 2021]. Like the British Museum's *A History of the World*, which projects a huge picture of humanity as a whole by traversing huge swaths of time, these two exhibitions emphasize the oneness of their respective localities by surveying time frames that cover millennia.

1-2 Objects in Motion: The Trans-Border Arrangement of Ming Pilgrim Flasks

This section will explore the trans-border arrangement of three Ming pilgrim flasks across *Gallery 33 China and South Asia* and *Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800*, along with a Chinese-style Iranian flask in *Gallery 43 The Islamic World* (the museum's only religious category) (**Figures 1.9-1.13**). The aim here is to tease out how these Ming flasks' identities are transformed as they traverse the cultural-geographical boundaries that the gallery walls stand for.


Figure 1.9 (left) Ming pilgrim flask. Yongle period, 1403-1424. Height: 25 cm; Width: 22 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: 1947,0712.325 (on display in the Chinese section of *Gallery 33 China and South Asia*)
Figure 1.10 (right) Ming pilgrim flask. Yongle or Xuande period, 1403-1435. Height: 22 cm; Width: 19.5 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: 1968,0422.32 (on display in the South Asian section of *Gallery 33 China and South Asia*)



Figures 1.11-1.12 (left and middle) Ming pilgrim flask (two sides). Wanli period, 1590-1620. Height: 30.5 cm; Width: 14.7 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: Franks.778.+ (on display in *Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800*)
Figure 1.13 (right) Safavid pilgrim flask. Safavid dynasty, 1626-1627. Height: 28 cm; Width: 18 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: 1950,1019.1 (on display in *Gallery 43 The Islamic World*)

The pilgrim flask is characterized by a flattened globular body with a cylindrical neck. In China, such vessels are known as *bao-yue-ping* 抱月瓶 [moon-flasks] or *bianhu* 扁壺 [flattened bottles]. As indicated by the word pilgrim itself, these flasks are "objects in motion."[99] Their shape can be traced back to the eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age.[100] Later, metal and glass pilgrim flasks became relatively common in West Asia. In the British Museum, examples of pottery from the eastern Mediterranean can be found in *Gallery 57 Ancient Levant*, and pieces of metal and glass flasks are seen in *Galleries 42-43 The Islamic World*. Pilgrim flasks were introduced to Tang China (618-907) via the Silk Roads.[101] A Tang ceramic flask decorated with scrolling grapevines is showcased in *Gallery 33 China and South Asia*, with its shape and decoration labelled as "exotic."[102] Pilgrim flasks then became a famous Ming product and were imported to India, West Asia, and Europe via diplomatic channels and trade routes. In Safavid Iran (1501-1736), in particular, the blue and white color scheme and floral decorations on Ming porcelain were appropriated by Iranian potters to make their pilgrim flasks appear Ming-like. Thus, we see that a circuit of exchange ran between Ming China and Safavid Iran. This connection will be explained further by associating a Ming pilgrim flask in *Gallery 33 China and South Asia* with a Ming-style Iranian flask in *Gallery 43 The Islamic World*. Both galleries underwent a major refurbishment that aimed to reinforce the idea of cultural interaction, and reopened in 2017 and 2018, respectively.[103]

1-2-1 Gallery 33 China and South Asia and Gallery 43 The Islamic World

Gallery 33 contains two sections, China and South Asia, both are organized chronologically, spanning prehistory to modern times (**Figures 1.14-1.15**). Each section has a blue and white Ming flask on display. The one showcased in the bay *Early Ming 1368-1487* in the Chinese section is decorated with fruiting and flowering lychee branches (see **Figure 1.9**), while the one placed in the bay *Sultans and Mughals 1300-1850* in the South Asian section is ornamented with blossoming peony branches (see **Figure 1.10**). They were both made in the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen during the first half of the fifteenth century, and together they materialize the extensive trade networks between Ming China, Mughal India (1526-1857), and Safavid Iran.

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[99] Meredith Martin and Daniela Bleichmar, "Introduction: Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World," *Art History* 38, no. 4 (2015): 605-619.

[100] Denise P. Leidy, *How to Read Chinese Ceramics* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 74.

[101] Robert Finlay, "The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History," *Journal of World History* 9, no. 2 (1998): 181.

[102] The museum number of the Tang ceramic flask displayed in *Gallery 33 China and South Asia*: 1936,1012.243.

[103] For details about the renovation of *Gallery 33 China and South Asia*, see Jane Portal, "Creating the New Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia," *Arts of Asia* 47, no. 6 (2017): 42-49. The refurbishment of *Galleries 42-43 The Islamic World* was supported by the Albukhary Foundation, and they are now intentionally located adjacent to the European galleries, which provides "the connections between the cultures of Islam […] and the cultures of the Mediterranean World and Europe." See the press release "New Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World to open in 2018" via the website 'artdaily': https://artdaily.cc/news/77408/British-Museum-announces-new-Albukhary-Foundation-Gallery-of-the-Islamic-World-to-open-in-2018#.X7Kt72hKiUk [Accessed January 20, 2021].


Figure 1.14 (left) View of *Gallery 33*, Chinese section. The British Museum Images, image ID: 01613429185. © The Trustees of the British Museum
Figure 1.15 (right) View of *Gallery 33*, South Asian section. The British Museum Images, image ID: 01613498047. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Before delving into the display of the Ming flask in *Gallery 33*, it seems relevant to first examine the British Museum's particular interest in Ming china/China. In *Gallery 33*, the Ming dynasty is the only Chinese dynasty that is divided into two chronological groups: *Early Ming 1368-1487* and *Late Ming 1487-1644*. There is no Early Tang/Late Tang, nor Early Qing/Late Qing. The bay *Early Ming 1368-1467* is a newly added section in the gallery's refurbishment and perhaps can be considered as a legacy of a temporary exhibition hosted at the museum around a year before *Gallery 33* was closed for renovation: *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China* (September 18, 2014-January 5, 2015, hereinafter referred to as *Ming: 50 Years*).[104] The fifty-year timeframe, from 1400 to 1500, is praised in this exhibition as "a golden age in China's history."[105]

Ming: 50 Years is arguably part of the Ming trend sweeping the museum world in Europe and the United States. Before this exhibition, there were several special exhibitions focusing on the Ming dynasty in Europe and the United States, for example: *Power and Glory: Court Arts of China's Ming Dynasty* (2008) at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco; *Arts of the Ming Dynasty: China's Age of Brilliance* (2009) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; *Mysterious Ming* (2013) at the Princessehof Ceramics Museum

[104] This exhibition originated from the research project, *Ming: Courts and Contacts 1400-1450*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and led by Craig Clunas and Jessica Harrison-Hall, who are also the curators of the exhibition. The research project also resulted in a conference of the same title held in 2014, accompanying the exhibition *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China*. See Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Luk Yu-Ping, eds., *Ming China: Courts and Contacts 1400-1450* (London: The British Museum, 2016).
[105] See: https://culture360.asef.org/news-events/exhibition-ming-50-years-that-changed-china-uk/ [Accessed January 20, 2021]. For a critical review discussing the definition of "a golden age in China's history" and the questionable concept of "change," see Jonathan Jones, "Ming mania at the British Museum—is it time we got over our obsession?," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/sep/10/ming-mania-british-museum-get-over-obsession [Accessed January 20, 2021]. Some Chinese reviews point out that what has been changed over this fifty-year timeframe was not China itself, but China's image to the Europeans. Hence, the timeframe represents not a golden age in China's history, but rather a Chinese golden age in the European eye. See Ye Ye 葉燁, "Ming: Shengshi huangchao wushi nian—Daying bowuguan tezhan" 明：盛世皇朝五十年—大英博物館特展 [Ming: 50 Years that Changed China—A Special Exhibition in the British Museum], *wenshi zhishi* 文史知識 [*Chinese Literature and History*] 4, (2015): 108-113.

in Leeuwarden; and *Ming: The Golden Empire* (2014) at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. All these exhibitions specifically associate the word Ming with the qualities of preciousness, brightness, and brilliance.[106] Indeed, as the art historian Stacey Pierson points out, the word Ming tends to be combined with the word (porcelain) vase, as a literary motif and figure of speech representing qualities such as fragility, fineness, preciousness, and exoticness.[107] Between 2014 and 2015, in anticipation of *Ming: 50 Years*, the British Museum toured a large Ming blue and white globular vase (*tianqiu ping* 天球瓶, its shape like a flask but its body much more rotund) to Glasgow, Sheffield, Bristol, and Basingstoke (**Figure 1.16**). According to Luk Yu-Ping, one of the curators of *Ming: 50 Years*, the reason for choosing this object to tour was quite obvious: "Without knowing much about the Ming dynasty, most people will probably have heard of the 'Ming vase'."[108] This Ming globular vase is currently displayed together with the Ming pilgrim flaks with lychee branches in the Chinese section of *Gallery 33* after the gallery reopened in 2017 (see **Figure 1.19**).

Figure 1.16 Ming globular vase. Xuande period, 1426-1435. Height: 51 cm; Width: 38 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: 1975,1028.19

The Ming pilgrim flask is displayed in the showcase *Trade and Diplomacy* in the Chinese section of *Gallery 33* (**Figure 1.17**). In the old *Gallery 33*, the showcase dedicated to the Ming dynasty contained only porcelain (**Figure 1.18**). By comparison, the Ming display in the newly renovated *Gallery 33* is less crowded than the previous arrangement but includes more objects in diverse materials and from different places.[109] The showcase *Trade and Diplomacy* presents interregional connections and exchanges of materials and visual languages. The showcase's theme revolves around seven Ming government-backed voyages to

[106] See: https://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/powerglory/intro.html; https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2009/arts-of-the-ming-dynasty; https://www.cultuurarchief.nl/z/tentoonstellingen/1303-het-mysterie-ming.htm [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[107] For more about the historical development of the trope of the Ming vase in English cultural discourse, see Stacey Pierson, *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 3 'Porcelain as Metaphor—Inventing "the Ming Vase" (18th-20th Centuries)'.
[108] This quotation originally appeared in the article "Made in China: An Imperial Ming Vase," written by Luk Yu-Ping for the British Museum's online blog. However, the page is no longer available after an update of the British Museum's website. For an online archive, see: https://changed407.rssing.com/chan-29755778/latest.php [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[109] The dark green backdrops installed in each showcase in the newly restored *Gallery 33 China and South Asia* also help to minimize glass reflections, and thus enhance the visiting experience.

South and West Asia between 1405 and 1433.[110] Thus, we see Chinese red lacquerware gifted to the Ashikaga court in Japan (1338-1573) combined with Japanese blades gifted to the Ming court; a Ming dish grouped with a Vietnamese stoneware plate with a similar color scheme and decoration; a pair of Ming pillow ends inlaid with gems from India and Sri Lanka; and a Ming pilgrim flask juxtaposed against two other Ming bottles and two comparable pieces of metalwork made in Herat, which shows the "[Ming] Court fashion for the exotic," according to the label (**Figure 1.19**).

Adjacent to the display, reproductions of *Horse with Chinese Grooms* (1418) and *Royal Feast in a Garden* (about 1444) illustrate a reciprocal exchange: large horses from West Asia were vital for the Ming army, and Ming porcelain was desirable for the Persian Sultans (**Figures 1.20-1.21**).[111] These graphics potentially create a transition between *Gallery 33 China and South Asia* and *Galleries 42-43 The Islamic World*, where several pieces of Ming porcelain are grouped with Persian ceramics. Influenced by shapes found in Islamic design, pilgrim flasks were exotic in the context of the Ming empire. Yet, when Ming porcelain became famous in the Islamic markets, Iranian artisans started to fashion their exotic-looking stone-paste flasks by imitating the visual designs of Ming porcelain. This connection is shown by the showcase *Chinese Inspirations* in *Gallery 43 The Islamic World* (**Figure 1.22**). Here, a Chinese-style Safavid Iranian pilgrim flask is grouped with several pieces of Ming porcelain and their imitations made in Mamluk Egypt (1250-1517), Safavid Iran, and Mughal India.

Figure 1.17 Showcase *Trade and Diplomacy* in *Gallery 33*, Chinese section. Photographed by the author in 2017

[110] Commanded by the Chinese mariner and diplomat Zheng He (1371-1433/35), these seven maritime expeditions helped to revitalize the Sinocentric tribute system. The voyages reached as far west as the coast of East Africa. By acknowledging Ming China's superior position, these tributaries not only acquired guarantees of peace but also benefited from commercial transactions.

[111] *Horse with Chinese Grooms* is a double-paged painting from the *Bahram Mirza album* (assembled 1544-1545), now collected in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. *Royal Feast in a Garden* is an illustration from the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Firdausi (about 934-1020), now collected in the Cleveland Museum of Art, museum number: 1956.10.a.

Figure 1.18 Showcase *Ming Dynasty* with Ming porcelain in *Gallery 33* before the refurbishment. Photographed by the author in 2014

Figure 1.19 A close look at the showcase Trade and Diplomacy. On the top shelf (from left to right): a Ming pilgrim flask; a Ming porcelain ewer; an Afghan metal ewer (late 1100s-early 1200s); a Ming porcelain tankard (on the right side of this tankard is an Afghan metal tankard, which is out of frame in this photo). On the middle shelf: a Ming porcelain dish (left) and a Vietnamese stoneware dish (right). On the bottom shelf: two Ming globular vases (the right piece is the one taken on the spotlight tour between 2014 and 2015). Photographed by the author in 2017.

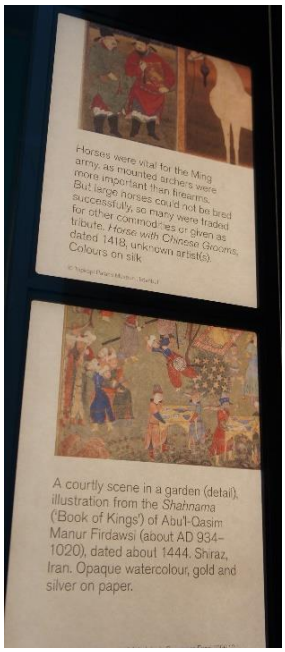

Figure 1.20 (left) Illustrated labels in the showcase *Trade and Diplomacy* (upper: *Horse with Chinese Grooms*; lower: *Royal Feast in a Garden*) Photographed by the author in December 2017
Figure 1.21 (right) *Royal Feast in a Garden* (detail) (about 1444). Opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper. Sheet in original: height 32.7 cm; width 22 cm. Collected in the Cleveland Museum of Art, museum number: 1956.10.a

Figure 1.22 A close look at the showcase *Chinese Inspirations* in *Gallery 43 The Islamic World*. A: Egyptian earthenware dish (1300-1500). B: Chinese Ming dish (found in Indonesia). C: Egyptian earthenware dish (1400-1500). D: Safavid pilgrim flask. E: Iranian stone-paste dish with lotuses (1500-1550). F: Iranian stone-paste jar (1601-1625). G: Indian stone-paste flask (1800-1900). Photographed by the author in 2017

The placement of the Ming pilgrim flask in the showcase *Cultural Interactions* in the South Asian section of *Gallery 33*, like the one in the Chinese section described above, indicates the idea of cultural exchange: it reflects the close relationship between China and India under the Mughal emperors. Before the refurbishment, the old South-Asian section of *Gallery 33* mainly displayed religious statuary, which could generate a misunderstanding or cultural stereotype, as if the culture of South Asia is confined to religious life. Following the gallery renovation, the South Asia section of *Gallery 33* now incorporates more diverse objects, not only those made in India; the display of the pieces of Ming-Qing porcelain is exemplary of this. In the showcase *Cultural Interactions*, the pilgrim flask is juxtaposed with a Qing water pipe commissioned by Indian patrons and a Ming cloisonné ewer with an Indian-inspired shape (**Figure 1.23**). Also found in this showcase are shards of Ming porcelain from Gaur, one Indian city where Chinese officials from the Ming court were greeted (**Figure 1.24**). The label calls the pilgrim flask "Emperor Aurangzeb's moon-flask," placing emphasis on ownership:

> This Chinese moon-flask belonged to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (ruled 1658-1707). His name is inscribed at the bottom with the date 1660, the second year of his rule. The flask may have reached him through trade or as a diplomatic gift.

The identification of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb as owner indicates a process of identity-transformation that Ming porcelain underwent in Mughal India. In the words of the art historian Stacey Pierson, the flask is "no longer a 'Chinese' object in the possessive sense but rather an Indian object of Chinese origin."[112] However, this change of identity in terms of ownership becomes unnoticeable. The Aurangzeb inscription—a mark of personal ownership—is on the bottom of the flask and hidden from view by its arrangement.

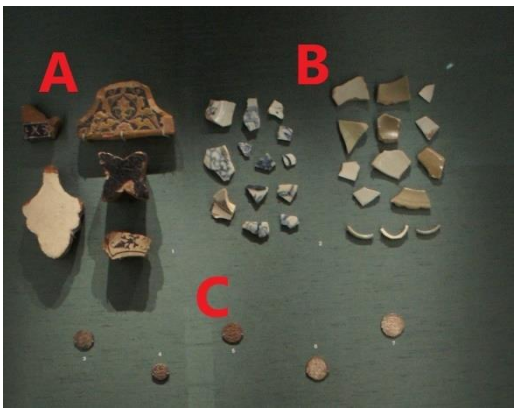

Figure 1.23 (left) A close look at the showcase *Cultural Interaction* in *Gallery 33*, South Asian section. Photographed by the author in 2017. From left to right: a Chinese Qing porcelain water pipe base (1662-1722); a Ming-Qing cloisonné ewer made for the Mughal market (1600s); and a Ming pilgrim flask
Figure 1.24 (right) A close look at the showcase *Cultural Interaction* in *Gallery 33*, South Asian section. A: Five pieces of tiles in Gaur (ca. 1400). B: Shards of Ming porcelain from Gaur. C: Coins from Gaur (13th to 15th century)

[112] Pierson, *From Object to Concept*, 39.

The Mughal Empire witnessed the prosperity and decline of Ming China and went on to behold a time of thriving European maritime powers, with their ambitious schemes for trade and colonization. The Portuguese were the first navigators to sail directly to India from Europe, and they settled in Goa, Malacca, and Macao. From these places, tons of Chinese porcelain were transported to Lisbon. In 1571, the Spaniards established their headquarters in Manila, on the west coast of the Philippines, where South American silver was transported in exchange for Chinese silk, cotton, and porcelain. The Netherlands greeted their Golden Age in the seventeenth century, a greeting that coincides with the founding of the Dutch East India Company (the VOC, founded in 1602). Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, more than three million Chinese porcelain pieces were transported from Batavia, the Company's headquarters in Asia, to Amsterdam.[113] The English East India Company (the EIC, founded in 1600) thereafter took over the VOC to become the dominant sea power in the eighteenth century. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, sails and charts of Europeans progressively spread wherever profits were called. On this grand stage of history, a late Ming pilgrim flask traveled far across the oceans, and it is now on view in the British Museum's *Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800*. This section has shown that the placements of Ming pilgrim flasks in the Chinese and Indian sections of *Gallery 33* suggest a change in the flasks' identity—from Chinese/Ming to Indian/Mughal—in the possessive sense. Below, I will discuss how the display of a late-Ming pilgrim flask in the museum's gallery of Europe indicates another process of identity-transformation in terms of possession: from Chinese/Ming to European.

1-2-2 Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800

Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800 shows how encounters with Africa, America, and Asia generated profound social changes and artistic developments in Europe. To speak specifically of the massive wall case where a piece of Ming pilgrim flask is on display, it reveals how European trading companies acted as go-betweens, reshaping the European worldview through contacting, and consuming, Others (**Figure 1.25**).

Groups of objects in this wall case are organized into four bays, each with a thematic topic: *Northern Sea Trade*; *Impact of the East*; *Trade and Territory*; and *Distant Worlds Made Tangible*. Since these four bays are separated only by thin sheets of glass, they seem more like a continuous story than four unconnected themes: from regional maritime commerce to overseas trade, and then back to the domestic context to show how the vast distances between Europe and the outside world were compressed by collecting. The Ming pilgrim flask is placed in the second bay, *Impact of the East*. Considered in association with the other objects displayed in the wall case, the Ming flask is readily identified as a possession of Europeans, or to use Russell Belk's words, the Ming flask becomes an "extended self" of Europeans.[114]

According to Belk, the concept of 'extended self' is comprised of "not only that which is seen as 'me' (the self), but also that which is seen as 'mine'."[115] It enables one to define who one is by what one

[113] T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 22, 227.
[114] Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *The Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (1988): 139-168.
[115] Ibid., 140. To possess an object means to invest our time, efforts, and attention in it, and these investments may transform it into property that can serve to fashion a desirable self-image. Emerging in the seventeenth century, property became a central way for Europeans to conceptualize an ideal selfhood, and this mode of

possesses. This is not limited to the individual dimension, but extends to "a hierarchical arrangement of levels of self, because we exist not only as individuals, but also as collectivities."[116] For the present discussion of how this Ming pilgrim flask is displayed in a way that makes it an aspect of 'extended self' for Europeans, two levels of Self can be identified: individual (Philip II, King of Spain and Portugal, 1527-1598) and cultural group (the European traders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially the English, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese). Which level of Self is identified depends on which vantage point is selected to view the Ming flask and its relations to the other materials on display.

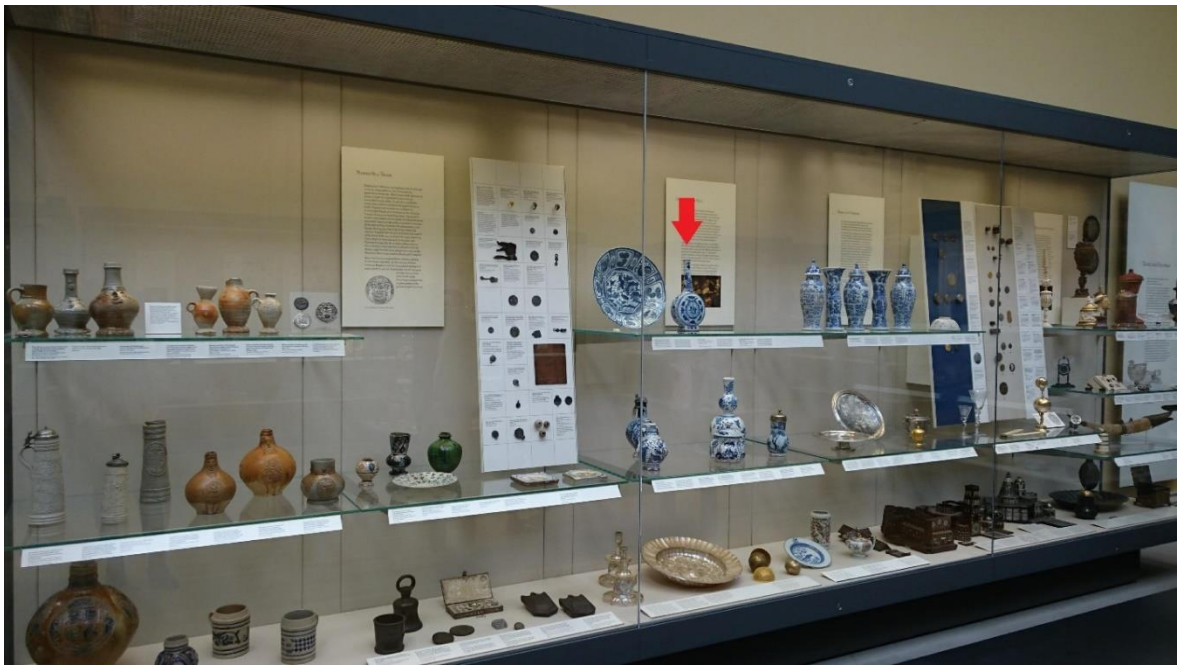

Figure 1.25 View of the wall case in *Gallery 46 Europe 1400-1800* with a Ming pilgrim flask (where the red arrow points). Photographed by the author in 2019

To start off, let us take a closer look at the flask. In the second bay, *Impact of the East*, the flask is combined with other Chinese and Indian products made for the European markets and some pieces of Dutch and British earthenware in Chinese-style to exemplify the "Oriental mania" in seventeenth-century Europe, as is indicated by the caption (**Figure 1.26**). Compared to the Ming flasks shown in the Chinese and Indian sections of *Gallery 33* discussed above, this Ming flask in *Gallery 46* has a particularly tall neck and its foot is trapezoidal. Its unique shape is considered to be inspired by "a Near or Middle Eastern metal prototype," like, for example, the brass pilgrim flask, which was probably made in the Indian provinces of the Ghurid empire (around 879-1215), now on display in the museum's *Gallery 42 The Islamic World* (**Figure 1.27**).[117]

conceptualization was facilitated by the expansion of trading networks. See Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[116] Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," 152.

[117] Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos, *Global by Design: Chinese Ceramics from the R. Albuquerque Collection* (London: Jorge Welsh Research & Publishing, 2016), 106.

Figure 1.26 (left) View of the *Impact of the East* bay. On the top shelf: a Ming dish (left) and a Ming pilgrim flask (right, where the red arrow points). On the middle shelf: five pieces of seventeenth-century tin-glazed earthenware from England and the Netherlands. On the bottom shelf: two seventeenth-century Indian candlesticks and a basin made for the European market, and a gilded Indian Goa stone with two containers. Photographed by the author in 2019
Figure 1.27 (right) Brass pilgrim flask inlaid with silver. Ghurid dynasty, ca. 1200. Height: 32 cm; Width: 22 cm. Collected in the British Museum, museum number: 1883,1019.7 (on display in *Gallery 42 The Islamic World*)

The way that the flask is arranged further shifts our attention from its Chinese origin to its European ownership. The side facing the visitor is decorated with a Spanish coat of arms showing lions and castles, which is, according to the label, copied from coins minted during the reign of Philip II. The pattern on the other side of the flask, a landscape with a seated Chinese scholar and his servant, is neither visible nor mentioned (see **Figure 1.12**). As it was a personalized product and token of status of King Philip II, this Chinese flask can be re-identified and appropriated as Spanish/European, and is now categorized in the British Museum based on its location of consumption.

Standing a few paces away from the wall case, we can associate the Ming flask with the objects displayed in the third bay, *Trade and Territory*, the former seems to become a cartographic tool that situates the European sense of Self by mapping the European sphere of influence across the globe. The group of objects in the third bay maps out the overseas commercial circuit connecting Europe to Africa, America,

and Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (**Figure 1.28**). There is, to name just a few objects, a Qing porcelain garniture set; a broken Ming bowl salvaged from the large cargo of a Chinese junk wrecked in the South China Sea around 1643; a globe-shaped German cup engraved with a world map; two Dutch wine glasses engraved with sailing ships; a British seal-die with the arms of the Royal African Company; and a silver eight reales minted in Peru under the reign of the Spanish King Philip II, showing castles and lions just like the coat of arms on the Ming flask. The Ming pilgrim flask can be seen in combination with these objects, as it was also a trade good with exchange value. Together, they help materialize a sense of domination: the possession of objects from foreign lands and other cultures is a powerful assertion of national authority that expands beyond national boundaries.[118] The sense that the outside world became controllable for Europeans as their territorial boundaries were expanded by colonization and trade is also illustrated by a map alongside the *Trade and Territory* caption (**Figure 1.29**). On the face of it, the map shows a series of excavations of wrecked *East Indiamen* ships to demonstrate "the scale of the export trade," as the caption puts it. Yet, what is also suggested in this Eurocentric map of the world is, perhaps, how desires for material and power drove the expansion of European territories and spheres of influence.

If we step away a bit further, the Ming pilgrim flask can also be seen together with the objects in the fourth and final bay, *Distant Worlds Made Tangible* (**Figure 1.30**). With engraved gems and mother-of-pearl, and metal-mounted vessels made of coral, ivory, amber, and coconut, this part of the display recalls an archetypal cabinet of curiosities, in which various objects showcases a microcosm representation of the universe."[119] The caption reads:

> Distant Worlds Made Tangible
> The discovery of the New World and the development of contacts with Africa and the Far East revolutionized the way in which the world was perceived. The Natural World, as studied by Renaissance scientists, now encompassed rarities from exotic lands. Such rarities, whether natural (a coconut shell), or artificial (a Chinese porcelain bowl), were often mounted in silver and gold.

Organizing, categorizing, and mounting material collections, the cabinet of curiosities embodied a logic Europeans used to mirror the wider world in a microcosm, and to mediate the interrelation between binaries such as natural and artefactual, distance and intimacy, overseas and domestic, and intangible and tangible. The cabinet of curiosities to which this fourth bay of the wall case refers creates what the art historian Rebecca Duclos calls "a desired microcosm."[120] In this microcosm, "the collection worked in a map-like way to construct the world by first ordering it and then interpreting that order so as to create a sense of place within the uncharted expanse of the cosmos."[121]

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[118] See Sharon Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Journal of Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (2003): 3.
[119] Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990[1987]), 69.
[120] Rebecca Duclos, "The Cartographies of Collecting," in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. Simon J. Knell (London and New York: Routledge, 2004[1999]), 90.
[121] Ibid.

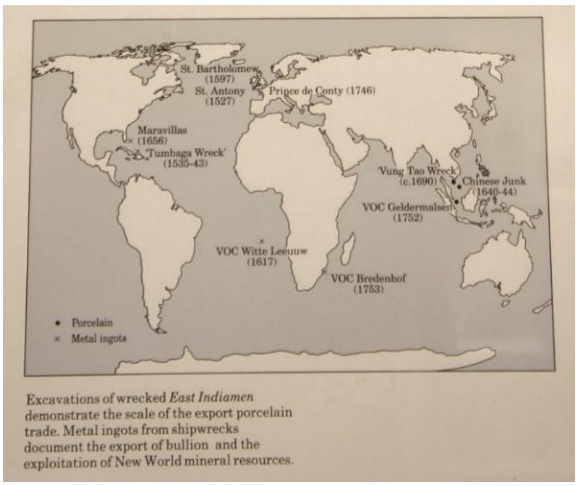

Figure 1.28 (left) View of the *Trade and Territory* bay. A: A Qing garniture set (1680-1690). B: A Ming bowl for the Southeast Asian market excavated from a Chinese junk wrecked in the South China Sea (around 1643). C: Two Dutch wine glasses engraved with sailing ships (ca. 1750). D: A silver eight reales minted in Peru under the reign of the Spanish King Philip II, showing castles and lions. Photographed by the author in 2019
Figure 1.29 (right) Map of Chinese porcelain trade attached to the *Trade and Territory* bay caption. Photographed by the author in 2019

Figure 1.30 View of three bays: A: *Impact of the East* (the red arrow points to the Ming pilgrim flask); B: *Trade and Territory*; and C: *Distant Worlds made Tangible*. Photographed by the author in 2019

The picture, *The Yarmouth Collection* (ca. 1665, also know as *The Paston Treasures*), featured with the *Distant Worlds Made Tangible* bay caption is also noteworthy in that it potentially secures a European sense of Self in terms of possession (**Figure 1.31**). This Dutch still life depicts a panoply of valuables assembled by the Paston family of Norfolk, in the United Kingdom. In the central foreground is a singing girl who is surrounded by objects both natural and artifactual. These objects include, just to name a few: a Chinese porcelain dish filled with a pink lobster, roses and fruits, a silver-gilt flagon decorated with shells, a monkey, a clock, and an enslaved person probably owned by the Pastons.[122] Intangible concepts of geographical distances are compressed by these tangible things crowded into an interior scene. The anthropologist David Howes refers to this painting as "an empire of the senses constituted by the best the world has to offer… In this microcosm earth, sea and sky are all symbolically present through representative objects and animals."[123] What is more, the sensory empire here is equally "a political empire:"

> Rich and rare sensations have been brought together from all over the world (as is suggested by the presence of the globe). Not just artefacts and plants, but also animals and humans form part of this empire. […] We see here that everything has been displaced from its original setting and brought together to form a new world order.[124]

Featuring this still life in the bay caption of *Distant Worlds Made Tangible* is suggestive in that it contributes to securing the European ownership of the objects placed in this bay and, more broadly speaking, in this wall case, including the Ming pilgrim flask. Or, put differently, the objects on display here become components of a sensory/political empire built upon the European ownership and accumulation of objects from around the world.

Figure 1.31 *The Yarmouth Collection*, Dutch School, ca. 1665. Oil on canvas. Height: 165 cm; Width 246.5 cm. Collected in the Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery. Accession number: NWHCM: 1947.170

[122] For a detailed survey of the symbolic meanings of the objects in *The Yarmouth Collection*, see Robert Wenley, "Robert Paston and the Yarmouth Collection," *Norfolk Archaeology* 41, no. 2 (1991): 113-144.
[123] David Howes, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 13.
[124] Ibid.

Using the phrase *Distant Worlds Made Tangible*, and the ideas evoked by this phrase, as a kind of closing remark in the wall case, is equally suggestive. Conceivably, the phrase encourages an affiliation with the displays in the previous bays, and in this way a continuous storyline unfolds in parallel with a flow of material goods: exotic commodities transported along trade routes towards Europe, where their tangible presence evoked overseas voyages and experiences of exploration; they might then be collected in a domestic cabinet, wherein they were possessed and appropriated as a way for Europeans to map and grasp the world. Arguably, the arrangement in the wall case reveals an object-biographical approach to display, through which the identity-transformation of the objects, such as the Ming pilgrim flask, is traceable.

The association between European self-fashioning and Chinese porcelain is even more conspicuous in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which will be analyzed in the next chapter. For the moment though, I will move on to contextualize trans-border arrangement in terms of the global turn in art history.

1-3 The Global Turn in Art History and Transcultural Presentation in the Museum Space

The trans-border arrangement of Ming pilgrim flasks in the British Museum indicates that these objects are components of the material culture of Ming China and many other cultural groups that have participated in the creation of their object biographies. Tracing the trans-border arrangement of Ming pilgrim flasks in the British Museum's Asian and European galleries, walking past its combination of various objects, replicates in our act the dissemination of Ming porcelain on an interregional scale (in Eurasia).[125] This reenactment, one that foregrounds the narrative of transculturation would have been hard to imagine just a few decades ago. Based on his curatorial experience in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in the 1980s, the art historian Craig Clunas points out that it would have inevitably aroused disputes if an object was not displayed according to its provenance.[126] For example, Chinese objects would not have been placed in the Japanese gallery, and no European products would have been found in the gallery of the Middle East—no matter how closely interconnected these regions have been for thousands of years via transfers of people and materials. Such a production-based categorization of museum collections, however, has been called into question in both academia and curatorial practices.

1-3-1 Art History from a Global Perspective: Boundaries in Question

The word global in the global turn in art history generally refers to a pluralistic transcultural perspective rather than a comprehensive geographical scope.[127] Here, I do not take the historian Bruce Mazlish's use

[125] For the analogy between walking through a museum and thumbing through an art history book, see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (1980): 455.
[126] Craig Clunas, "Wuzhi wenhua—zai dongxi eryuanlun zhi wai" 物質文化—在東西二元論之外 [Material Culture Beyond the East/West Binary], *Xin Shixue* 新史學 [*New History*] 17, no. 4 (2006): 204.
[127] Gasparini, "Interview with Monica Juneja about Global Art History."

of the term global history to refer primarily to "the history of globalization" in "a new global epoch" emerging roughly after the 1970s.[128] Following this idea, confines global (art) history to a contemporary development. Rather, I draw on the explanation of the historian Sebastian Conrad, who considers 'global history' not as a synonym for macro-history or the history of globalization, but as a perspective, or more specifically, "a heuristic device that allows the historian to pose questions and generate answers that are different from those created by other approaches."[129] As Conrad reminds us, global does not necessarily mean the de-bordered, "planetary totality of historical processes," but can also entail an approach that helps move beyond and reflect on established frameworks in the narrative of history.[130] Understanding global as a research perspective promises a particular way of looking at (art) history that focuses on dynamic processes of connection, circulation, and transformation. It thereby breaks out of compartmental thinking about cultures which is rooted in nationalism and the Eurocentric binary of Us and Others.[131]

This reading of global is aligned with the "notion of globality informed by a transcultural perspective" that Monica Juneja proposes. A transcultural perspective, according to Juneja, "works to re-define the units of art history, away from national frames and following the logic of the movement of agents, objects and practices."[132] Thus, the global turn in art history viewed from a transcultural perspective opens up questions about the validity of the preexisting categories into which the discipline has long been sorted. Could the discipline of art history be restructured in ways that move beyond such monolithic categories as period styles, empires, and nation-states and towards the historical-spatial networks underpinning ongoing patterns of cultural interaction? Could the history of art and material culture be organized by a de-territorialized, rather than a center-periphery model? How does a rethinking of the essentializing frames of art historical narrative help to unravel the possible ideological texture of the discipline?

These questions reveal how rethinking art history from a global/transcultural perspective often entails critical self-reflection on the ways the discipline has been constructed. Along the same lines, it often entails challenging static, homogeneous, and bounded ideas of culture. "We cannot," as the art historian Kitty Zijlmans points out, "unwrite the art history that has been written […] What we can do, and what has been happening for the past decade, is to reevaluate how art history has been written and question why it happened in such a way."[133] To do so, we need to unsettle the existing framing of art historical writing, "of its methods and descriptions of in- and exclusion."[134] Importantly, the purpose of

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[128] Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing Global History to World History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 3 (1998): 390-391.
[129] Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 11, 72.
[130] Ibid., 95.
[131] The global turn in art history not only seeks approaches to transcend the conventional boundaries of categorization. It also calls for enhancing interdisciplinary cooperation. See Kitty Zijlmans, "Pushing Back Frontiers: Towards a History of Art in a Global Perspective," *International Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2003): 203.
[132] Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…'," 480; Gasparini, "Interview with Monica Juneja about Global Art History."
[133] Kitty Zijlmans, "An Intercultural Perspective in Art History: Beyond Othering and Appropriation," in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 293.
[134] Kitty Zijlmans, "The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art System," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 149.

rethinking the disciplinary frame of art history is not to eliminate all forms of boundaries entirely, but to take all boundary conditions as a subject of investigation, rather than as a given fact. For the art historian Claire Farago, this means that we need to treat all boundary conditions as "porous and double-sided, strategically invested rather than natural or inevitable constructs."[135]

To think of cultural boundaries as porous rather than self-contained involves a shift in emphasis from vertical influence to horizontal circulation. The study of vertical artistic influence or diffusion is considered increasingly inadequate in light of the global turn in art history, as it often suggests a central-peripheral structure of thought that perpetuates a Eurocentric bias.[136] By contrast, viewing circulation as "a motor of transformation," as Juneja does, enables one to perceive an object's meaning as accumulating and transforming along with its displacement across porous boundaries, across points of production, exchange, and consumption.[137] Hence, a key part of approaching art history from a global/transcultural perspective is acknowledging the life history and alterity of an object, an object whose identity formation needs to be explored from multiple perspectives. The trans-border arrangement of the Ming pilgrim flasks in the British Museum, I propose, provides a promising example to demonstrate how museum presentation can explore and redraw the existing boundaries of art-historical categorization through the application of a transcultural approach.

There are undoubtedly many more ways for a museum to challenge homogeneous, bounded ideas of culture and cultural identity. The museum world today has seen efforts at spatial reorganization and collection re-contextualization, attempts to reflect on the existing modes of display and categorization. An interesting example is the research project *Objects in Transfer* (2012-2016), at the Museum für Islamische Kunst (Museum of Islamic Art) in Berlin, which has been practiced in the semi-permanent galleries of the museum since 2016. The idea of transculturation and its impact on unsettling the rigid cultural boundaries endorsed by the exclusive categories of museums is central to the project. The art historian Vera Beyer, who was the head of *Objects in Transfer*, points out: "We have explored connections and transfers of objects that are transcultural in the sense that they undermine current cultural categories—in this case that of Islamic art."[138] For objects with biographical trajectories crossing different cultural regions, the umbrella term *Islamic Art*—a religious category combined with the European concept of art—is obviously inadequate, because it constitutes "a process of delimitation of Christian from Islamic culture."[139] To enable audiences to trace the transfer of the selected objects, a number of interactive

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[135] Claire Farago, "The 'Global Turn' in Art History: Why, When, and How Does It Matter?" in *The Globalization of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review*, ed. Daniel Savoy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 307.

[136] For more about the difference between studies of diffusion or influence and studies of continuing circulations without implications of cultural hierarchies, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. eds., *Circulations in Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 2-3.

[137] Monica Juneja, "Circulation and Beyond—The Trajectories of Vision in Early Modern Eurasia," in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 60-61.

[138] Vera Beyer, "Beyond the Museum Walls. Questioning the Cultural Delimitation of 'Islamic Art' by Pointing to the Entanglement of Collections," in *Objects in Transfer: A Transcultural Exhibition Trail through the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin*, eds. Vera Beyer, Isabelle Dolezalek, and Sophia Vassilopoulou (Berlin: Museum für Islamische Kunst, 2016), 14-15. Online at: http://www.objects-in-transfer.sfb-episteme.de/document/Objects%20in%20Transfer.pdf [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[139] Ibid., 13. For more about the construction of the category Islamic art in art history discipline and the museum world, see Junod, et al., eds. *Islamic Art and the Museum: Approaches to Art and Archaeology in the Muslim World*.

installations are embedded in the galleries, including touchscreens, and a digital platform accessed through QR codes. There are also floor arrows pointing toward related objects housed in two other museums in Berlin, the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) and the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (Museum of Byzantine Art), where similar arrows point back in return. Such cross-references further encourage a tracing of cultural connections beyond the limits of museum walls.

Another promising strategy for (art) historians and curators to transcend a narrowly national perspective is a shift to working within larger interregional spaces, such as the seas and oceans which are filigreed with interregional trading networks.[140] The power of cultural boundaries has also been challenged by a number of museum studies looking for a more reciprocal relationship between museums and the communities around them.[141] Interregional and thematic frameworks indeed provide a logical approach for museums to go beyond a territorially-bound categorization. However, in addressing the question of "how the identity potentialities of the museum can be put to new use," the dominant cultural-geographical categories do not have to be entirely abolished.[142] As the art historian Mary Sheriff has pointed out, such divisions, which structure most museum galleries and art-historical narratives, "are surely heuristic necessities."[143] This is especially true in the case of the British Museum; for a museum that presents an extensive collection, a cultural-geographical framework is still immediately graspable, allowing visitors to navigate the gallery space easily.[144] The point here is to acknowledge that these boundaries are not mutually exclusive but porous, and museums can spatialize material circulations that transcend the existing borderlines by activating the trans-border movements of the objects they display. This further brings us to a critical point: recognizing that it is possible to cast a more positive light on the metaphor of museum-as-map, rooted in nineteenth-century imperialism and colonialism as it may be. The idea of mapping transcultural exhibition trails in this museum space prompts a reflection on the long-recognized role of museums as classificatory maps.

1-3-2 Rethinking the Role of the Museum as a Cartographic Tool

Collecting and mapping are both forms of territorialization. According to the political historian Benedict Anderson, both maps and museums were the "institutions of power" used by the colonial powers in

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[140] For example, between 2014 and 2015, the British Museum hosted the special exhibition *Connecting Continents: Indian Ocean Trade and Exchange*. This small exhibition presents objects from the museum's collection that cross cultural (also departmental) boundaries, including a nineteenth-century Indonesian boat model made of cloves from the Department of Asia and a Roman necklace made of South Asian sapphires and garnets from the Department of Greece and Rome. In addition to the Indian Ocean, the East Asian seas (specifically stretching from the Sea of Japan to the South China Sea) are another maritime space that has recently earned significant curatorial attention, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

[141] See Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," 1-16; Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, "Re-staging Histories and Identities," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 186-197; and Rhiannon Mason, "National Museums, Globalization, and Postnationalism: Imaging a Cosmopolitan Museology," *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 1 (2013): 40-64.

[142] Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," 6.

[143] Mary D. Sheriff, *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art Since the Age of Exploration* (Chapel Hill: The Universality of North Carolina Press, 2010), 1.

[144] Christopher Whitehead et al., eds., *Museums, Migration and Identity in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

Southeast Asia to imagine their dominions and secure the legitimacy through "a totalizing classificatory grid."[145] Indeed, the correspondence between curatorial and cartographic practices was established in imperial and colonial contexts. Rebecca Duclos argues that collecting and displaying objects seized from (and thus becoming a metonymy of) colonized lands was a metaphor for the collector's capacity as a colonizing power. These imperial assemblages, according to Duclos, have the "cartographic power" of securing the colonized in the colonizer's ownership.[146] Similarly, in characterizing the spatial nature of the ethnographic and natural-historical museums that emerged during nineteenth century, the museum scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill also notes the interweaving of collecting, mapping, and colonizing: "The drawing together of these objects from disparate parts of the world was as much a form of cartography as the drawing of a map [because they both are] a form of symbolic conquest."[147] The correspondence between collecting/displaying and mapping in a colonial context, therefore, lies much in the fact that they both provide a tangible presence to the intangible power of domination and manipulation. They both use the spatial trope of boundary to map out the binary distinction between the forceful Self (the colonizers, collectors, and cartographers) and the powerless Other (the colonized, collected, and mapped).

Certainly, a museum's role as cartographic tool, stemming from colonial contexts, needs to be revised to better reflect a more dynamic and fluid understanding of cultural identity in the postmodern world. For example, the cartographic role of museums has been adapted to explore how particular patterns of migration and migrant experience can be mapped in museum spaces, and in doing so, creates a more inclusive society.[148] Notably, certain objects, such as the Ming pilgrim flasks, are readily considered as migrants in the sense that they are "an expression of transregional connections and the exchange of techniques, thoughts, patterns, fashions and ideas."[149] Compared to the conception of the oneness of the world discussed earlier, the presentation of transculturation with objects that have transcultural lives seems more relevant to the British Museum's growing engagement with the idea of cultural exchange.

In fact, the exploration of a new cartographic metaphor is an especially urgent issue for the British Museum. Branding itself as a museum where the oneness of the world is exhibited, the museum sought to downplay, if not eliminate, its national/imperial aura. As MacGregor claims:

> It is a standing source of astonishment and amusement to visitors that the British Museum has so few British things in it, that it is a museum about the world as seen from Britain rather than a history focused on these islands.[150]

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[145] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006[1983]), 163, 184.
[146] Rebecca Duclos, "The Cartographies of Collecting," 86.
[147] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 18.
[148] See Whitehead et al., eds., *Museums, Migration and Identity in Europe*.
[149] Stefan Weber, "Preface," in *Objects in Transfer: A Transcultural Exhibition Trail through the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin*, eds. Vera Beyer, Isabelle Dolezalek, and Sophia Vassilopoulou (Berlin: Museum für Islamische Kunst, 2016), 5. Online at: http://www.objects-in-transfer.sfb-episteme.de/document/Objects%20in%20Transfer.pdf [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[150] Neil MacGregor, "Britain is at the Centre of a Conversation with the World," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/apr/19/comment.comment1 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

Indeed, the museum does not present a national narrative with a British collection as its main focus. However, this does not necessarily mean that the museum "has nothing to do with national ownership."[151] On the contrary, I agree with Craig Clunas' argument that "The 'British Museum' could never be restricted to British things, for to do so would set a limit to the reach of British power, as well as to the gaze of the all-comprehending and autonomous subject."[152]

This all-comprehending gaze points to what the political theorist Timothy Mitchell calls "the world as an exhibition."[153] Focusing on the great nineteenth-century exhibitions in Europe, Mitchell argues that the world-as-exhibition suggests a particular mode of seeing; that is, the Europeans acted as beholders with a detached, privileged point of view to see the world organized and grasped as an exhibition—to make sense of the "external reality" presented before their eyes in a seemingly objective form.[154] Such a Euro-centric, privileged view, according to Sharon Macdonald, was often materialized through the "central atria" that many nineteenth-century European museums had.[155] Notably, such an ideologically-laden central atrium is now found in the British Museum: The Great Court of the British Museum is crowned with the inscription "AD 2000 This Great Court Celebrating the New Millennium Is Dedicated to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II" (**Figure 1.32**). The Great Court provides a vantage point from which an imperial sense of the world-as-exhibition is suggested physically and metaphorically. This sense is also visualized in the museum's floor map on which the Great Court is surrounded by the galleries representing areas of the world (see **Figure 1.2**).

Figure 1.32 British Museum's Great Court with the inscription "AD 2000 This Great Court Celebrating the New Millennium Is Dedicated to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II." The British Museum Images, image ID: 01613552871. © The Trustees of the British Museum

[151] MacGregor, "To Shape the Citizens of 'That Great City, the World'," 54.
[152] Craig Clunas, "China in Britain: The Imperial Collection," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1998), 43.
[153] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1988), 10.
[154] Ibid., 21.
[155] Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," 4.

The idea of the oneness of the world reflects an objectifying, world-as-exhibition gaze. By comparison, the mapping of a transcultural narrative through the trans-border arrangement of objects that have global lives (e.g. Ming pilgrim flasks) corresponds to an ideological position of loosening or transcending Self-Other boundaries, with emphasis on the shifting of subject-positions and mutual permeability of cultures. This, in my opinion, could help transform the British Museum into a place to communicate that, to quote Fischer, "human history was driven and has always been driven by exchange, by cultures communicating."[156]

Conclusion: Beyond a Universal Container

The trans-border arrangement of the Ming flasks analyzed in this chapter shows the British Museum's potential to accommodate and project the narrative of transculturation into its spatial configuration, to be a place where different narrative frameworks (chronological and synchronic, cultural and transcultural) can coexist and complement each other. Such coexistence can help tell more dynamic stories of cultural connection and enable a more dynamic reading of the museum's collections. It also helps move the museum beyond its age-old foundation of universalism by calling attention to the inadequacy of classifying an object based merely on its place of origin, by acknowledging the fluid and plural identities that an object might have accumulated throughout its life history.

We have seen regarding the Ming pilgrim flasks in their trans-border arrangement is how such a display scheme can foreground cross-fertilization between regions and thus potentially dismantle the obsolete Self-Other boundary and bounded cultural identities. In this sense, trans-border arrangement and the accompanying narrative of transculturation can aptly approach one of the main objectives of the British Museum today: that is, to become a place where global interconnections can be illuminated. However, it should be noted that the trans-border arrangement in the museum is currently quite challenging for audiences to trace, or even to notice, because of the lack of clear instructions. How does the museum encourage a more dynamic reading of its collection pieces on display so as to fulfill its vision today? There are a number of object trails accompanied by leaflets that already incorporate galleries in the British Museum: around the themes of, for example, empire and colonial exploitation, and LGBTQ history.[157] Conceivably, if there is a transcultural exhibition trail with selected objects with global biographies (e.g. Ming pilgrim flasks) acting as 'gateways' to a culturally entangled world, a visit to the British Museum can potentially become a voyage towards a transcultural outlook.[158] In the next chapter, I

[156] Higgins, "Interview British Museum Director Hartwig Fischer."
[157] For the object trails in the British Museum today, see: https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[158] The word gateway here is used on purpose in order to evoke the idea of "gateway objects" which the British Museum adopted in 2006 to structure a more comprehensible interpretative model in its semi-permanent galleries. Gateway objects refer to a group of carefully chosen objects that act as gateways to larger themes. They are usually arranged in a way that can effectively grab audiences' attention—for example, in the center of a display case or at the entrance of a gallery—in order to tell an overarching story of that showcase or that gallery. The gateway objects approach was proposed by the British Museum's interpretation team, established in 2005. See Jane Batty et al., "Object-Focused Text at the British Museum," *Exhibition* 36, no. 1 (2016): 70-80.

will shift the focus to another intriguing national museum, where the glorious past shared by a specific group of people, the Dutch, is staged; namely, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

CHAPTER 2 Self-Fashioning: The Multiple Values of Chinese Porcelain in the Rijksmuseum

A heroic past […] is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.

Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation?*

Introduction: Chinese Porcelain Across Departmental Boundaries

Opened in 1885, the Rijksmuseum is essentially different from many national museums, which are characterized as national only because they are maintained directly or indirectly by central governments and most of their funding comes from national budgets.[159] Beyond these premises, the Rijksmuseum is a museum for the nation because it contributes to the construction of a unified national identity defined by former glories through the combination of art and history.[160] The museum was built to be a landmark of Dutch nation-building during the nineteenth century, and it continues to be an emblematic embodiment of Dutch nationhood today. This makes the museum a special case in the museum world, where reshaping national identities and restaging national histories with a multicultural or transcultural perspective is very much en vogue. So, how does such a Dutch national monument present china?

Today, the Rijksmuseum has three curatorial departments: The Department of Prints and Drawings, the Department of History, and the Department of Fine and Decorative Arts.[161] Both the

[159] The formation of the present-day Rijksmuseum relates to its three predecessors, established respectively by three regimes that characterized the Netherlands across the nineteenth century: Nationale Kunstgalerij (the National Art Gallery, founded in 1800 by the Batavia Republic); Koninklijk Museum (the Royal Museum, founded in 1808 by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the king of the Kingdom of Holland); and the Rijks Museum in the Trippenhuis (founded in 1815 by the United Kingdom of the Netherlands). The political confrontations between the House of Orange and its opponents had brought about the history of the Rijksmuseum complex roots in both The Hague and Amsterdam before today's museum building designed by the Dutch architect Pierre J. H. Cuypers (1827-1921) was completed in 1885. This tortuous path has been articulated in many texts concerning the history of the Rijksmuseum and the gradual process through which the museum became associated with the formation of national identity. See, for example: Ellinoor Bergvelt, "Potgieter's 'Rijksmuseum' and the Public Presentation of Dutch History in the National Museum (1800-1844)," in *Free Access to the Past: Romanticism, Cultural Heritage and the Nation*, eds. Lotte Jensen, Joep Leerssen, and Marita Mathijsen (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 171-195.

[160] Mary Bouquet, *Museums: A Visual Anthropology* (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 42.

[161] Referring to the Rijksmuseum's organization chart: https://rijks-web.azurewebsites.net/en/organisation/organisation-chart [Accessed January 20, 2021]. The Department of Fine and Decorative Arts manages three subsets of objects: Asian Arts, Craft, and Paintings and Sculpture.

Departments of History and Fine and Decorative Arts have collections of Chinese porcelain. This distribution relates to the history of the museum's collection of Chinese porcelain. There are two institutions that significantly contributed to the formation and expansion of the collection of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum: The Netherlands Museum for History and Art (Nederlands Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst, founded in 1875 in The Hague, and hereinafter referred to as the Netherlands Museum); and the Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst (The Society of Friends of Asian Art, founded in 1918 in Amsterdam. In 2018, the Society was granted the designation 'Koninklijk', meaning 'Royal', hence hereinafter referred to as the KVVAK).

The Netherlands Museum was established to advance public knowledge of applied art and design and the great history of the Netherlands.[162] It was merged into the Rijksmuseum in 1883, shortly before the Rijksmuseum officially opened its doors. This inclusion brought over a thousand pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and most of them are export porcelain of blue and white and polychrome.[163] The Netherlands Museum's Chinese and Japanese porcelain collection mostly came from the Dutch lawyer and sinologist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807). Royer's widow bequeathed her husband's collection to the Dutch sovereign (subsequently King) William I (1772-1843) in 1814, and in 1816, Royer's collection was put on display in the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (Royal Cabinet of Curiosities), a national museum founded by William I in The Hague.[164]

After the closure of the Royal Cabinet in 1883, the Royer collection was divided into two groups: ethnographic objects; and ornamented pieces of artistic interest.[165] The former was transferred to the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden.[166] The latter, including a large group of blue and white and polychromed Chinese and Japanese porcelain, was integrated into the Netherlands Museum and ended up in the Rijksmuseum (following the incorporation of the Netherlands Museum into the Rijksmuseum).[167] This division between ethnographic and decorative objects, according to the art historian Lieske Tibbe, shows how "Simple objects were categorized as 'ethnographic', and ornamented pieces made of precious materials, as 'art'."[168] The transfer of richly decorated objects into the Netherlands Museum was also related to the museum's focus on industry art and design. Notably, Chinese

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[162] Lieske Tibbe, "*Kunstkammer* Objects in Museums of Industrial Arts: Banishment of Useful Destination?," in *Specialization and Consolidation of the National Museum after 1830: The Neue Museum in Berlin in an International Context*, eds. Ellinoor Bergvelt et al. (Berlin: G+H Verlag, 2011), 187.

[163] A. L. den Blaauwen, "The Porcelain Collection in the Rijksmuseum," in *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, ed. Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1985), 29. In addition to the porcelain collection incorporated from the Netherlands Museum, the Rijksmuseum continuously received Chinese porcelain as gifts, purchased it, or borrowed on a long-term basis from other Dutch collectors throughout the twentieth century. For a detailed introduction to the collection history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum, see Jan van Campen, "History of the Collection," in *Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: The Ming and Qing Dynasties*, eds. Christian J. A. Jörg, and Jan van Campen (London: Philp Wilson, 1997), 11-23.

[164] Jan van Campen, *De Haagse Jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807) en Zijn Verzameling Chinese Voorwerpen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), 399.

[165] Tibbe, "*Kunstkammer* Objects in Museums of Industrial Arts" 185.

[166] Van Campen, *De Haagse Jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807)*, 52.

[167] Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 12.

[168] Tibbe, "*Kunstkammer* Objects in Museums of Industrial Arts," 185. For more about this division, see Rudolf Effert, *Royal Cabinets and Auxiliary Branches: Origins of the National Museum of Ethnography 1816-1883* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2008), 227-236.

and Japanese porcelain was transferred to the Netherlands Museum not only because of its artistic qualities but also because of its artistic inspiration for the manufacture of Dutch ceramics.[169]

In 1927, the Rijksmuseum's director, Frederik Schmidt-Degener (in office 1921-1941), ended the Netherlands Museum's role as an independent organization within the Rijksmuseum and divided its collection into two departments: The Department of History and the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art.[170] For most of the twentieth century, as the first and second sections of this chapter will illustrate, Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum was displayed in the galleries of these two Departments, imbued with values as both a historical record of Dutch maritime power and a home decoration showing Dutch taste in interior design. In 1977, an assortment of Chinese porcelain from the Dutch VOC shipwreck *De Witte Leeuw* (which sank in 1613 and was excavated in 1976) was incorporated into the collection of the Department of History and was later put on display.

The KVVAK was established by a group of Dutch collectors and connoisseurs who had an enthusiasm for collecting and studying Asian objects, especially items not made for export but for Asian local markets.[171] Their collections were mainly comprised of objects from East Asia (especially China, Japan, and Korea) and South and Southeast Asia (especially India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka). This collection field overlaps a geo-cultural field, roughly from British India to Japan, which was labelled 'Asia' in early twentieth-century Europe.[172] When the KVVAK was founded, its members included those who were interested in theology and valued Asian art as a source of wisdom in life.[173] Under the efforts of the KVVAK's founder, Herman Visser (1890-1965), and its first chairman, Herman Westendorp (1868-1941), the Society shifted its focus from "sfeer [atmosphere]" and "stemming [mood]" towards the aesthetic and art-historical values of Asian art in the 1920s.[174]

The members of the KVVAK were endeavoring to distinguish (the European-defined category of) 'fine art', which is valued for its own sake and beauty, from 'applied art', which serves practical and decorative functions, and sought to assemble a collection that could reflect their taste in the former

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[169] Barbara Laan, "Kunstnijverheid en interieur in het Nederlandsch museum voor geschiedenis en kunst in het Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Ontstaan en opheffing van de cultuurhistorische presentatie 1875-1927," *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Interieurgeschiedenis* 39, (2014-2016): 97 (note 84).

[170] This division was based on the suggestion of the Rijkscommissie [National Advisory Committee] on the reorganization of the museum industry in the Netherlands. This committee was set up by the Dutch government in 1918 and Schmidt-Degener was one of the members. See See J. P. Sigmond, "Museale presentaties van de Nederlandse Geschiedenis in het Rijksmuseum. Inleiding optwee studies" [Presentations of Dutch History in the Rijksmuseum. Introduction to Two Studies], *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 45, no. 4 (1997): 262-264.

[171] Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 19.

[172] Ibid. According to the KVVAK's founder, Herman Visser, the Society's collection of Asian art is comprised of two groups: the first is "Indian Art together with its many menations," such as Thailand and Indonesia, and the second is "Far Eastern Art, which contains the works of China, Japan and Korea." Visser also explains the missing of art of West Asia in the Society: "Aspects of Near Eastern Art differ sharply from those of that widely scattered area including Indian and East Asiatic art; the reasons for divergence lie in cultural, technical and artistic grounds." See Herman F. E. Visser, *Museum van Aziatische Kunst in het Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: Catalogus* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1952), 8.

[173] Jan van Campen, "Honderd jaar Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst," *Aziatische Kunst* 48, no. 2 (2018): 17-18.

[174] Ibid., 18.

category.[175] The aim of the Society was not to present an extensive overview of Asian art, but rather to "focus on the acquisition of a select group of objects that exemplified a particular region, style, type or period."[176] The Society contributed significantly to the expansion of the Dutch collection of various types of Asian objects; whether porcelain, ceramics, paintings, bronze vessels, tomb figures, jewelry, or religious statues, they are now grouped together, and evaluated and studied (but also generalized) as fine art.

In 1932, the Society's Museum for Asian Art was opened within the Tuinzaal (Garden Hall) on the ground floor of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[177] It was the first public museum for Asian art in the Netherlands. [178] In 1952, the Museum for Asian Art was integrated into and displayed in the Rijksmuseum.[179] This incorporation facilitated the establishment of a new Department of Asian Art in 1965, and in 1972 the Society decided to loan their collection to the Rijksmuseum long-term. In 1990, the management of the collection of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum's Department of Sculpture and Applied Art was transferred to the museum's Department of Asian Art.[180]

The collection and presentation history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum attaches multiple values to china. This chapter sets out to explore the decorative, historical, aesthetic, art-historical, and most of all, symbolic properties that have been attributed to Chinese porcelain between the 1930s and today. The decade of the 1930s was a significant time for the Rijksmuseum. Under the directorship of Schmidt-Degener, the Rijksmuseum of the 1930s had just undergone a major reconfiguration in terms of spatial organization and display perspective. This reconfiguration aimed at enhancing aesthetic experience (for Schmidt-Degener, a museum should be a place "waar de schoonheid spreekt [where beauty speaks]") and providing a more coherent and clear narrative of Dutch national development attuned to "patriotically-minded."[181] As I will explain in this chapter, the presentation of Chinese porcelain

[175] For more about the establishment of the KVVAK as well as its vision and collection field, see Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1985).
[176] Menno Fitski, Anna Aleksandra Ślączka, and William Southworth, "A Pavilion for Asian art in the new Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," *The Portrait* 64, (2013): 56; see also Menno Fitski and Anna Aleksandra Ślączka, "A New Pavilion for Asian Art at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," *Arts of Asia* 43, no. 3 (2013): 134.
[177] Scheurleer, *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, 15.
[178] The very first museum for Asian art in the Netherlands was the Nederlandsch Museum voor Oost-Aziatische Kunst (Netherlands Museum for East Asian Art), a private museum founded in 1920 in Amsterdam. This museum, later renamed the Yi Yuan Museum, was based on the collection mainly of the sinologist Raphaël Petrucci (1872-1917). For more about the Nederlandsch Museum voor Oost-Aziatische Kunst, see Marie Yasunaga, "How to exhibit the un-exhibitable. Karl With and the Yi Yuan Museum of Eduard von der Heydt in Amsterdam," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 65, no. 1 (2015): 321-353.
[179] Scheurleer, *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, 22.
[180] Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 23.
[181] See Ger Luijten, "'De veelheid en de eelheid': een Rijksmuseum Schmidt-Degener" ['The multitude and the rarity': The Rijksmuseum Schmidt-Degener], *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 35, no. 1 (1984): 354; and Patricia Wardle, "Summaries," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 45, no. 4 (1997): 398. Schmidt-Degener made some changes in terms of display scheme that can be considered promotions of Dutch national identity. For example, he applied a nationalist approach to reorganizing the museum's painting collection: separating Dutch painting from that of other Europeans, and sorting pieces from the seventeenth century into a series of regional schools with certain masters singled out. See Ellinoor Bergvelt, "The Decoration Programmes of Cuypers' *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam," in *Specialization and Consolidation of the National Museum after 1830: The Neue Museum in Berlin in an International Context*, eds. Ellinoor Bergvelt et al. (Berlin: G+H Verlag, 2011), 311-321.

that Schmidt-Degener designed in the 1930s marked the beginning of appropriating Chinese porcelain into a token of Dutch civic pride and national prestige. This chapter will show that, throughout the twentieth century and up until today, Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum has been combined with Dutch objects of various types and attributed multiple values that contribute to the development of Dutch self-affirmation and national identity.

This chapter has three sections. Broadly, sections 2-1 and 2-2 demonstrate the incorporation of Chinese porcelain in the construction of an ideal Dutch self-image with specific reference to two schemes of juxtaposition: Dutch portraits and Chinese porcelain; and Dutch landscapes and Chinese porcelain. More specifically, section 2-1 explores the decorative and symbolic values attributed to Chinese porcelain in its juxtaposition with Dutch portraits found in the Rijksmuseum between the 1930s and today. Here, decorative value refers to the function of porcelain in Dutch home decoration; symbolic value refers to the display of porcelain to communicate meaning beyond its material quality, representing, for example, social status, national prestige, and identity.[182] This section shows how china is appropriated into the Dutch 'extended self'. The word appropriation here specifically refers to what the anthropologist James Carrier calls "the process by which a person establishes a relationship of identity with an object, makes it a possession."[183] I introduced the idea of the 'extended self', the idea that one's conception of Self extends beyond "what is me" to "what is mine," developed by Russell Belk, in the previous chapter, and it is key here as well.[184] Section 2-2 focuses on the combination of mapped landscapes of VOC fortresses and trading posts and pieces of Ming porcelain, including porcelain shards from *De Witte Leeuw*. This scheme of juxtaposition has been found in the Rijksmuseum since at least the 1980s and can still be found today. In this display scheme, Chinese porcelain is ascribed historical significance (acting as an important record for understanding Dutch historical events) and symbolic value, giving tangible presence to intangible ideas of Dutch leadership and a sphere of influence that extended beyond the Netherlands' national borders.

After the join of the KVVAK's collection in the Rijksmuseum in 1952, Chinese porcelain was imbued with a new meaning; it became a work of art, ascribable aesthetic and art-historical value. Here, aesthetic value refers to the visual and material qualities of porcelain that contribute to its significance as a work of art; art-historical value is highlighted when porcelain is framed in a historical sequence to illustrate the development of artistic styles.[185] Section 2-3 examines the discursiveness of the viewing environment of simplicity in which the Society's collection has been put on display. For the KVVAK and the curators of the Department of Asian Art, this style of viewing environment helps to de-mystify Asian objects and frame them as works of art. Beyond this intention, this section will also discuss how the separation of today's Asian Pavilion from the museum's main building inevitably creates a spatial narrative of cultural differentiation.

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[182] See Karin Ekström, "Symbolic Value," in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, ed. Dale Southerton (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2011), 1420-1421.
[183] James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 10.
[184] Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (1988), 139-168.
[185] See Alan H. Goldman, "Art Historical Value," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 1 (1993), 17-28.

2-1 Portrait and Porcelain: Embellishing Dutch Self-Image

Between 1887 and 1927, most of the Chinese and Japanese porcelain collection in the Rijksmuseum was stacked in a decorative manner on shelves in the Ceramic Hall, together with other porcelain and ceramics from the Netherlands, Italy, France, England, and Germany (**Figures 2.1-2.3**). At that time, the ground floor of the Rijksmuseum was allotted to the Netherlands Museum, and the Ceramic Hall was one of the galleries located on the Western side of the ground floor.[186] As the objects shown in the Ceramic Hall were generally grouped based on their places of production, the Ceramic Hall's layout encouraged a comparison of cultural-regional styles, echoing the Netherlands Museum's objective of improving public knowledge of applied art by enabling "the public to compare examples from abroad with original Dutch artefacts."[187]

Figure 2.1 View of the *Ceramic Hall* with ceramics and furniture, ca. 1905-1909. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: RMA-SSA-F-05481-1

[186] Between 1914 and 1917, the Ceramic Hall also displayed a collection of Chinese Zhangzhou ware on loan from the Dutch mining engineer Reinier Dirk Verbeek (1841-1926). Verbeek's collection was moved and displayed in the Princessehof Museum in Leeuwarden in 1919 and was donated by his heirs to the Princessehof Museum in 1929. See Eline van den Berg, "The Princessehof Collection of Chinese Ceramics from the Former Dutch East Indies," *Journal for Art Market Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 1-15.
[187] Tibbe, "*Kunstkammer* Objects in Museums of Industrial Arts," 186-187.

Figure 2.2 Shelf with Chinese and Japanese porcelain vases in the Ceramic Hall, ca. 1914-1926. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011939

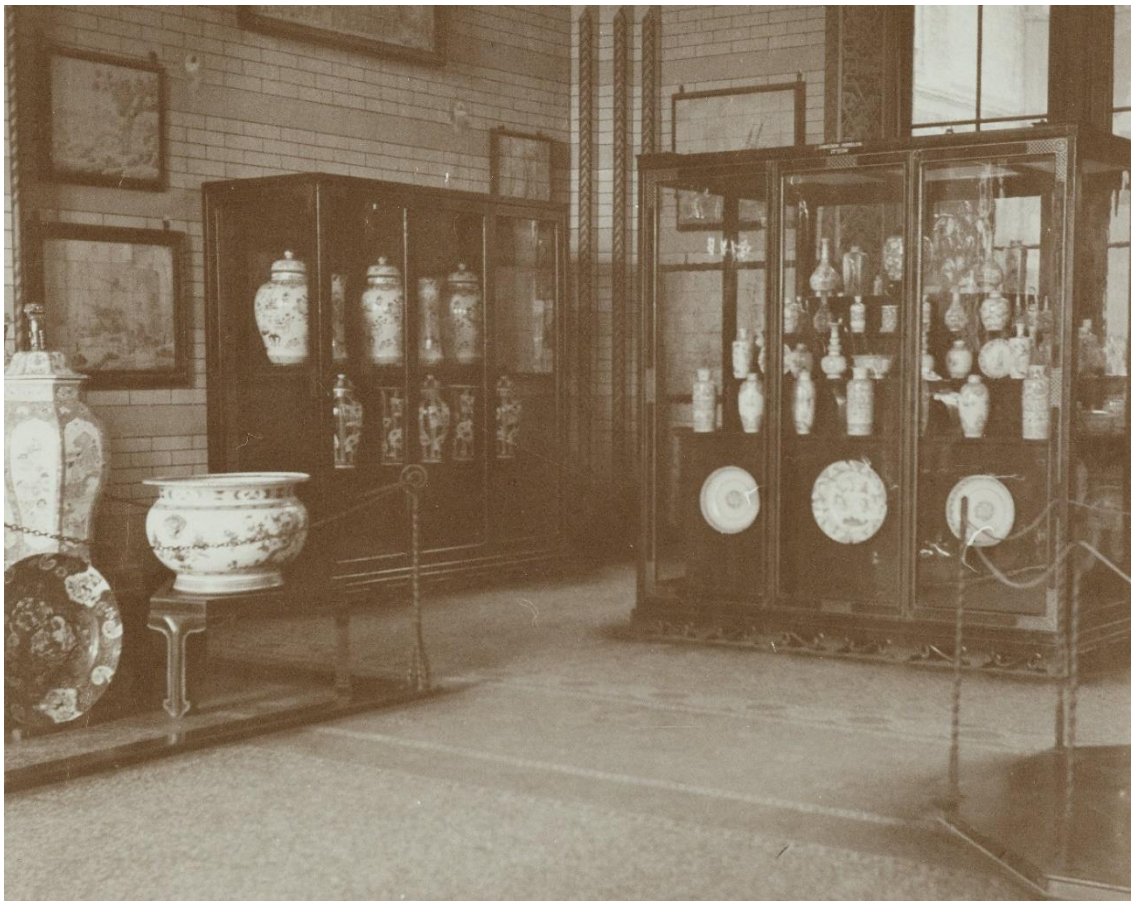

Figure 2.3 View of the Ceramic Hall with Delftware tiles (hanging on the walls) and two showcases with Chinese porcelain (including pieces from the Royer collection), 1926. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: RMA-SSA-F-00126-1

It was not until Frederik Schmidt-Degener was appointed as the new director of the Rijksmuseum in 1921 that the display of Chinese porcelain became indicative of Dutch civic pride and national prestige. Schmidt-Degener, who had studied art history in Paris and Berlin, was a supporter of the German museum reform movement at the turn of the twentieth century. He was deeply inspired by the new display strategy the German museum reformer Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929) had advocated: that is, mixing objects made of different materials to create eye-catching juxtapositions.[188]

For von Bode, classifying collections into types, such as paintings, sculptures, furniture, and decorative arts, was not an effective way to grab the attention of visitors. Therefore, during his curatorship in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (which later became the Bode Museum) in Berlin in the early twentieth century, von Bode experimented with "a modified form of the period room" in which various objects made of diverse materials but in one particular period (e.g. renaissance) were assembled in a well-spaced layout to evoke the period's style.[189] Such a mixed display made references to private settings, evoking "the atmosphere of the private houses of the collectors where the objects had been before they entered the museum."[190] Notably, as the art historian Andrew McClellan points out, von Bode's mixed display not only was visually appealing but also had the potential to incite patriotic sentiment as it "captured regional characteristics threatened by the homogenizing pressure of modernization."[191] The evocation of a domestic interior in public museums was considered able to encourage the general public to appreciate and take pride the taste of the nation.[192]

Below, I will explore the patriotic implication of Schmidt-Degener's collocation of Dutch portraits (more specifically, group/family portraits of Amsterdam regents and Dutch VOC staffs) alongside Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum's *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall* and *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*. *Gallery 364* was ready in 1923 and *Gallery 344* around 1932, and the mixed arrangements in these two galleries were clearly inspired by von Bode's style of display.[193] These

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[188] Malcolm Baker, "Bode and Museum Display: The Arrangement of the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum and the South Kensington Response," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 38, (1996): 143-153; Luijten, "'De veelheid en de eelheid'," 354. Before appointed as the Rijksmuseum's director, Schmidt-Degener was the director of the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam between 1908 and 1921. In the Boymans Museum, Schmidt-Degener also enacted mix arrangement following Wilhelm von Bode's idea. See Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2004), 66-85.

[189] Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800-2000* (New Heaven and London: Tale University Press, 2009), 55. See also Wilhelm von Bode, "The Berlin Renaissance Museum," *The Fortnightly Review* 50, (1891): 506-515.

[190] Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 65.

[191] Andrew McClellan, ed., *Art and Its Public: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 16.

[192] Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), 159. The more elaborate period rooms seen in today's museums in the United States, inspired by von Bode's mixed rooms, are also considered capable of raising patriotic sentiment. See R. T. H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of our Ancestors, as shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1925), xxii.

[193] Schmidt-Degener also designed mixed arrangements in other galleries of the Rijksmuseum. For example, between 1925 and 1939, the *Gallery of Honor* presented seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, furniture, and pieces of Delftware collected by John Francis Loudon (1821-1895).

arrangements were roughly maintained until the Rijksmuseum was temporarily shut down in 1939 because of World War II.

2-1-1 Home Decoration and the Fashioning of an Ideal Self

During the late period of the directorship of Barthold W.F. van Riemsdijk (in office 1897-1921), the predecessor of Schmidt-Degener, the Rijksmuseum received an important collection from Dutch collector Jean Charles Joseph Drucker (1862-1944) and his wife Mary Lydia Drucker-Fraser. It was mainly made up of paintings of the Hague School (on loan to the museum in 1904) and a pair of eighteenth-century Chinese Qing black square vases, also known as the *Druckervazen* (the Drucker vases, on loan to the museum in 1906) (**Figure 2.4**).[194] A prerequisite for receiving these exquisite collections was that the Rijksmuseum had to provide an exclusive space to show the collection.[195] To this end, the Drucker Wing opened stage by stage between 1909 and 1919.[196] In the Drucker Wing, the Druckers' collection of paintings was hung in a modern, symmetrical style. However, due to risky transportation following World War I and the Rijksmuseum's waning interest in porcelain at the time, the placement of the porcelain was delayed.[197] It was not until Schmidt-Degener became the new director-general that this situation changed.

Schmidt-Degener expressed great appreciation for the quality of the Druckers' porcelain collection.[198] He followed the condition set by Drucker, in which the collector emphasized that his porcelain collection was meant to be shown as a decoration of the interior rooms hung with paintings.[199] Hence, Schmidt-Degener constructed an eighteenth-century domestic space in *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall* by incorporating a Rococo-style staircase and a half-dome shaped imitative stucco ceiling decorated with leaves and blossomy flowers that had been removed from an eighteenth-century Rotterdam patrician house (**Figure 2.5**).[200] In *Gallery 364*, some Asian tapestries or carpets covered the floor; the pair of black square vases that Drucker loved were put on a Rococo console table with a Chinese flower wall-covering as background (see **Figure 2.4**); and other Chinese blue and white and famille verte porcelain, also from the Drucker collection, was framed in several Rococo-style wall cabinets with acanthus decorations, wherein they were arranged symmetrically on the scrolled brackets (**Figure 2.6**). There was also a wall case with a decorative frame showing pieces of Chinese porcelain and silverwork such as plates, ewers, and candlesticks (**Figure 2.7**). The balanced composition of Chinese porcelain in these cabinets coincided with the decorative traditions that flourished in Dutch interiors during the late seventeenth century.[201] Drucker was satisfied with the gallery design. As a result, the Drucker vases were gifted to the

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[194] Jan Van Campen, "Londense Aankopen van J.C.J. Drucker," *Aziatische Kunst* 38, no.4 (2008): 22.
[195] Ibid.
[196] After 2013, the Drucker Wing was renamed the Philips Wing and mainly hosted special exhibitions.
[197] Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 16.
[198] Ibid.
[199] As Van Campen notes, displaying paintings together with porcelain was common in early twentieth-century Europe, see Ibid.
[200] E. P. Engel, "Het ontstaan van de verzameling Drucker-Fraser in het Rijksmuseum," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 13, no. 2 (1965): 55.
[201] Graham McLaren, "Porcelain Rooms," in *Encyclopedia of Interior Design*, ed. Joanna Banham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 988.

Rijksmuseum in 1928, and following Drucker's will, his collection of more than a hundred pieces of Chinese porcelain was bequeathed to the museum roughly after 1944, and was incorporated in the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art.[202]

Figure 2.4 Drucker's black square vases in the center of *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall*, ca. 1920-1950. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0012062

Figure 2.5 View of *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall* with three display cabinets showing Chinese porcelain, and two portraits of Joseph Bouër and his wife Catherine Bégon hanging between the cabinets, ca. 1920-1950. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0012065

[202] Van Campen, "Londense Aankopen van J.C.J. Drucker," 22; F. J. Duparc, *Een eeuw strijd voor Nederlands cultureel erfgoed* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1975), 209.

Figure 2.6 (left) A close look at one of the porcelain cabinets in *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall*, ca 1920-1950. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0012069
Figure 2.7 (right) Wall case showing porcelain and silverware in *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall*, ca. 1920-1950. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0012057

The display in *Gallery 364* clearly features what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls *in-situ* installation. In-situ installations refers to such "mimetic re-creations of settings" as period rooms and dioramas.[203] However, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reminds us, no matter how innocent these in-situ installations seem to be (as if they do nothing more than faithfully re-locate an entire house interior into a museum gallery), they are not essentially "neutral" but rather intentionally constituted, or "performative."[204] With this in mind, I argue that the in-situ display in *Gallery 364* acts more than just a mimetic evocation of Dutch house interiors in the eighteenth-century. Rather, it serves the interest of Dutch self-fashioning, especially if one considers the portrait-porcelain juxtaposition in this gallery.

The possessor-possession relationship was foregrounded through the display of three portraits in this gallery. The portraits were: *Joseph Bouër* and his wife *Catherine Bégon* (both 1746) (**Figures 2.8-2.9**, see also **Figure 2.5** for their arrangement in *Gallery 364*), and *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family* (1763) (**Figures 2.10-2.11**).[205] The three portraits were set in their original carved frames in a Rococo style that was coordinated with the style of the gallery. It seems to me that these portraits were put on display not just

[203] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 3.
[204] Ibid., 20; see also Adrian Franklin, "Performing Live: An Interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett," *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 3 (2001): 215.
[205] These three portraits are not from the Drucker collection.

to provide an enriching visual experience, but also to visualize a sense of ownership. According to the 1931 Rijksmuseum gallery guide, "De wanden zijn versierd met portretten van menschen, die geleefd zouden kunnen hebben in deze vermenging van Europeesch Rococo en Chineesche gratie. [The walls are decorated with portraits of people who might have lived in this mixture of European Rococo and Chinese grace]."[206] In this context, the portrait-porcelain juxtaposition alluded to the possessor-possession relationship, in which Chinese porcelain was conceived as a status symbol, or the 'extended self', of the upper class represented by the portrayed people. In addition to this group level of identity (upper-class), the Chinese porcelain in this gallery also contributed to Dutch national identity, particularly when associated with the grand painting *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family*.

Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer (1720-1796/7) was born in Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC in Asia, and his father, Cornelis Hasselaer (1676-1737), was the director-general of the VOC in Batavia. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer left Batavia in 1772, a year after he had been appointed as a member of the VOC Ordinary Council of India in Batavia. After returning to the Netherlands, he became the burgomaster of Amsterdam between 1773 and 1794, and was elected as one of the managing directors of the VOC in 1777. His profound association with this multinational company is equally reflected in his first two marriages: his first wife, Clara Wendela Sautijn (1721-1756), was the daughter of the VOC director Willem Sautijn (1678-1731); his second wife, Geertruida Margaretha Mossel (1742-1768), was the daughter of Jacob Mossel (1704-1761), who was the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies from 1750 to 1761.[207] When the painting *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family* was created in Amsterdam in 1763, Hasselaer was actually in Batavia. Thus, this family portrait is an ideal representation in which the father far away in Batavia is reunited with his children in Amsterdam.[208]

Figure 2.8 (left) *Catherine Bégon* by Jean-Etienne Liotard, 1746. Drawing. Size: high 62.8 cm; width 49 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-233
Figure 2.9 (right) *Joseph Bouër* by Jean-Etienne Liotard, 1746. Drawing. Size: high 62.6 cm; width 49 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-232

[206] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen* [*Guide with Illustrations*] (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1931), 115.
[207] For more about the Hasselaer family and the painting *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family* by George van der Mijn, see J. F. L. de Balbian Verster, "Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer (1720-1797), zijn Indische loopbaan (1756-1772) en zijn burgermeesterchap (tot 1795)," *Jaarboek Amstelodadum* 28, (1931): 65-94; and Reinier Baarsen, Robert-Jan te Rijdt, and Frits Scholten, eds., *Nederlandse Kunst in Het Rijksmuseum 1700-1800* (Zwolle: Waanders; Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2006), 122-123.
[208] De Balbian Verster, "Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer (1720-1797)" 73-76.

Figure 2.10 *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family* by the George van der Mijn, 1763. Oil on canvas. Size: high 249 cm; width 288 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-1360

Figure 2.11 View of *Gallery 364 The Rotterdam Dome Hall* with a porcelain cabinet and the portrait *Mr. Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer and His Family*, ca. 1920-1950. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0012059

The arrangement of Pieter Cornelis Hasselaer's family portrait in *Gallery 364* was suggestive. The portrait is a large oil painting, measuring 314 centimeters high and 332 centimeters wide, including its gilt frame with carved flowers and arabesque. The painting was placed to allow audiences to appreciate the decorative style of the depicted interior and to compare it with the similar interior style of *Gallery 364* (see **Figure 2.11**). Potentially, this arrangement invited audiences to conceive of the picture surface as an imaginary interior space extending from the real gallery space, with the painting's beautiful frame acting as an interface to bridge the two spaces together.[209] Seen in this way, the cabinets of Chinese porcelain and the portrait of the Hasselaers were closely associated with each other, which enabled some interpretations. This collocation designed by Schmidt-Degener thus echoes one of the important characteristics of von Bode's mixed display; that is, it offers audiences "a wide range of possible associations" between the objects displayed in one room.[210] Considering the affiliation of Hasselaer with the VOC and the fact that Chinese porcelain was one of the goods that the VOC frequently shipped to the Netherlands via Batavia between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one possible interpretation that the portrait-porcelain combination in *Gallery 364* could render is to recall the merits and achievements of Dutch overseas expansion. From this perspective, the pieces of Chinese porcelain displayed in *Gallery 364* acted as a multivalent symbol imbued with not only decorative but also symbolic values linked to the nation of the Netherlands.

How Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum of the 1930s contributed to a Dutch self-fashioning shaped by possessiveness is equally seen, and is expressed more profoundly, in another gallery, *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*. *Gallery 344* was located just three galleries away from *Gallery 364*. Here, hundreds of pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain (mainly the collection that originated from the Netherlands Museum and was by then managed by the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art) were displayed so as to highlight their decorative effect, and were combined with Dutch portraits, most of them group portraits of Amsterdam regents. This mixed arrangement, like the one seen in *Gallery 364*, was clearly inspired by von Bode's design. And, likewise, perhaps it is inadequate to consider such a portrait-porcelain combination in *Gallery 344* as simply an expression of decorative beauty, instead of a specific scheme to visualize the civic pride of Amsterdam regents and the national glory of the Netherlands.

In the 1920s, *Gallery 344* displayed individual and group portraits, silverware, and Chinese and Japanese porcelain (**Figure 2.12**).[211] Schmidt-Degener revamped this gallery afresh in 1932. This time, silverware was moved out; Dutch portraits of Amsterdam regent groups were paralleled with various pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain presented in line with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch vogue in furnishing. As I shall contend, this assortment, with connotations of both interior design

[209] For how painting frames act as the frontiers for both regions of the real territory where the viewer stands and the painted territory of the picture, see José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditations on the Frame," *Perspecta* 26, (1990): 188-189. Also, according to the art historian Barbara E. Savedoff, painting frames serve to "encourage the reading of the painting as a receding space by hiding the edges and thereby disguising the objecthood of the painting." Barbara E. Savedoff, "Frames," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3 (1999): 350.
[210] Baker, "Bode and Museum Display," 145.
[211] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen* [*Guide with Illustrations*] (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1928), 92.

and overseas expansion, appropriated Chinese and Japanese porcelain into an 'extended self' of the Dutch subject.

The 1938 Rijksmuseum gallery guide and photos show that the pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in *Gallery 344* were set up to mimic the porcelain displays in opulent Dutch "woningversiering [home decoration]" (**Figures 2.13-2.16**).[212] Here, the pieces of Chinese porcelain in the showcases were first sorted typologically to bring together those with similar decorative styles (e.g. kraak, blue and white, blanc de Chine, famille verte, blue powder, etc.), and then piled symmetrically upon the shelves (**Figures 2.17-2.20**).[213] There were also Chinese porcelain garnitures (sets of Chinese porcelain vases with matching decoration) displayed above wooden stands. The pyramid-shaped arrangement of porcelain in *Gallery 344* is reminiscent of the mantel garniture formulated by Daniël Marot (1661-1752), a French-born Dutch architect and interior designer, who worked for the stadholder of the Dutch Republic, William III of Orange (1650-1702) and his wife, Mary Stuart (1662-1694) (**Figure 2.21**). A corresponding display is also found in a doll house of the Dutch art collector Sara Rothé (1699-1751), now collected in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem (**Figure 2.22**).[214] Like in *Gallery 364*, the porcelain pieces in *Gallery 344* were not individually labelled. The emphasis lies more on the ensembles composed by these porcelain pieces than on each object *per se*. Bringing together such a large number of porcelain pieces and large-scale group portraits, it is clear that the gallery must have created a splendid visual effect, although the archive photos are black and white.

Figure 2.12 View of *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings* with portraits, large vases of Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and a showcase with silverware, around 1930. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: RMA-SSA-F-00485-1

[212] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen* [Guide with Illustrations] (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1938), 92. According to the archive photos from 1938, the large group portraits shown in *Gallery 344* were as follows: *Portrait of the Inspectors of the Collegium Medicum* (1724) by Cornelis Troost (1696-1750); *The Regents of the Aalmoezeniersweeshuis Orphanage in Amsterdam* (1729) by Cornelis Troost; *The Directors of the Surgeons Guild in Amsterdam* (1732) by Jan Maurits Quinkhard (1688-1772); *The Four Regents, the Secretary and the House Father of the Lepers' House in Amsterdam* (1773) by Jacobus Luberti Augustini (1748-1822); *The Regents of the Oudezijds Huiszittenhuis in Amsterdam* (1806) by Adriaan de Lelie (1755-1820); and *The Regents and Regentesses of the Lepers' House in Amsterdam* (1834-1835) by Jan Adam Krusema (1804-1862). Most of these paintings are from the Rijksmuseum's collection, while some pieces were borrowed from the City of Amsterdam at that time.

[213] Kraak porcelain, a type of Chinese export porcelain mainly decorated in underglaze cobalt blue, was made in large quantities in the late Ming dynasty. Kraak is thought to be named after Portuguese ships known as carracks.

[214] For the display of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the Dutch interior, see Jan van Campen, "Chinese and Japanese Porcelain in the Interior," in *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. Jan van Campen and Titus M. Eliëns (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, in collaboration with Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, Groninger Museum, Keramiekmuseum Princessehof Leeuwarden, 2014), 191-211.

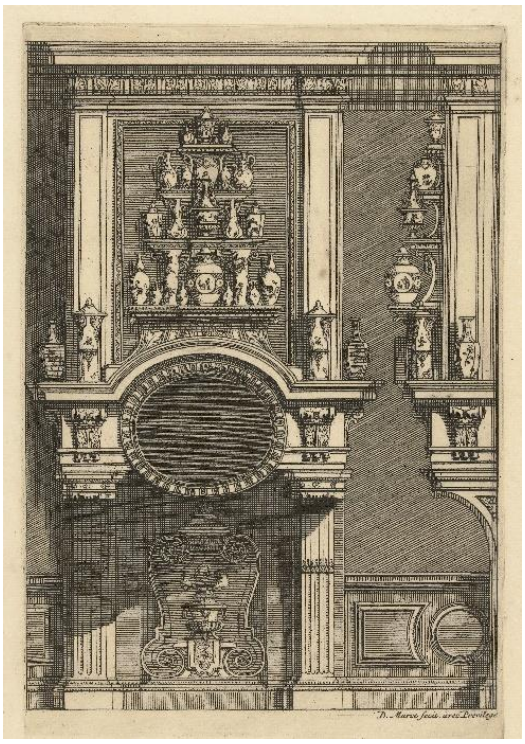
Figure 2.13 View of *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings* with portraits of Amsterdam regent groups and showcases with Chinese porcelain, 1938. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011928

Figure 2.14 View of *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings* with portraits of Amsterdam regent groups and showcases with Chinese porcelain, 1938. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011929

Figure 2.15 View of *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings* with Chinese Porcelain, 1938. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011922

Figure 2.16 View of *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings* with Chinese and Japanese porcelain, 1938. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011920

Figures 2.17-2.20 Different showcases with Chinese porcelain piled upon pyramid-shaped shelves in *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings*, 1938. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011924 (upper left); HA-0011925 (upper right); HA-0011926 (below left); and HA-0011927 (below right)



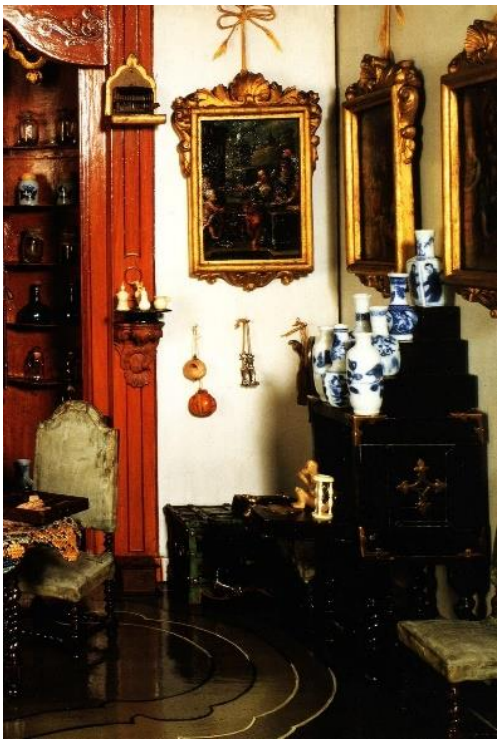


Figure 2.21 (left) Chimneypiece design by Daniël Marot, ca. 1703-1800. Etching on paper. Size: high 24.5 cm; width 16.7 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: RP-P-1964-3214
Figure 2.22 (right) Porcelain cabinet in one of the rooms of Sara Rothé's doll's house (detail), about 18th century. Collected in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. Object number: oph II-3566. Ill. from: Epco Runia, *Sara Ploos van Amstel-Rothé Poppenhuis* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1988), 29

The Chinese porcelain in *Gallery 344* played an important role in the composition of a Dutch subject defined by consumption and connoisseurship. The gathering and showing of such a large number of porcelain pieces in one gallery space seems to make this display of china a flaunting of wealth, a spectacular presentation of material excess. The accumulation of porcelain-as-possession in *Gallery 344* embodies what James Clifford calls "the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience)."[215] In addition to being an impressive (self-)display of wealth, the excessive display of Chinese porcelain in the gallery also recalls the Dutch upper- and middle classes' collecting taste for Chinese porcelain in the eighteenth century. According to the 1938 Rijksmuseum gallery guide, the pieces of porcelain on display were restricted to those made in the late Ming and early Qing periods, in particular, to the species that were collected by "onze voorouders [our ancestors]" and served as our "kostbare en gezochte woningversiering [precious and sought-after home decoration]."[216] Considering the portrait-porcelain combination in *Gallery 344*, the word voorouders [ancestors] here is readily associated with the Amsterdam regents and regentesses represented at almost life-size in the group

[215] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 218.
[216] The original Dutch text in the 1938 Rijksmuseum gallery guide: "Het Chinese […] porcelain, in grote verscheidenheid in deze zaal aanwezig, diende in onze 18e eeuw als kostbare en gezochte woningversiering. De collectie is beperkt tot de soorten, die door onze voorouders verzameld warden." [The Chinese […] porcelain, present in great diversity in this room, served in our 18th century as a precious and sought-after home decoration. The collection is limited to the species collected by our ancestors.] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen*, 92.

portraits suspended above the groups of porcelain. The use of the word ancestor in the gallery guide and the flaunt display of china here, I propose, help consolidate the solidarities of Amsterdam's civic pride across generations.

These eighteenth-century regent pieces illustrate the so-called *Pruikentijd* (Wig Period), during which wearing wigs became a way for the privileged classes to externalize power.[217] Formed under the Dutch Republican regime, the regents were a separate social group within the wealthy upper stratum. They held local political power by holding office in city government (e.g. town councils) and were appointed to charitable institutions or guilds by cooption. The regent group was a close-knit oligarchy that had considerable influence and authority in the urban-centered civic society of the time.[218] Often commissioned and paid for regents stepping down, and to be viewed by successive regents in boardrooms or entrance halls of social institutions, the most important functions of regent group portraits was to commemorate. Portraying their subjects in confident poses, looking directly at the viewer, these group portraits let the board of regents honor their own public services and, even more so, perpetuate their reputations.[219]

Removed from their original locations and re-grouped in *Gallery 344*, these immense group portraits created a grand scenario and communicated a sense of collective identity to the Rijksmuseum's audience. The gallery space was, so to speak, a monument of Amsterdam's civic pride, in which the association between portraits and porcelain not only modified the conventional taxonomical categorization in museums, as the museum reform movement sought to achieve. Moreover, the portrait-porcelain collocation helps kindle memories of what pivotal roles these worthy citizens once played, both in the charities in Amsterdam and in the Dutch trade with Asia.[220] Members of the regent class may have been chief VOC investors in cooperation with other non-regent but rich merchant elites. Together, their investment could account for nearly half of the total capital of a regional chamber.[221] Moreover, they may have been appointed as managing directors (*bewindhebbers*) of the VOC chambers, and thereby earned honoraria, patronage powers to appoint favorites at certain warehouses, and the right to customize products to their changing needs and desires.[222] This was especially true of Amsterdam regents; some of them are deemed to have been the most powerful figures in the VOC during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[223]

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[217] For more about the way wigging represented social status in eighteenth-century Europe, see Lynn M. Festa, "Personal Effects: Wigs and Possessive Individualism in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29, no. 2 (2005): 47-90.

[218] For the power of the regent group under the Dutch Republic, see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[219] On the function of Amsterdam regent group portraits, see Michiel Jonker, "Public or Private Portraits: Group Portraits of Amsterdam Regents and Regentesses," in *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age*, eds. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. and Adele Seeff (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 206-226.

[220] The newly arranged Boymans Museum in Rotterdam under the directorship of Schmidt-Degener (1908-1921) was also considered "a monument of civic pride." See Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 80.

[221] The organizational structure of the VOC was comprised of six chambers represented by six port cities: Amsterdam, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Rotterdam, Delft, and Middleburg.

[222] See Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 452.

[223] For more about the role that Amsterdam regents played in the Dutch VOC, see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 946-951.

The 1938 Rijksmuseum gallery guide explains that the reason for showing china in *Gallery 344* lies in the fact that it "played such a major role in our civilization history."[224] According to the sociologist Norbert Elias, the word civilization expresses: "the self-consciousness of the West. One could even say: the national consciousness. […] By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of."[225] Indeed, the china display in *Gallery 344* coupled with the group portraits of regents signified the self-consciousness of the Dutch, their pride in the significance of their own nation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: making great advancements in naval technology with the VOC as "the world's first global commercial enterprise;" being a world economic power with Amsterdam as the richest city in the Europe, full of luxury goods from the other side of the world.[226]

Additionally, good taste in interior ornamentation has long been regarded as a measurement of a highly sophisticated civilization from a European perspective.[227] As the literary scholar Eugenia Jenkins notes, "The well-furnished home and the well-furnished mind were mutually sustaining" in eighteenth-century Europe.[228] Especially, furnishing domestic spaces with goods from overseas was a fashionable approach to displaying an ideal self-image for Europeans, as it implied the capability to gather objects from beyond national boundaries.[229] By displaying porcelain in a way that mimics the sumptuous domestic embellishment that only wealthy and powerful Dutch figures could afford, china is here identified as the Dutch 'extended self', serving both the civic pride of Amsterdam and the national prestige of the Netherlands. From this perspective, the porcelain display in *Gallery 344* is not mimetic but rather performative.

The porcelain display in *Gallery 344* indicates that, after having been assigned to the Rijksmuseum's Department of Sculpture and Applied Art in 1927, Chinese porcelain was presented as a Dutch domestic decoration and appropriated to build an ideal Dutch self-image as reflected in the Dutch conspicuous consumption of porcelain. This display scheme was continually seen, at least between the 1970s and the end of the 1980s, in a gallery of the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art: *Gallery 253A Colonial Art*.

Gallery 253A was laid out in a modified period-room arrangement (**Figures 2.23-2.24**). Here, pieces of Chinese armorial porcelain and large vessels with Dutch ordered decorations were combined with Dutch portraits and various other objects, including textiles, silverware, ivory boxes, and furniture.[230] These objects were arranged in a way to evoke a specific style of home furnishings favored by Dutch people in Asia during the seventeenth century. As the 1985 Rijksmuseum gallery guide notes, *Gallery 253A* sought

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[224] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen*, 92

[225] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994[1939]), 5.

[226] Anthony Reid, "Economy and Social Change, c. 1400-1800," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia. Volume II: From c. 1500 to c. 1800*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 144.

[227] On the relationship between the European idea of civilization and interior decoration, see Sherrill Whiton, *Elements of Interior Decoration: Revised and Enlarged* (Chicago: J. B. Lippincott Company 1994).

[228] Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

[229] Sharon Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (2003): 3.

[230] Most of the Chinese armorial porcelain collection in the Rijksmuseum comes from J.G.A.N. de Vries (1853-1925), who bequeathed his collection to the museum in 1925. See Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 18.

to present "how the Dutch lived overseas (i.e. in their former colonies)."[231] However, rather than merely mimicking the domestic lifestyle of the Dutch overseas, the porcelain display in *Gallery 253A* acquires specific symbolic meanings, especially if one considers three portraits hanging in the gallery: *VOC Senior Merchant* (1640-1660) by Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1692) (**Figure 2.25**, see also **Figure 2.23** for its arrangement in *Gallery 253A*), and *Elisabeth van Oosten* (1663) and *Johannes van Rees* (1663) (**Figures 2.26-2.27**, see also **Figure 2.24** for their arrangement in *Gallery 253A*).

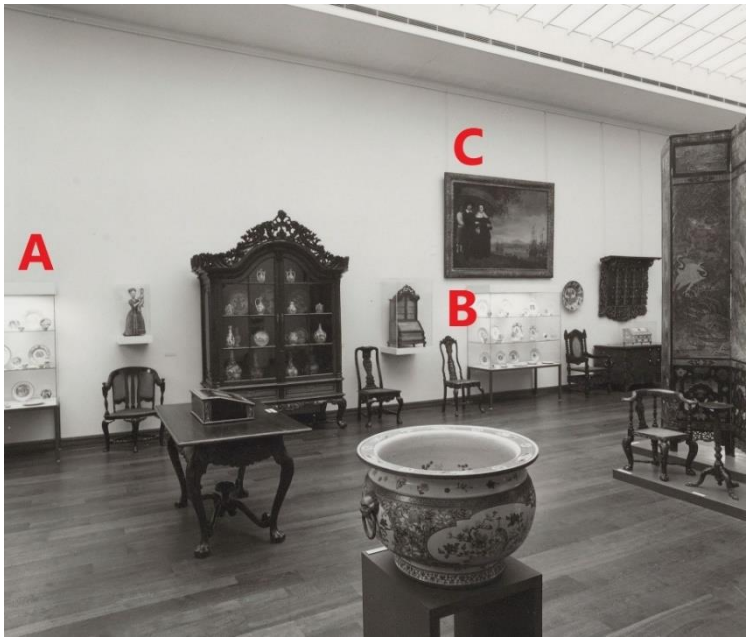

Figure 2.23 View of *Gallery 253A Colonial Art* with Chinese export products (A and B: two showcases with Chinese armorial porcelain; C: *VOC Senior Merchant* by Aelbert Cuyp), 1973. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: HA-0014292

Figure 2.24 View of *Gallery 253A Colonial Art* (A: *Portrait of Elisabeth van Oosten*; B: *Portrait of Johannes van Rees*), 1973. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: HA-0014286

[231] Rijksmuseum, *Guide to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1985), 17.

Figure 2.25 *VOC Senior Merchant* by Aelbert Cuyp, ca. 1640-1660. Oil on canvas. Size: high 138 cm; width 208 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-2350

Figure 2.26 (left) *Portrait of Elisabeth van Oosten*, attributed to Willem Jansz. Poly, 1663. Oil on canvas. Size: high 118 cm; width 83 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-807
Figure 2.27 (right) *Portrait of Johannes van Rees*, attributed to Willem Jansz. Ploy, 1663. Oil on canvas. Size: 118 cm; width 83 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: SK-A-809

Arguably, these three portraits were carefully chosen to show the VOC's power in Asia. The people portrayed in *VOC Senior Merchant* were probably the VOC merchant Jakob Martensen (birth and death dates unknown) and his wife, with an enslaved person holding a parasol for them. Martensen is pointing to the VOC fleets ready to leave the harbor of Batavia and heading to The Netherlands. This posture sheds light on his status and involvement in the company. The figures depicted in the other two portraits are also related to the VOC; Johannes van Rees (1662-1690/91) was the half-brother of Elisabeth van Oosten

(1660-1714). The latter then became the wife of Abraham van Riebeeck (1653-1713), the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies from 1709 to 1713. The involvement of these three portraits potentially moves the gallery beyond simply a neutral presentation of Dutch interior design overseas, and into a representation of seventeenth-century Dutch maritime power, power capable of assembling various Asian goods under one Dutch roof.

Thus far, this section has sought to show the ideological textures of the china displays in the twentieth-century Rijksmuseum, arguing that these displays do more than just mimicking Dutch home decoration but rather visualizing how possession of china affords an ideal Dutch self-image. Below, I focus on the display of a specific type of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum: armorial porcelain. Chinese porcelain with Dutch coat of arms is itself a materialization of ownership. The following will show how, in the museum today, Chinese armorial porcelain is presented in a way that accentuates its ownership by specific Dutch individuals, which is different from this porcelain's perspective of display in the museum of the twentieth century.

2-1-2 The Personification of Chinese Armorial Porcelain

After having been separated from the Netherlands Museum by Schmidt-Degener in 1927, the galleries of the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art and Department of National History both were assigned a collection of Chinese armorial porcelain. The Department of National History was then further divided into the Department of Dutch Maritime History, opened in 1931, and the Department of Dutch Territorial History, opened in 1937. A showcase of pieces of Chinese armorial porcelain was displayed in a gallery of the Department of Dutch Maritime History. Meanwhile, another group of Chinese armorial porcelain was displayed in *Gallery 345* (the exact title of the gallery is unknown), which was set up in 1932 adjacent to *Gallery 344 Dutch Paintings*.

The Department of Dutch Maritime History was distributed in a series of ground floor galleries in the museum's east wing. These were sequenced chronologically, from the Dutch War of Independence (or the Eighty Years' War, 1568-1648) to the Belgian Revolution (1830-1831) and the Shimonoseki Campaign (1863-1864). [232] The showcase with pieces of Chinese porcelain featuring Dutch armorial and other customized ornaments was found in one of these galleries (**Figure 2.28**). As the museum's 1938 gallery guide indicates, this gallery also included landscape paintings of Dutch trading posts in Asia, weapons, and portraits of the VOC Governors-General in Asia to indicate important periods in the history of the overseas regions.[233] Here, the pieces of Chinese armorial porcelain served as material proof of the history of Dutch expansion in Asia. As far as I could understand from the Rijksmuseum's archived photos and guides, it was not until this placement that Chinese (armorial) porcelain was considered as an object with historical value (to the Dutch) and incorporated in the narrative structure of Dutch national history. After 1945, the Departments of Dutch Maritime History and Dutch Territorial History merged into the

[232] The Shimonoseki Campaign was a series of battles fought by joint naval forces from Great Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, and France, against the feudal Japanese Choshu Domain to seize control over the Shimonoseki Strait.
[233] Rijksmuseum, *Gids Met Afbeeldingen*, 75.

Department of Dutch History.[234] Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there seems to be no evidence that Chinese armorial porcelain was displayed in the galleries of the Department of Dutch History. In the late 1970s, however, an important collection of Chinese porcelain from *De Witte Leeuw* was incorporated in the Department of Dutch History, which I will discuss in the next section.

Meanwhile, *Gallery 345* also showcased a group of Chinese armorial porcelain and pieces of Chinese export porcelain painted with Dutch figures (**Figures 2.29-2.30**). The gallery included various Chinese and Japanese export products—ivory stacking boxes, lacquerware, and a carved wooden screen, to name a few. Chinese armorial porcelain was here displayed in groups, as it used to be ordered for dinner service, meant to be collected and used in quantity. Since these pieces of armorial porcelain were not labeled individually, it seems to have been almost impossible for audiences to acquire information regarding the historical Dutch family who had ordered these products. As far back as the 1970s, Chinese armorial porcelain in *Gallery 253A Colonial Art*, as discussed previously, was also displayed in groups (see **Figure 2.23**).

Figure 2.28 View of one of the galleries of the Department of Dutch Maritime History, 1935. A: The showcase with Chinese armorial porcelain. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: RMA-SSA-F-01228-1

[234] Arthur F.E. van Schendel, *Nederlandse geschiedenis in het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam* [Dutch history in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam] (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1971), 60.

Figure 2.29 View of *Gallery 345* with Chinese and Japanese export products, 1939. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011919

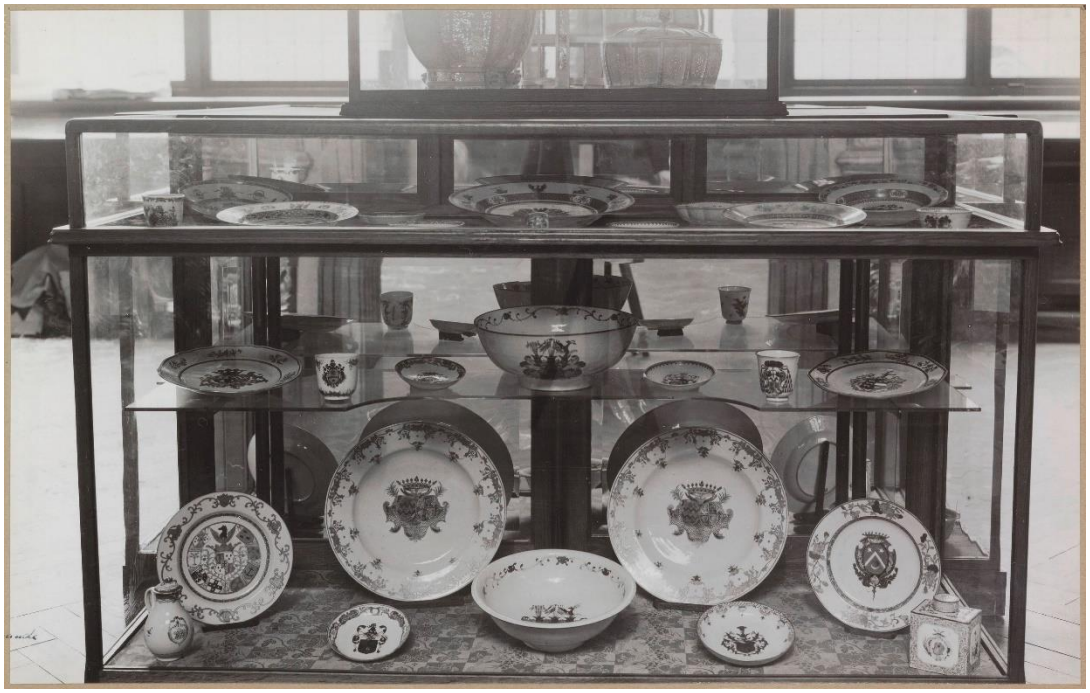

Figure 2.30 Showcase with Chinese armorial porcelain in *Gallery 345*, 1939. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0011918

Today, in the Rijksmuseum, Chinese armorial porcelain is also incorporated in the narrative of Dutch national history related to the VOC's power, but from a different perspective, as seen in *Gallery 1.5 Netherlands Overseas 1700-1800*.[235] Occupying a whole sidewall of *Gallery 1.5*, portraits of the governors-general are arrayed to mimic their initial layout in the assembly hall of the Company's fort in Batavia (**Figure 2.31**). These governors-general are consistently represented in a dignified manner, holding their command batons and positioning themselves majestically to reinforce their authority as the highest office. Most of the portraits shown in this gallery depict their subjects against backgrounds of their family coats of arms. As a confirmation of illustrious ancestry and a sign of elite status, Dutch heraldic emblems are equally visible upon the pieces of Chinese porcelain under the portraits.

From the seventeenth century onwards, each governor commissioned his own portrait and hung it next to the one of his predecessors at the end of his governorship.[236] An early example of such an arrangement is seen in an engraving in *Allerneuester geographisch und topographischer Schauplatz von Africa und Ostindien* (1744) by Johann Wolfgang Heydt, who was appointed as an architect for the Company in Batavia around 1737 (**Figure 2.32**). It seems that this display scheme symbolizing the inheritance of Dutch power in Asia, is now resurgent in the Rijksmuseum's *Gallery 1.5*. In a similar fashion, the governors-general's portraits in the gallery are sequenced chronologically and suspended in high positions, inviting audiences to look up, as if to pay tribute to these powerful figures. Seen from this vantage point, this wall of fame harkens back to the heyday of the Company and honors the leading nobility of that time—even though in recent times nearly half of them have come to be remembered in history for their involvement in corruption, nepotism, mishandling, and even massacres.[237]

Like the 1930s arrangements in *Gallery 364* and *Gallery 344* designed by Schmidt-Degener, the portrait-porcelain juxtaposition in today's *Gallery 1.5* also helps anchor a possessor-possession relationship. Compared to the displays of Chinese armorial porcelain in groups in the aforementioned galleries in the twentieth-century Rijksmuseum, the pieces of armorial porcelain in *Gallery 1.5* are personalized by emphasizing their ownership by specific, worthy Dutch individuals. For example, there is a porcelain dish with the Valckenier arms commissioned by the governor Adriaan Valckenier, whose portrait with identical coat of arms is hung nearby (**Figures 2.33-2.35**). Such parallelism highlights how the armorial ornamentation acts as a possessive branding, whereby the porcelain plate is closely associated with the powerful image of its owner. Customizing foreign goods with personalized,

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[235] Some pieces of Chinese armorial porcelain are showcased in an area called *Special Collections* on the eastern ground floor of the Rijksmuseum. The objects here are laid out according to their materials and certain categories, such as musical instruments, Delftware, Chinese porcelain, jewelry, costumes, and so on. The *Special Collections* area is independent from the grand narrative of Dutch national history presented in the Rijksmuseum today.

[236] See Michael North, "Production and Reception of Art through European Company Channels in Asia," in *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections*, ed. Michael North (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 99.

[237] This somewhat ironic contradiction is also seen in the gallery's display. According to the wall caption in *Gallery 1.5*, the privileged position of the Dutch overseas trade during the eighteenth century "could only be maintained with increasing violence." However, not only does the caption lack any more explicit self-critical reflection, visual and material reference to demonstrate such violence is also missing from this gallery. On the contrary, the interpretation and presentation of the objects on view in this gallery tend to highlight the pride, rather than the prize, of the Dutch overseas trade.

possessive emblems is surely a way to make an object part of the Self.[238] Through associating the portrait of the possessor with the porcelain he possesses, a person-object bonding—that is, the making of something one's own—is made explicit.

Figure 2.31 View of *Gallery 1.5 Netherlands Overseas 1700-1800*, 2013. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0028588

Figure 2.32 The assembly hall of the Company's fort in Batavia, with the portraits of the governors-general hung on the left wall. Ill. from: Johann Wolfgang Heydt, *Allerneuester geographisch und topographischer Schauplatz von Africa und Ostindien* (Willhermsdorff: Johann Carl Tetschner, 1744), 37

[238] Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," 141.

Figure 2.33 (left) Chinese dish with the Valckenier arms. Porcelain, ca. 1735-1740. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: AK-RBK-1969-152
Figure 2.34 (middle) *Portrait of the governor Adriaan Valckenier* by Theodorus Justinus Rheen, 1737. Oil on canvas. Size: high 102.5 cm; width 85.5 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-3778
Figure 2.35 (right) Detail of Figure 2.34

The idea of 'selves as owners' is equally informed by the object labels, for they provide audiences nothing from a production perspective, and only biographical information about the Dutch owners. To take but one example, the label of an armorial plate with a squirrel holding a leaf (object number: AK-NM-13380) reads:

> The arms are those of the Sichterman family. This plate belongs to one of many services ordered by Jan Albert Sichterman of Groningen. He worked for the Dutch East India Company from 1716 to 1744 and was very influential in the silk and cloth trade in Bengal. He eventually returned to the Netherlands, where he lived in a splendid house on the Ossenmarkt in Groningen.

With its label written like a brief biography recounting the accomplishments of Sichterman, the porcelain plate bearing his personalized coat of arms acts as a confirmation and reminder of the elite identity of its Dutch owner.

In this section, I have discussed how the juxtaposition of portraits and porcelain in certain galleries of the Rijksmuseum from the 1930s to today constitutes a specific possessor-possession relationship. Below I shift the focus to another type of grouping: Dutch landscape paintings and Chinese porcelain, especially the shipwreck porcelain excavated from the VOC's *De Witte Leeuw*, in the galleries of the Dutch History Department from the late 1970s to date. In this grouping, Chinese porcelain seems to be ascribed not just historical but also symbolic values, providing a material signifier of Dutch national power in the global arena.

2-2 Landscape and Porcelain: Mapping the National Power Beyond the National Boundaries

The porcelain cargo from *De Witte Leeuw* shipwreck signifies the Dutch ability to assemble and dominate beyond national boundaries. Built by the Amsterdam chamber of the VOC, the trading ship *Witte Leeuw* exploded and sunk off the coast of the island of Saint Helena in 1613, during its homeward voyage, a price paid for its battle with two well-armed Portuguese ships. The goods from the wreck *De Witte Leeuw*, therefore, are a historical document of power struggles between leading maritime nations (Portugal and the Netherlands) in the seventeenth century. Excavated by the underwater archeologist Robert Sténuit in 1976, the intact pieces and shards of porcelain were acquired by the Department of Dutch History in the Rijksmuseum in 1977, and were later put on display in the Department's *Gallery 102 The Seventeenth-Century Square* (**Figure 2.36**).[239]

Figure 2.36 View of *Gallery 102 The Seventeenth-Century Square*. A: The display of the shipwrecked goods from *De Witte Leeuw*, 2000. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0014497

The Dutch History Department opened a series of new galleries in the museum's east wing in 1971, including *Gallery 102*, which was a large, two-layered gallery in the east inner courtyard. These galleries were maintained up until the grand renovation of the Rijksmuseum that started in 2003. From 1971 to 2003, they offered a schematic presentation of Dutch historical highlights from a Dutch-centric point of view. As the then Director-General of the Rijksmuseum, Arthur F.E. van Schendel (in office 1959-1975), has noted:

> While planning the aims and the kinds of display to be used in the historical department it was of the greatest importance to bear constantly in mind that to a considerable extent, this department shows our history as it was seen by our ancestors. They selected certain objects to be kept, they indicated what should be emphasized. […] [I]t should be also pointed out that […] in the Netherlands as in any other country, the official conception of historical events has always been characterized by a patriotic bias.[240]

[239] Christine L. van der Pijl-Ketel, ed., *The Ceramic Load of the 'Witte Leeuw' (1613)* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1982).
[240] Van Schendel, *Nederlandse geschiedenis in het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam*, 61.

This statement informs us that the selected objects presented in the Department's galleries were those that contributed to a patriotic narrative about the history of the Netherlands. In this sense, it is not hard to understand why the Department devoted its most spacious gallery (i.e. *Gallery 102*) to the most heroic page of Dutch history, the seventeenth century.

Many objects that were shown in *Gallery 102* are again brought together in today's *Gallery 2.9 Netherlands Overseas 1600-1650*. These objects include, to name just a few: paintings of Dutch trading posts in Asia, a VOC's ship model, objects excavated from the island of Nova Zembla, and the shipwreck porcelains from *De Witte Leeuw*. *Gallery 2.9* has two parts, devoted to the VOC trade with Asia and the WIC trade with Africa, respectively. In the part dedicated to the VOC, there is a showcase containing a group of Chinese blue and white porcelain, including pieces from *De Witte Leeuw* and pieces of Chinese export porcelain made for the Dutch market (**Figures 2.37-2.38**). Here, I would like to draw attention to the combination of Chinese porcelain and Dutch landscape paintings of colonies and harbors in Asia, to show how this combination acts as a metaphorical mapping, suggesting a far-reaching national dominion.


Figure 2.37 (left) Showcase with the pieces of Chinese porcelain from *De Witte Leeuw* shipwreck and other commissioned products in *Gallery 2.9 Netherlands Overseas 1600-1650*. Photographed by the author in 2017
Figure 2.38 (right) Shipwreck porcelains from *De Witte Leeuw* displayed in *Gallery 2.9 Netherlands Overseas 1600-1650*. Photographed by the author in 2017

The landscape paintings shown in *Gallery 2.9* stage a panoramic view of Dutch forces' configuration beyond national boundaries: namely, of the seventeenth-century Intra-Asian trading network. These paintings include: six seventeenth-century topographic views of the cities of Neyra (Indonesia), Lawec (Cambodia), Judea (Thailand), Canton (China) (**Figure 2.39**), Cochin (India), and Cananor (India); *The Castle of Batavia* (1661), portraying the heart of the Dutch trade network in Asia (**Figure 2.40**); and *The Trading Post of the Dutch East India Company in Bengal* (1665), in which a settlement, river, Indian tents, and graveyard appear as landmarks along a web of footpaths crisscrossing the land, making the painting map-like (**Figure 2.41**).[241] These pictures feature what the art historian Svetlana Alpers calls

[241] Here, I do not mean that the scenes in *The Trading Post of the Dutch East India Company in Bengal* are all realistic or without any artificial arrangement. This is especially so, if one considers the fact that the painting was commissioned by the VOC as a display of power. For a detailed discussion of the painting's sources, see Byapti Sur, "The Dutch East India Company through the Local Lens: Exploring the Dynamics of Indo-Dutch Relations in Seventeenth Century Bengal," *Indian Historical Review* 44, no. 1 (2017): 62-91.

"mapped landscapes," offering a privileged view of the otherwise invisible, distant world, transforming the that world into a flat surface and bringing it before the viewer's eyes.[242]

Figure 2.39 *View of Canton in China*, attributed to Johannes Vinckboons, 1662-1663. Oil on canvas. Size: 97 cm; width 140 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-4474

Figure 2.40 (left) *The Castle of Batavia* by Andries Beeckman, 1661. Oil on canvas. Size: high 108 cm; width 151.5 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-19
Figure 2.41 (right) *The trading lodge of the VOC in Hougly, Bengal*, by Hendrik van Schuylenburgh, 1665. Oil on canvas. Size: high 203 cm; width 316 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-4282

The arrangement of these mapped landscapes articulates a metaphoric spatial collapse in *Gallery 2.9*. These mapped landscapes were formerly placed in the Amsterdam Oost-Indisch Huis (East Indies House).[243] The Oost-Indisch Huis was the headquarter of the VOC in its home city. Here, several paintings, including *The Castle of Batavia* and Vinckboons' panoramas, once hung in the Great Hall, where the Heren XVII held their meetings (**Figure 2.42**). Conceivably, there was a connection between showing these

[242] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 119-168.
[243] Today, the Oost-Indisch Huis in the center of Amsterdam is a listed Dutch national heritage site. Inside, the meeting room of the Heren XVII is restored and features replicas of *The Castle of Batavia* (1661) by Andries Beeckman and a series of landscape paintings by Johannes Vinckboons, the originals of which are seen in today's *Gallery 2.9 Netherlands Overseas 1600-1650* in the Rijksmuseum. See Kees Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money: Maps, Plans, and Topographic Paintings and Their Role in Dutch Overseas Expansion during the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Amsterdam: Batavia Lion International, 1998).

mapped landscapes in the East Indies House and showing off the ability of the Dutch: that is, their unsurpassed power to dominate what lies beyond their national borders, to assert ownership over foreign lands, and to gather goods from distant areas into one place. The symbolic implications of cartography are "proprietorship and authority," as Geoff King, the scholar of cultural studies, puts it: "To map a territory is to stake various kinds of claim to it, to make assertions of ownership, sovereignty, and legitimacy of rule."[244]

Figure 2.42 *Willem V takes a seat as director with the VOC* by Simon Fokke, 1768. Etching and engraving. Size: high 29.5 cm; width 40.5 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: RP-P-1944-2072

Whether inhabiting the walls of the East Indies House in the past, or of *Gallery 2.9* in the Rijksmuseum today, these mapped landscapes act as windows opening onto the world, inviting viewers to travel it virtually; put another way, the assemble of these mapped landscapes works to encompass the world in one Dutch room. As the seventeenth-century Dutch cartographer Joan Blaeu wrote, "maps enable us to contemplate at home and right before our eyes things that are farthest away."[245] Such a viewing experience, evoking a metaphorical mapping of Dutch maritime power, has now recurred in *Gallery 2.9*, in which china acts as an "artefactual cartographer" metonymically referring to the VOC's Asian trading networks.[246]

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[244] Geoff King, *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 23, 27.

[245] Cited in Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 159, from Joan Blaeu, *Le Grand Atlas* (Amsterdam, 1663), 3.

[246] According to the art historian Rebecca Duclos, the map and the collection-as-map are both "message-bearing entities that operate metonymically (having a direct relationship to a specific body of material or a landscape)." See Rebecca Duclos, "The Cartographies of Collecting," in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. Simon J. Knell (London and New York: Routledge, 2004[1999]), 85, 89.

One can describe what I have discussed thus far in terms of the portrait-porcelain and the landscape-porcelain exhibition schemes; it seems that they both show how china contributes to Dutch self-fashioning. I will now move on to examine the aesthetic and art-historical values that have been attached to Chinese porcelain since the integration and presentation of the KVVAK's collection in the Rijksmuseum in 1952. The incorporation of the KVVAK's collection contributed to the development of the category of Asian art in the Rijksmuseum.

2-3 De-mystification and Cultural Difference

The founding of the KVVAK in 1918 was rooted in a broader context: twentieth-century European taste when it came to collecting Asian objects had shifted from curiosity to aesthetic and art-historical concern.[247] Based on the Society's collection, the Museum for Asian Art was opened within the Garden Hall of Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1932.[248] The Garden Hall had three galleries. The central gallery was reserved mainly for Indian and Indonesia statuary. The side galleries showed various Chinese and Japanese objects, including porcelain, ceramics, lacquerware, sculptures, bronze, wooden crafts, and paintings (**Figure 2.43**).[249]

Figure 2.43 View of the left-side gallery in the Museum for Asian Art in the Garden Hall of the Stedelijk Museum, 1932. Ill. from: Herman F. E. Visser, "Het Museum van Aziatische Kunst in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam," *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten*, no. 5 (1932): 138

[247] Regarding this change in the taste of collectors, see Basil Gray, "The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 39, (1971-1973): 19-42. See also Yasunaga, "How to exhibit the un-exhibitable," 325-326.

[248] For more about the KVVAK's history before the opening of its Museum for Asian Art in the Stedelijk Museum, see Maartje Draak, "Chronicle of the Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst," in *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, ed. Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1985), 9-13; and Jan van Campen, Wang Ching-Ling, and Rosalien van der Poel, "The Asian Art Society in the Netherlands: A Centennial Celebration," *Arts of Asia* 48, no. 4 (2018): 110-117.

[249] Herman F. E. Visser, "Het Museum van Aziatische Kunst in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam," *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten*, no. 5 (1932): 131-139.

Arranging objects in ways that could highlight their visual characteristics and catalyze aesthetic experiences was a crucial concern for the Society's founder, Herman Visser. In the 1932 *Bulletin*, Visser notes that, wherever possible, sculptures in the museum were placed at angles that enabled sidelights to illuminate their visual qualities.[250] In addition to the relationship between lighting and visual perception, the interplay between the styles of the exhibited objects and the ambience of the exhibition space was foregrounded in the Museum for Asian Art. For example, according to the KVVAK's first chairman, Herman Westendorp, the Society preferred showing ceramics and porcelain from the pre-Ming period over richly decorated Ming-Qing porcelain (though Ming-Qing ceramics in plain styles were also on display).[251] This was in part because the study and collection of pre-Ming wares, in particular those of the Song period (906-1279), were blossoming in early twentieth-century Europe.[252] And it was in part because, for the Society's members, compared to porcelains with lively ornamentation, the plain style of pre-Ming wares was more compatible with the "stille sfeer [quiet atmosphere]" of the Museum for Asian Art.[253]

After five years of negotiations, the Society's collection was transferred to the Rijksmuseum in 1952, and was presented on the ground floor of the Drucker Wing (**Figure 2.44**).[254] This transfer plan was supported by the Rijksmuseum's director David Röell (in office 1945-1959), partly because the integration of the Society's collection fit Röell's goal of giving the Rijksmuseum a more international flavor.[255] The Museum for Asian Art in the Drucker Wing originally had eight galleries organized based on object origins and types (**Figure 2.45**). These eight galleries were followed by another two galleries to show later Chinese ceramics and porcelain from between fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly from the Rijksmuseum's prior collection (**Figure 2.46**).[256] Although displays in these galleries were changed from time to time in the following years, the overall regional and typological framework remained until the Drucker Wing was closed for renovation in 1993.[257]

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[250] Ibid., 136-137.

[251] Herman Karel Westendorp, "De Ceramiek op de Tentoonstelling van Aziatische Kunst," *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunsten*, no. 7 (1936): 254-255.

[252] Gray, "The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972," 26, 29; see also Van Campen, "History of the Collection," 20.

[253] Westendorp, "De Ceramiek op de Tentoonstelling van Aziatische Kunst," 255. For more about the KVVAK's emphasis on Chinese art before the Ming dynasty, see Herman F. E. Visser, "The Exhibition of Far Eastern Art at Amsterdam," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 35, no. 199 (1919): 144.

[254] See Draak, "Chronicle of the Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst," 22; and Wang Ching-Ling 王靜靈, "Helanren de yazhou tansuo" 荷蘭人的亞洲探索 [The Dutch Exploration of Asia], *Diancang dutianxia gumeishu* 典藏讀天下古美術, no. 5 (2014): 72-73. There were many reasons why the Museum for Asian Art was moved to the Rijksmuseum. One was that, the Stedelijk Museum changed its focus to become a museum of modern art after the Second World War. See Jan Fontein, "De Vroege Jaren van de Vereniging," *Aziatische Kunst* 35, no. 2 (2005): 11. For more about the KVVAK's developments after the Second World War, see Herman Visser, *Asiatic art in private collections of Holland and Belgium* (Amsterdam: De Spieghel, 1947).

[255] Fontein, "De Vroege Jaren van de Vereniging," 11-12. Röell's attempt to build a less nationalist narrative in the Rijksmuseum is also reflected in that he moves Dutch paintings out of the museum's Gallery of Honor, and presents here paintings from France, Italy, and Spain. See Jouke van der Werf, "Vormgeven in dienst van de beschouwing – de herinrichting van het Rijksmuseum 1945-1959," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 51, no. 3 (2003): 198-199, 222.

[256] Herman F. E. Visser, "New Presentation of the Museum of Asiatic Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," *Museum International* 6, no. 2 (1953): 118-119.

[257] The Drucker Wing was closed for renovation in 1993. This renovation was completed in 1996 and the Drucker Wing was reopened as the South Wing. The Rijksmuseum's Department of Asian Art had three galleries in the South Wing classified by object types: sculptures, paintings, and crafts. The Department's galleries were

Figure 2.44 View of one of the Chinese galleries in the Museum for Asian Art in the Drucker Wing of the Rijksmuseum, 1952. Placed at the end of the passage is the bronze statue of *Shiva Nataraja*. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0013753

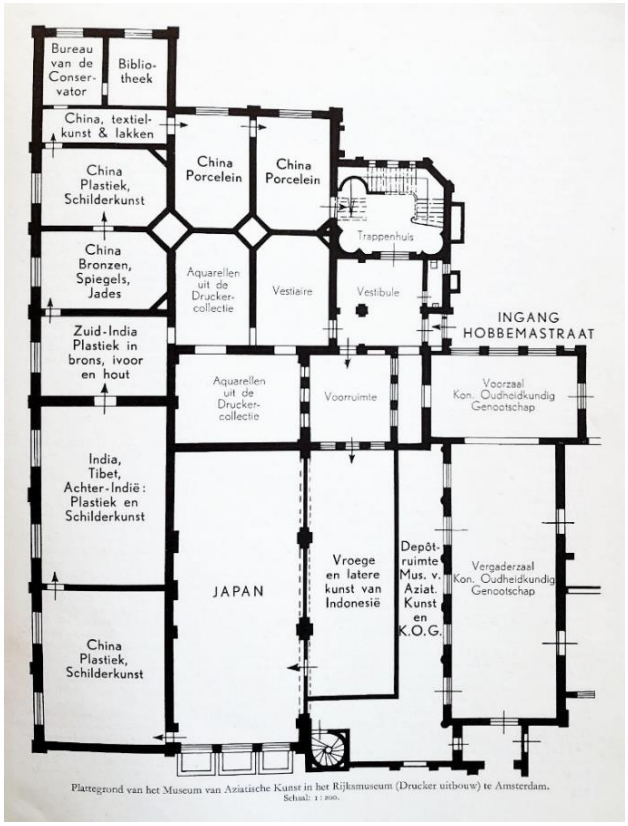

Figure 2.45 Floor map of the Museum for Asian Art in the Drucker Wing of the Rijksmuseum, with arrows indicating a specific viewing order, 1952. Ill. from: *Bulletin van de Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst*, no. 36 (1952): 133

dismantled in 2003 and the South Wing was reserved for seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, as the Rijksmuseum's main building was closed for a drastic renovation. See Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, "De Nieuwe Indeling van de Kunstvoorwerpen van de Afdeling Aziatische Kunst," *Aziatische Kunst* 26, no. 1 (1996): 10-12; and Renée Steenbergen, "Chronology of the Society of Friends of Asian Art from 1985-2010," *Aziatische Kunst* 40, no.2 (2010): 29.

Figure 2.46 Showcase with Rijksmuseum's collection of Chinese powder-blue porcelain in one of the Asian art galleries in the Drucker Wing, 1957. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0013796

The space allotted to the Museum for Asian Art in the Drucker Wing was twice as large as at the Stedelijk Museum's Garden Hall, which allowed for greater freedom in spatial configuration and object arrangement. To whet the audience's interest, Visser put the Society's most famous pieces (e.g. the Dancing Shiva) in the axis of the entrances to the galleries where they were displayed (see **Figure 2.44**). Such a careful layout was underlined by a specific viewing direction. As Visser notes:

> Zij dient in de hier aangegeven volgorde te worden ondernomen, want men mist anders de "doorkijk effecten" van Dansende Çiva en grote Chinese houten figuur. Chronologisch zou het ook fout zijn met het recentste (het latere Chinese porcelein) te beginnen. [It should be taken in the order given here, otherwise you will miss the "see-through effects" of Dancing Çiva and large Chinese wooden figure [the *Guanyin* statue]. Chronologically it would also be wrong to start with the most recent (the later Chinese porcelain).][258]

Visser was also pleased with the spacious layout in the Drucker Wing. For him, leaving ample space between showpieces not only enabled a pleasant viewing experience without objects becoming each other's disturbing background, but also echoed the features of the displayed Asian art. "Empty space play an extremely important role in Chinese and Japanese art," says Visser: "nothing could be more disastrous than to fill every available square inch in rooms where [they are] exhibited."[259] This elegantly spacious arrangement of Asian art continued in the Drucker Wing throughout the twentieth century and in the Society's current home in the Asian Pavilion, an annex of the Rijksmuseum which was opened in 2013, as I will show later.

On top of a spacious arrangement, light-colored interiors were key in producing a viewing atmosphere of harmony and simplicity. When the Museum for Asian Art was opened in the Drucker Wing,

[258] Herman F. E. Visser, "Een en Ander over de Inrichting en Opstelling van ons in het Rijksmuseum Heropende Museum," *Bulletin van de Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst*, no. 38 (1952): 150.
[259] Visser, "New Presentation of the Museum of Asiatic Art in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," 119.

all its galleries were painted to create a bright and soft atmosphere. Some galleries were specifically painted in hues that matched the colors of the objects on display. For example, the walls of the gallery with Chinese bronzes were painted in a "light greyish green," which "match[es] well the patina of the bronzes," and the walls of the Hindu-Javanese gallery were covered with a "light grey fabric" to set off "the dark grey colour of the stone sculptures."[260] Notably, the light-colored Asian art galleries were consistent with those in the Rijksmuseum's main building, which was related to the taste of the Rijksmuseum's director at the time, David Röell.

Before serving the Rijksmuseum, Röell was the director of the Stedelijk Museum between 1936 and 1945. Supported by the Stedelijk Museum's curator, Willem Sandberg, Röell had the interior walls of the Stedelijk Museum painted white to create a simplified gallery style. For Sandberg and Röell, the white walls were not only adaptable for often-changing exhibitions, but also gave the Stedelijk Museum a modern look, which helped fulfill the museum's commitment to collect and display modern art.[261] After his time as the Rijksmuseum's director, Röell worked with the Dutch architect Frits Eschauzier to carry out a large-scale modernization plan for the museum in the late 1940s and the 1950s. This plan included revamping the interior of the Rijksmuseum's main building by reducing showpieces to make a more spacious setting and whitewashing the gallery walls (**Figure 2.47**).[262] Röell and Eschauzier also worked with Visser to design the interior of the Museum for Asian Art in the Drucker Wing.

Figure 2.47 One of the whitewashed galleries of the Department of Sculpture and Applied Arts in the Rijksmuseum, 1952. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0015974

[260] Ibid., 120.
[261] Willem Sandberg, "An Old Museum Adapted for Modern Art Exhibitions," *Museum International* 4, no. 3 (1951): 155, 158. See also Rudi Fuchs, "The Museum from Inside," in *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties*, eds. Evelyn Beer and Geoffrey Bennington (Den Haag: Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst/SDU, 1989), 308, 310.
[262] David Cornelis Röell, "New Arrangements at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," *Museum International* 8, no. 1 (1956): 24-28; and Ivan Nevzgodin, "Transformations of the Rijksmuseum: Between Cuypers and Cruz y Ortiz," in *Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: Restoration and Transformation of a National Monument*, ed. Paul Meurs and Marie-Thérèse van Thoor (Rotterdam: NAi010 Publishers; Delft: The Delft University of Technology, 2013), 82.

For Röell and Eschauzier, the white of the Rijksmuseum's walls provided a neutral background that helped focus attention on the objects on display, not an enclosed and sanctified "white cube" space as O'Doherty describes.[263] For Visser, the light-colored background brought the gallery space into visual harmony with the displayed objects.[264] The light atmosphere of the Society's Museum for Asian Art also clearly distinguished it from the often dimly-lit ethnographic galleries in Europe, and this distinction aligns with the goal of the Society; that is, to "get Oriental art away from on the one hand the minor, decorative sphere and on the other the domain of ethnography."[265] The varied interpretations imposed upon the function of the plain-colored walls by Sandberg, Röell, Eschauzier, and Visser confirm what the art historian Charlotte Klonk has argued: "a uniformly hermetic room with four white walls and a stable function and meaning [has] never existed."[266]

The KVVAK's development of an art-historical understanding of its Asian collections is reflected in the Society's planning of special exhibitions. In 1954, Röell and Visser together organized a special exhibition of Asian art with a published catalogue: *Oosterse Schatten: 4000 jaar Aziatische Kunst* [*Oriental Treasures: 4000 Years of Asian Art*].[267] This was a large-scale exhibition with nearly a thousand objects on display, including pieces from the KVVAK and those borrowed from other institutions and private collectors. About half the showpieces are from China, and the other half are mostly from Japan, Korea, India, and Indonesia. According to the catalogue, the exhibition included not only Chinese export porcelain but also pieces that were made for local and Asian markets and some pieces for Chinese emperors.[268] Compared to the Society's 1925 exhibition *Tentoonstelling van Chineesche Kunst* [Exhibition of Chinese Art], which focused on Han-Tang ceramics and Song porcelain, and its 1936 exhibition *Tentoonstelling Aziatische Kunst* [Exhibition of Asian Art], which presented only Ming-Qing products under the category of "Chinese ceramics," *Oosterse Schatten* included more types of Chinese porcelain and ceramics from the Neolithic Period to the Qing dynasty.[269] Also, compared to the catalogues of the previous exhibitions in 1925 and 1936, the catalogue of *Oosterse Schatten* is more informative: it not only lists each showpiece with notes on its period of production, shape, size, color, and decoration, but also offers an overview of the development of Chinese porcelain manufacturing techniques in different kilns

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[263] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1999); Van der Werf, "Vormgeven in dienst van de beschouwing," 196, 213.
[264] Visser, "Een en Ander over de Inrichting en Opstelling van ons in het Rijksmuseum Heropende Museum," 146-150.
[265] Scheurleer, *Asian Art in the Rijksmuseum*, 7. See also Pieter Ariëns Kappers, "Een Bijzonder Eeuwfeest" [A Special Centenary], *Aziatische Kunst* 48, no. 2 (2018): 7.
[266] Charlotte Klonk, "Myth and Reality of the White Cube," in *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Piotr Piotrowski (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 67.
[267] The exhibition's catalogue: Jan Fontein, *Oosterse Schatten: 4000 jaar Aziatische Kunst* [Oriental Treasures: 4000 Years of Asian Art] (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1954).
[268] Ibid., 41.
[269] The KVVAK's 1925 exhibition *Tentoonstelling van Chineesche Kunst* was organized by Herman Visser and Herman Westendorp. It was pioneering in Europe, earlier than the famous 1929 exhibition of Chinese art in Berlin and the 1935 *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London. The exhibition's catalogue contains statements about the form, style, and manufacturing techniques of Song porcelain. See Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst, *Tentoonstelling van Chineesche Kunst* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1925). The pieces of Chinese porcelain in the KVVAK's 1936 exhibition *Tentoonstelling Aziatische Kunst* were sorted based on periods and decorative styles (e.g. powder blue, blue and white, polychrome, etc.). See Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst, *Tentoonstelling Aziatische Kunst* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1936).

and period-styles in different dynasties. The catalogue of *Oosterse Schatten* also briefly introduces the reception of Chinese porcelain in overseas markets in Japan, West Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe.[270] The narrative that captures developmental patterns across time imparts art-historical value to porcelain.

This art-historical value is also expressed by the way porcelain was displayed in the exhibition's galleries: pieces of ceramics and porcelain were sequenced chronologically and grouped based on similar period-styles to show the stylistic development (**Figures 2.48-2.50**). Compared to the porcelain display in a decorative manner (as we have seen in *Gallery 364* and *Gallery 344* of the 1930s Rijksmuseum), the porcelain pieces in this exhibition were arranged horizontally in showcases, with ample space between them. This layout invites a closer look at the visual characteristics of individual pieces.

The Asian Art Department was established in the Rijksmuseum in 1965 in association with the KVVAK, and the KVVAK's collection was then formally decided to be put on long-term loan to the Rijksmuseum in 1972. The display scheme of grouping Chinese porcelain based on period-style and neatly arranging it within a spacious gallery was seen in the galleries of the Asian Art Department in the Rijksmuseum throughout the second half of the twentieth century (**Figures 2.51-5.52**). Also evident here was a continued preference for showing the Asian collection in a viewing environment of simplicity. Such a viewing environment is equally favored in the Asian Pavilion today.

Figure 2.48 View of *Gallery 8* in the exhibition *Oosterse Schatten* with Chinese porcelain, 1954. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0009478

[270] Fontein, *Oosterse Schatten: 4000 jaar Aziatische Kunst*, 39-42.

Figure 2.49 (left) Showcase with Chinese monochromatic porcelain in *Gallery 7* in the exhibition *Oosterse Schatten*, 1954. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0009469
Figure 2.50 (right) Showcase with Chinese porcelain of blue and white and powder blue in *Gallery 8* in the exhibition *Oosterse Schatten*, 1954. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0009476

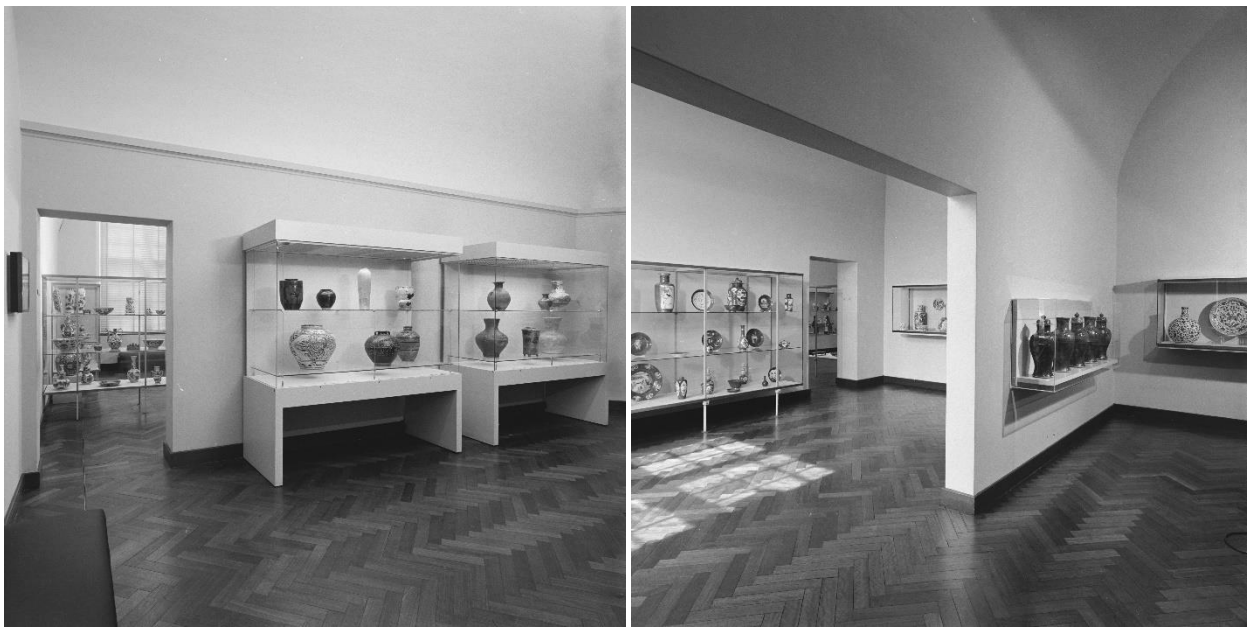

Figure 2.51 (left) View of the galleries of the Asian Art Department, with Chinese ceramics and porcelain, 1983. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0019922
Figure 2.52 (right) View of the galleries of the Asian Art Department, with Chinese porcelain, 1983. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0019925

After ten years of closure, the Rijksmuseum underwent a large-scale refurbishment and was finally reopened in 2013 (**Figure 2.53**).[271] This renovation was directed by the Spanish architects Pedro Cruz Villalón and Antonio Ortiz García. They also designed a free-standing, irregularly shaped, two-tiered structure (and its interior elements) called the Asian Pavilion, which is dedicated to the display of the Asian Art Department's collection (**Figure 2.54**). Its upper floor displays Hindu-Buddhist statues from India and Indonesia (**Figure 2.55**). For the curatorial team, daylight from a series of windows on this floor helps not only to enhance the viewing experience of these sculptures by highlighting their three-dimensional qualities, but also to underscore that many of the sculptures displayed here were originally shown in outdoor, open-air spaces.[272] Additionally, by bringing these religious sculptures together, the curators manage to encourage an artistic comparison of the similarities and differences between those made in India and in Indonesia.[273] The lower gallery on the below-ground floor shows various objects, including those that are light-sensitive, such as painting and lacquerware, mainly, but not exclusively, from China, Japan, and Korea (**Figure 2.56**). As these materials are light-sensitive, the display on the lower floor is more frequently changed compared to the display on the upper floor, where the large stone statues are more difficult to move.[274]

The interior exhibition space of the Asian Pavilion is closely connected with an exterior garden and waterscape through a line of large windows along the stairwell (**Figure 2.57**). The particular collocation of the label 'Asian Pavilion' and the surrounding water garden may evoke a specific Asian image that has been reinforced from a European perspective for centuries.[275] As a widespread decorative motif on Chinese and Japanese porcelain, lacquerware, and wall-coverings, garden pavilions were conceived by European artisans and interior designers as a signifier of China or, more broadly, Asia. The motif was then commonly copied on chinoiserie products in order to create an imaginary Chinese/Asian genre of landscape. The whiteness of the exhibition space (which is usually less crowded compared to the main building) in association with the waterscape of gravel seems to be readily reminiscent of the tranquility, clarity, and simplicity of Zen aesthetics.[276]

To a certain extent, the display aesthetics in the Asian Pavilion today recall Visser's tastes by creating a viewing atmosphere of harmony and simplicity, an atmosphere that is set by neatly arranged objects and plain-colored galleries. The major difference is that, compared to the Society's early displays

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[271] Throughout the twentieth century, the spatial layout in the main building of the Rijksmuseum had been based on departments. After the renovation, collections of paintings, sculptures, crafts, and historical objects from different departments were no longer shown in separate parts of the museum, but displayed in combination to present a chronological overview of Dutch art and history. For more about this ten-year renovation, see Paul Meurs and Marie-Thérèse van Thoor, eds., *Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: Restoration and Transformation of a National Monument*; see also the documentary about the renovation, *The New Rijksmuseum* (2014).

[272] Anna A. Ślączka and William Southworth, "Rijksmuseum," *Arts asiatiques* 68, (2013): 120. See also the documentary *The New Rijksmuseum* (2014).

[273] Ślączka and Southworth, "Rijksmuseum," 120.

[274] Menno Fitski, "Wisselen in Het Aziatisch Paviljoen" [Changing in The Asian Pavilion], *Aziatische Kunst* [Asian Art] 44, no. 2 (2014): 40.

[275] Oliver R. Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (New York: Scribner's, 1977).

[276] For the curators of the Asian Art Department, the spatial atmosphere of the Asian Pavilion is one of "simplicity and clarity," which is "aligned well with the nature of the Asian art collection." See Fitski and Ślączka, "A New Pavilion for Asian Art at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam," 134.

in the Garden Hall and the Drucker Wing, the presentation in the Asian Pavilion is organized in an endeavor to show more of the diversity of Asian art. Except for a few pieces that are semi-permanently showcased, the Department of Asian Art change its showpieces and exhibitions in the Asian Pavilion almost every six months.[277] This decision is made in accordance with the curatorial intent of keeping a spatial organization that is "visueel rustig en duidelijk [visually calm and clear]," while simultaneously showing the collection as much as possible, so as to entice audiences to visit more regularly.[278]

Figure 2.53 North facade of the Rijksmuseum, 2013. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0027608

Figure 2.54 Asian Pavilion, 2013. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0026665

[277] In 2014, Anna Grasskamp and Annette Loeseke published a research report based on two hundred interviews with the museum's visitors. According to the report, "a lack of paintings and prints in the Asian Pavilion" plus the fact that "the audio guide's selection of two Asian sculptures [the Japanese temple guardian and the Shiva Nataraja] in the Pavilion" runs the risk to "channel the perception of […] an object-concentrated Asian section which in turn might negatively reinforce rather than deconstruct some problematic stereotypical views of the very nature of artistic practices in Asia." See Anna Grasskamp and Annette Loeseke, "Framing 'Asia': Results from a Visitor Study at the Rijksmuseum's Asian Pavilion," *Aziatische Kunst* 44, no. 2 (2014): 55. This argument maybe somewhat overdetermined, given that displays in the Asian Pavilion change regularly.

[278] Menno Fitski, "Een Nieuw Paviljoen voor Aziatische Kunst" [A New Pavilion for Asian Art], *Aziatische Kunst* 43, no. 3-4 (2013), 5.

Figure 2.55 (left) View of the upper floor of the Asian Pavilion, 2013. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0027969
Figure 2.56 (right) View of the lower floor of the Asian Pavilion, 2013. Collected in the Rijksmuseum, object number: HA-0027983

Figure 2.57 View of Asian Pavilion with *Vessel of the Soul* (facing the waterscape) by Tu Wei-Cheng, 2019. © Tu Wei-Cheng

Moreover, the showpieces in today's Asian Pavilion are not limited to the Department's (and the KVVAK's) original collection scope—which focuses on four key regions: China, Japan, India, and Indonesia—but also include works from outside of these regions, through international collaborations, to enrich the image of Asian art. This results in a quite refreshing viewing experience. For example, between 2019 and 2020, the Asian Pavilion has presented a special exhibition titled *The Future of Now: Bu Num Civilization in the Rijksmuseum*. The exhibition shows a series of fictitious cultural relics by the contemporary Taiwanese artist Tu Wei-Cheng (not the Asian Art Department's collection), including

Vessel of the Soul, a site-specific artwork made to display at the Asian Pavilion, echoing the waterscape of gravel and plants just beyond the glass windows (see **Figure 2.57**).[279] This is the first time that a contemporary Taiwanese artist has been invited to hold a solo exhibition at the Rijksmuseum, and his presence provides a fresh impression of Asian art.

Ideologically, the whitewashed space of the Asian Pavilion is *not* a homogeneous space of art that whitewashes the heterogeneity inherent in the category of Asian art.[280] Quite the opposite, the ever-changing presentations that include not just the KVVAK's collection but also contemporary artworks borrowed from other Asian artists or institutions shows a promise of expanding the category and highlight the diversity of Asian Art of the KVVAK and the Rijksmuseum's Asian Art Department. Nevertheless, it should be also noted that, when compared with the Rijksmuseum's main building, the architectural and interior design of the Asian Pavilion could unintentionally evoke a sense of cultural difference. That is to say, the very idea of differentiation is not simply found in the Asian Pavilion, but it is constructed and reinforced if one compares the Asian Pavilion with the adjoining main building of the Rijksmuseum.

As mentioned, when the Museum for Asian Art was incorporated in the Rijksmuseum under the directorship of Röell, its light-colored galleries were consistent with those in the museum's main building. By comparison, today's Asian Pavilion is visually distinct from the museum's main building. The Asian Pavilion is detached from the main building with only a long white hallway to connect the two. More than simply a spatial transition from one building to another, I contend that this white passageway may also unfold a spatial narrative of cultural differentiation: 'we are here at this place and they are there at that place'. Unlike the nineteenth-century cathedral-like main building, which was erected of red bricks, with a Gothic-renaissance appearance, the Asian Pavilion is built of Portuguese limestone, giving it an off-white, modern look, and it is intentionally built in a zigzag shape to contrast the symmetrical rectangle of the main building.[281] In addition to their architectural profiles, the two buildings' interiors and exhibition designs also form an obvious contrast. The main building presents the grand linear narrative of Dutch art and heroic national history in galleries with walls painted in varied greys. In contrast, the showpieces and exhibitions in the Asian Pavilion's simple gallery space are changed often. Their obvious differences in terms of architectural style, interior design, and object organization potentially make a walk from the main building to the Asian Pavilion potentially a symbolic bordering process following a logic of differentiation.

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[279] For an introduction to the exhibition, see Wang Ching-Ling, "The Future of Now: The Bu Num Civilization in the Rijksmuseum," *Aziatische Kunst* 50, no. 1 (2020): 64-65.

[280] The Asian Pavilion is criticized by Anna Grasskamp and Annette Loeseke as embodying "a certain epistemic violence," especially if one considers that "the Pavilion's attempt to stage Asian religious sculptures as 'art'." See Anna Grasskamp and Annette Loeseke, "Asia in Your Window Frame: Museum Displays, Window Curators and Dutch-Asian Material Culture," *World Art* 5, no. 2 (2015): 239. However, what should be also noted here is that, by collecting and displaying religious sculptures as arts, the KVVAK intends to highlight possible artistic relationships between religious sculptures in China, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia, and to get Asian religious objects away from a (European) ethnographic standpoint. See Visser, "Het Museum van Aziatische Kunst in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam," 131.

[281] Fitski, "Een Nieuw Paviljoen voor Aziatische Kunst," 4.

Conclusion: The Making of Multivalent Porcelain

Through the close readings and historical contextualization in these three sections, this chapter aims to show how important the collection history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum is in exploring the performative effects of the museum's porcelain display. Archival photos and old gallery guides provide a rich material for this chapter to explore how the display of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum has attributed decorative, historical, aesthetic, art-historical, and symbolic values to Chinese porcelain from the 1930s up until today. Chinese porcelain displayed in the galleries of the Department of Dutch History and the Department of Sculpture and Applied Art acts like a reminder of former Dutch glory and splendor. In these galleries, the juxtapositions of Chinese porcelain with Dutch portraits depicting powerful classes and landscapes mapping the VOC's field of influence show us how china display can work to express discourses of Dutch civic pride and national identity. Exploring the schemes of arrangement of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum offers a deeper understanding of the patriotic narrative through which the museum negotiates and constructs Dutch national identity and self-image with objects coming from other places. At the same time, the incorporation of the KVVAK and the development of the Asian Art Department introduced the category of Asian art in the Rijksmuseum. As shown, in the galleries of the Asian Art Department, Chinese porcelain and other Asian objects are displayed in a way to accentuate their aesthetic and art-historical values.

This chapter has explored the appropriation of Chinese porcelain from the Rijksmuseum's Dutch-centric narrative perspective. The next chapter, Chapter 3, focuses on two special exhibitions co-organized by the Rijksmuseum and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, the United States, between 2015 and 2016: *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the Peabody Essex Museum. It analyzes the performativity of the two exhibitions by introducing the issue of focalization, a concept originally proposed in the study of literary narratives.

CHAPTER 3 Focalization: Comparison of the Exhibition Narratives of *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the Peabody Essex Museum

Who, in what context, is presented as seeing?

Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse*

Introduction: The Power of Focalization

This chapter aims to show the importance of focalization, as both a narrative technique and an analytical tool, in the analysis of performative qualities of exhibitions. It takes the form of a comparative study of two co-organized special exhibitions: *Asia > Amsterdam* (October 17, 2015-January 17, 2016) at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* (February 27-June 5, 2016) in Salem's Peabody Essex Museum in the United States (hereinafter referred to as the PEM).[282] Many objects that were displayed in *Asia > Amsterdam* were also shown in *Asia in Amsterdam*. Most of them come from the collections of the two museums, but pieces were also borrowed from other private and institutional lenders.

Asia in Amsterdam was initially conceived as a small installation accompanying another exhibition, *Golden: Dutch and Flemish Masterworks from the Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo Collection*, hosted by the PEM in 2011. The Rijksmuseum, which was about to reopen after a ten-year renovation, agreed to lend the PEM works for this small installation. This collaboration eventually facilitated a new project of co-organizing special exhibitions in the two museums: namely, *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam*.[283]

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[282] The exhibition in the Rijksmuseum was initially titled *Asia in Amsterdam* as well. According to an email sent on July 15, 2016 from the art historian Jan van Campen, who is also one of the exhibition curators, the change of title was very much a graphic decision. The graphic designer at the Rijksmuseum, Irma Boom, preferred *Asia > Amsterdam* over *Asia in Amsterdam* in her designs for the posters, brochures, advertisements, and cover of the exhibition catalogue. It seems to me, however, confusing to use the mark '>' in the title, not only because it is hard to pronounce (still *in*?), but also because its meaning is ambiguous, as it looks like both a directional arrow (Asia *to* Amsterdam?) and a mathematical symbol (Asia *is greater than* Amsterdam?).

[283] Regarding the origin of the exhibition programming, see the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition: Karina H. Corrigan, Jan van Campen, and Femke Diercks, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* (Salem: Peabody Essex Museum; Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum; New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2015), 10.

Both the Rijksmuseum and the PEM hold renowned collections of Asian export art that are inextricably connected to global trade in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. This laid the foundation for their cooperation in exhibition planning and content. The Rijksmuseum, as I have explained in the previous chapter, is a Dutch national monument that houses a collection of Asian export products associated with the VOC's overseas expansion. On the other side of the Atlantic, the PEM's collection history is also inextricably linked to early global maritime trade, as the city where the museum is located, Salem, was an important port for trade with China and the East Indies in the nineteenth century.

The PEM is the successor of the East India Marine Society, founded in Salem in 1799. The Society's members were limited to Salem's elite, people who had sailed beyond either the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, and brought diverse objects back from the northwest coast of America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. The Society's charter included a provision for the establishment of a museum displaying their collection of "natural and artificial curiosities" gathered on their global voyages.[284] By 1825, the Society moved into its own building in Salem, the East India Marine Hall, now embedded within the PEM's building. The East India Marine Hall was then gradually transitioned into the Peabody Museum, which was opened in 1915.[285] Generally, from 1825 to the late 1990s, the collection of the Society was displayed as ethnographical/natural-historical materials that served to promote local knowledge about distant lands and to signal their owners' successes in global trade.[286] In 1992, the Peabody Museum was merged with the nearby Essex Institute, which was a local organization concerned with natural history, and became the PEM as seen today. In the ensuing years, the PEM has expanded its building and reimagined itself as an *art* museum. For the PEM, the idea that art can "bridge time, space, and cultural boundaries" provides a useful approach to break free from its prior historical orientation "as an institution by and about Salem sea captains."[287] Today, the museum's vision is to explore the inextricable cultural connections embodied in the collection. Particularly, Asian export art is one of the PEM's key collection categories, as it provides an important window into the profound historical relations between artistic creation and overseas trade.

According to the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition, edited by the curators from both museums, *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* aim to show the "transformative impact that Asian

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[284] John R. Crimes, "Curiosity, Cabinets, and Knowledge: A Perspective on the Native American Collection of the Peabody Essex Museum," in *Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum*, eds. John Richard Grimes, Christian Feest, and Mary Lou Curran (New York: American Federation of Arts in Association with University of Washington Press, 2002), 17. The purpose of displaying the members' collections to the public was not only intellectual (spreading knowledge) but also practical, as showing objects assembled from around the world reinforced the social status of the Society's members in Salem. See Patricia Johnston, "Global Knowledge in the Early Republic: The East India Marine Society's 'Curiosities' Museum," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, ed. Joan M. Marter (Washington DC.: Smithsonian Scholars Press, 2011), 68-79.

[285] Walter Muir Whitehill, *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem: A Sesquicentennial History* (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1949), 6.

[286] See Karen Kramer Russell, "Over 200 Years of Native American Art and Culture at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts," *Tulsa La Review* 45, no. 1 (2009): 32-44; and Johnston, "Global Knowledge in the Early Republic," 74.

[287] See Russell, "Over 200 Years of Native American Art and Culture at the Peabody Essex Museum," 7; Peggy Levitt and Katherine Cali, "Using the Local to Tell a Global Story: How the Peabody Essex Museum Became a World Class Museum," *Museum and Society* 14, no. 1 (2016), 152. The latter has a detailed discussion about the PEM's efforts to reposition itself as an art museum.

luxuries had on Dutch art and life in the seventeenth century."[288] The catalogue explains that the scope of Asia in the exhibitions specifically refers to the areas of and between India, Indonesia, China and, Japan, basically the trading sphere over which the VOC had control in the seventeenth century.[289] The term luxuries here refers to objects that were valued by the Dutch not only because of their materials (e.g. gold and gems) but also because of their fascinating craftmanship, visual and sensual allure, and symbolic function of communicating the social status of their owners.[290]

Many of the objects included in the exhibitions embody combined styles. For example, both exhibitions show a Chinese Qing porcelain sweetmeat set decorated with the coat of arms of Johannes Camphuys (1634-1695), the former Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, who used it to serve Japanese cuisine to European guests.[291] Objects like this are fascinating not only because of their blending of materials and styles, but also because of the rich information they contain about historical interactions across cultural borders. With these objects that demonstrate once flourishing networks of trade and exchange in their visual vocabularies, the two exhibitions seek to highlight the "artistic interactions made possible through the global networks of the VOC."[292] In this sense, *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* echo the idea of transculturation discussed in Chapter 1 in regard to the trans-border arrangement of Ming pilgrim flasks and the narrative of transculturation in the British Museum today. As suggested, arranging and interpreting a museum object through a transcultural lens aims to draw audiences' attention to the object's past circulation across geo-cultural borders and its connections with different groups, and to show how these bring multiple meanings and identities to the object. A transcultural perspective of interpretation, as Monica Juneja and Anna Grasskamp argue, enables a shift of focus "from the site of origin of an object—the place where traditional art history situates and interprets its objects—to more interactive zones and spaces of contact in order to look at the dynamic relationships between a number of sites."[293] Arguably, this 'interactive zone' is what *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* create in their galleries, in which audiences are invited to see the potential of objects to illustrate historical interactions between the Netherlands and Asia.

Despite these common grounds, the two exhibitions construct very different narratives. This is not only because of their different arrangements of objects; I propose, their distinctive use of focalization also enables them to highlight different messages. The term focalization was first introduced by the literary theorist Gérard Genette in order to distinguish the question "whose point of view orients the

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[288] Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks, *Asia in Amsterdam*, 9. Broadly, the two exhibitions present the transformative impact of this encounter with four themes. These are as follows: home furnishing (how Asian luxuries permitted new schemes of interior decoration); fashion (how Asian textiles with new fabrics and patterns led to new fashion); collecting and publishing (how new information about Asia facilitated the collection of objects and the publishing of printed maps and illustrated books); and artistic creation (how Asian luxuries inspired the making of Dutch art, such as still life and ceramics).

[289] Ibid., 14. This exhibition catalogue is very informative. It contains seven essays on the topic of the Dutch trade and consumption of Asian luxuries. The lavish color illustrations of the objects on display are distributed in these essays, with detailed notes on the historical interactions between Asia and Europe behind the manufacture and consumption of each piece.

[290] Ibid.

[291] This porcelain sweetmeat is collected in the PEM, object number: AE85686.A-I.

[292] Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks, *Asia in Amsterdam*, 16.

[293] Monica Juneja and Anna Grasskamp, "EurAsian Matters: An Introduction," in *EurAsian Matters: China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800*, eds. Anna Grasskamp and Monica Juneja (Cham: Springer, 2018), 7.

narrative perspective" from the question "who is the narrator."[294] The distinction between who *sees* and who *speaks* is important as it enables a better understanding of the communicative conception of vision in a narrative. However, Genette's proposition of a taxonomy of three types of focalization (zero, internal, and external) have been criticized as confusing as they are hard to distinguish from each other in many cases.[295]

Genette's concept was substantially revised by Mieke Bal. Bal anchors focalization in the relation between "that which is 'seen' or perceived […] and the vision through which they are seen or presented."[296] In this way, she underlines the strong connection between focalization and perception.[297] Furthermore, Bal distinguishes two levels of focalization, each defined in her own way: external focalization is the first level, at which the subject of focalization—the focalizor—is a narrator located outside the represented event (the story world); when this external focalizor delegates focalization to "a character-bound focalizor" who is located in the represented event (the story world), this is second-level, internal focalization.[298] Bal's concept of focalization is hierarchically structured in that the internal or character-bound focalizor is embedded in the external or non-character-bound focalization. As such, recognizing *where* and *how* "the focalization is transferred from the first [external] to the second [internal] level" is crucial, and an issue I will discuss further in this chapter.

In addition to her clear definitions of internal and external focalization, Bal's focalization theory will be my main paradigm for three reasons. First, Bal provides a convincing reason for using the term focalization instead of existing terms such as point of view and perspective. Genette considers focalization, on a terminological level, as merely a "reformulation" of the concept of point of view, a term that is used to "draw together and systematize" the many ideas regarding issues of visual field in narrative.[299] However, as the literary scholar Burkhard Niederhoff points out, this is "an underestimation of the conceptual differences between focalization and the traditional terms."[300] Bal, in comparison, conceives of the term focalization not just as a typology of narratives but also, and more importantly, as an analytical tool composed of the act of focalization (to focalize), the subject of the focalizing (the focalizor), and the object of the focalizing (the focalized). As Bal notes, the terms point of view and

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[294] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1980[1972]), 186.

[295] According to Genette, zero focalization refers to a narrative in which the omniscient narrator has unrestricted vision and thus sees and is knowledgeable about more than any character in the story; external focalization refers to a narrative in which the narrator has restricted vision and sees less than a given character in the story; and internal focalization refers to a narrative in which the narrator has a restricted vision and only sees what a given character sees. See Genette, *Narrative* Discourse, 189-194. For a general discussion and criticism of Genette's concept of focalization, see Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, eds., *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modelling Mediation in Narrative* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Guyter, 2009).

[296] Mieke Bal, *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 43.

[297] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997[1985]), 142.

[298] Ibid., 26, 156-158. For a discussion of the debate between Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal on the topic of focalization, see Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions and Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

[299] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1988[1983]), 65.

[300] Burkhard Niederhoff, "Focalization," in *Handbook of Narratology*, eds. Peter Hühn, John Pier, and Jörg Schönert (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 115.

perspective have no customary verbs to describe the processing activity, nor do they have nouns to identify the agent who performs the act of focalization. However, as Bal argues, focalization is a "subject-oriented theory."[301] In order to analyze the function of focalization, it is necessary to have terms through which the performing subject and the object of that performance can be derived and described.

Second, Bal's conception of focalization as a subject-oriented theory helps to justify my choice to bring this term into this specific chapter. In the previous two chapters, I use the term perspective to describe a particular curatorial point of view from which the meaning of an object is regarded. For example, the British Museum's transcultural perspective is revealed in its trans-border arrangement of Ming pilgrim flasks, and the Rijksmuseum's Dutch-centric perspective is revealed in its juxtaposition of Chinese porcelain with Dutch portraits. The concept of focalization enables this chapter to further examine whether the exhibition story told to audiences is subjectively filtered, or to use Bal's word "*coloured*," by a specific agent who is not a curator but a *character* located in the story world of the exhibition.[302] In this sense, focalization, as an analytical tool, contributes to a close reading of the structuring of the exhibition story, a more in-depth analysis of the meaning generated by the specific way in which the objects on display are organized.

The third reason I apply Bal's idea of focalization is that, as a cultural theorist, Bal emphasizes the manipulative effect of focalization. For her, focalization, as a term derived from photography and film, has a strong technical sense, making it a useful tool to reveal that "any 'vision' presented can have a strongly manipulative effect," and in doing so to "help us keep our attention on the technical side of such a means of manipulation."[303] Hence, what she proposes is in fact a more critical analysis of focalization as a "subtle manipulation," in order to "expose the hidden ideology embedded in a narrative structure," rather than merely another terminological label for classifying a text.[304] This provides a critical underpinning and a clear account of why I adopt focalization as an analytical tool for my comparative study of these two exhibitions.

This chapter has three sections. The first section compares the narrative structures of the two exhibitions as reflected in their overall different spatial organizations and object arrangements. The second and third sections further examine the focalization strategies practiced in certain galleries of the exhibitions. The purpose here is not to contend that each of these two exhibitions only uses a specific type of focalization, nor to evaluate which type of focalization is the most desirable. Rather, I aim to explore how the operations of different types of focalization in certain galleries of the two exhibitions contribute to highlighting specific messages.

3-1 Same Luxuries, Different Stories

Asia > Amsterdam and *Asia in Amsterdam* share the same objective of celebrating seventeenth-century Amsterdam as one of the most bustling cities in Europe and a city where the yearning for the Asian

[301] Bal, *Narratology*, 143-144.
[302] Ibid., 8.
[303] Ibid., 144.
[304] Ibid., 171.

luxuries became affordable. These Asian imports greatly changed the Dutch lifestyle and brought an air of artistic innovation to the Netherlands. Interestingly, aside from this shared curatorial intention, each of the two exhibitions has its own way of organizing its storyline and the presentation. As a result, their take-home messages may not be quite the same.

3-1-1 Asia > Amsterdam at the Rijksmuseum

Asia > Amsterdam is located in the Philips Wing, an annex of the Rijksmuseum where special exhibitions are often held. The exhibition has ten galleries: *Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam*; *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain*; *Gallery 3 In Asia/Batavia*; *Gallery 4 Portugal and Spain in Asia*; *Gallery 5 Scholars and Collectors/Rembrandt*; *Gallery 6 Wearing Asia*; *Gallery 7 Lacquerware/Amalia and Frederick Henry*; *Gallery 8 Pronk Still Lifes/Asia in the Dutch Interior*; *Gallery 9 Interactions in Ceramics*; and final, *Gallery 10 Asia Everywhere* (**Figure 3.1**).

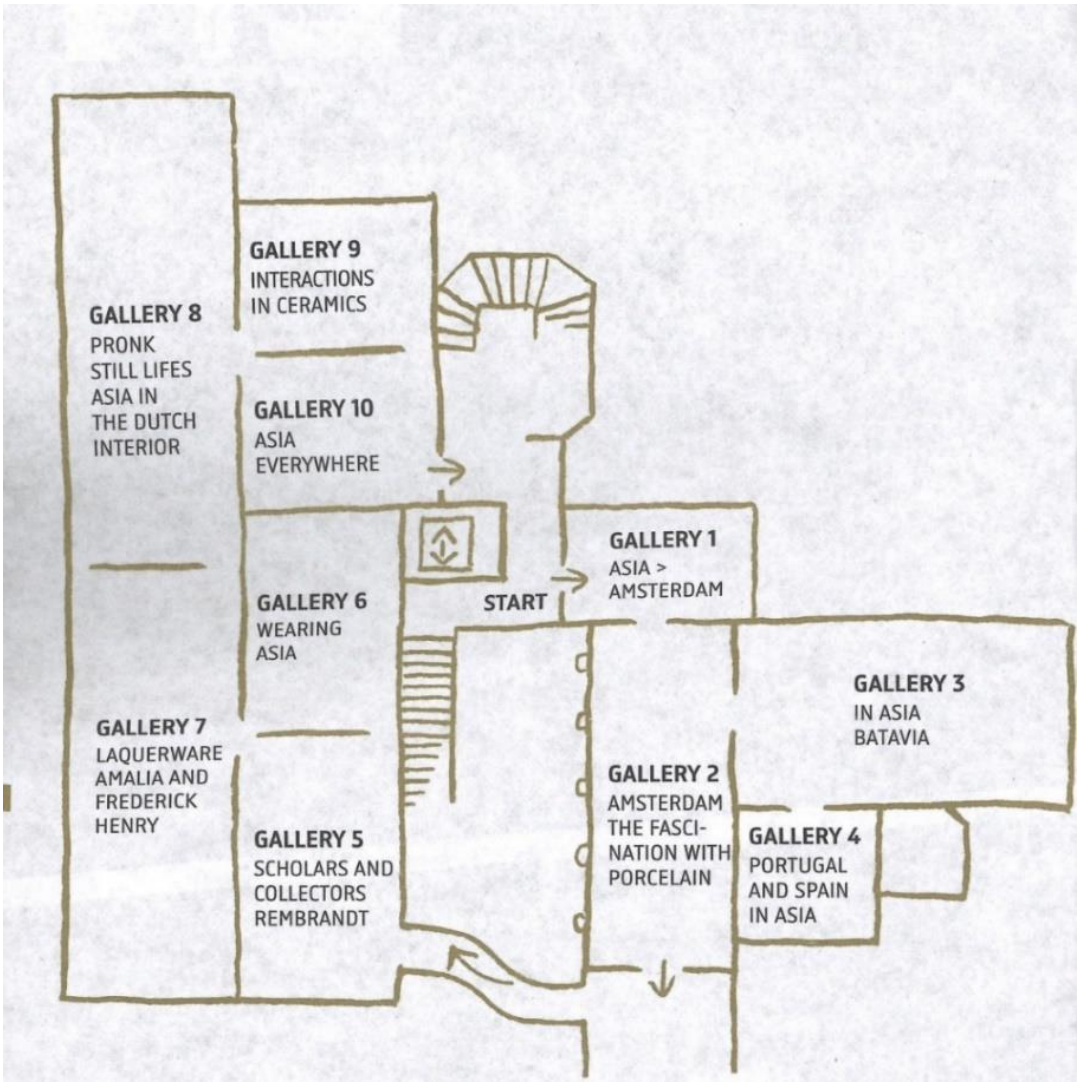

Figure 3.1 Floor plan of *Asia > Amsterdam*. © The Rijksmuseum

The gallery walls are wallpapered with a series of enlarged watercolors with garish patterns designed by the contemporary Dutch artist Kiki van Eijk. The intention here is to use these colorful wallpapers to suggest the theme of each gallery display. For example, the wallpaper in *Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam* immerses audiences in a blue seascape, echoing the maritime scene represented in the Dutch painting on display, *The Return in Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies* (1599) (**Figures 3.2-3.3**). Similarly, the pattern of the wallpaper in *Gallery 6 Wearing Asia* is allegedly inspired by multicolored cotton fabric from India (**Figure 3.4**). Similar floral patterns are found on a dressing gown made in the Netherlands using cotton cloth from India which is showcased in the middle of the gallery space. However, it should be noted that, in the exhibition's galleries, there are no labels or captions to shed light on the themes of each watercolor. These ten watercolors are reproduced by the Rijksmuseum as ten greeting cards and sold in the museum's souvenir shop. It is through the texts attached behind the card box that I gleaned the theme of each of them. Thus, it is almost impossible for audiences to identify the theme of each wallpaper, let alone connect the watercolor with the corresponding gallery display. What is more, although these wallpapers are indeed visually attractive, they also run the risk of being lurid and overwhelming, pulling viewers' attention away from the objects on display, which are supposed to be the protagonists on the exhibition stage.

Figure 3.2 View of *Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. On the left wall: *The return in Amsterdam of the second expedition to the East Indies* (1599). On the right wall: *Map of the East Indies* (1626-1699). In the showcase: A Japanese blue and white plate with the monogram of the VOC and a Dutch silver spice box. © The Rijksmuseum

Figure 3.3 *The return in Amsterdam of the second expedition to the East Indies* (1599), by Hendrik Cornelisz. Vroom. Oil on canvas. Size: high 102.3 cm; width 218.4 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-2858

Figure 3.4 View of *Gallery 6 Wearing Asia* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. © The Rijksmuseum

The floor plan of the exhibition reveals that its narrative is arranged sequentially, with a clear beginning and end, and an intended order (see **Figure 3.1**). This floor plan is printed in the exhibition's booklet, accompanied by all the label contents.[305] The story of the exhibition begins when Asian imports arrive in Amsterdam on the VOC's ships. The object numbered 1 in the first gallery is a painting called *The Return in Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies* (see **Figure 3.3**). The seascape and joyous occasion marks "a commercial triumph," the label reads, "the first step towards the success of the future VOC had been taken." Compared to other galleries of the exhibition, *Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam* is the smallest and has the fewest showpieces. It acts as a prelude to the main story which happened after Asian luxuries were unloaded from the VOC ships. The storyline immediately shifts to Amsterdam's cityscape and Dutch domestic interiors in the next gallery.

When audiences step into *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain*, what immediately greets them is a large-scale *Portrait of Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh* (1674) (**Figures 3.5-3.6**). The label reads:

[305] The booklet is available at the exhibition entrance and free of charge.

> Wollebrand returned to Alkmaar in 1648 after working many years for the VOC, for which he held high offices in Persia (now Iran) and India. Back home, he had himself portrayed as a successful servant of the VOC by his fellow townsman Van Everdingen.

Holding his command baton, Wollebrand is depicted in a majestic pose, echoing the height of his career, although, according to the catalogue, the portrait was in fact commissioned by the elderly Wollebrand, just a year before his death.[306] Two other paintings, *View of the Golden Bend in the Herengracht* (1671-1672) (**Figure 3.7**) and *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere* (1712) (**Figure 3.8**), are displayed around Wollebrand's portrait. According to their labels, the former shows how "the canal became the domain of the very richest [, some of whom] earned their money from trade with Asia," while the latter provides an idealized representation of how "well-to-do Amsterdammers gave precious objects from Asia pride of place in their homes." After this, audiences in *Gallery 2* will be immersed in a world of goods constituted by a series of Dutch still lifes incorporating Chinese porcelain into the idealized representations of domestic settings (**Figures 3.9-3.10**). Moving from the glorious return of fully laden ships, to a cityscape of Amsterdam with mansions on both sides of the canal, to a room corner arrangement of precious goods from Asia, to a tabletop and ledge laden with porcelain, this viewing order amplifies a joyous mood, a celebration of the prosperity of Amsterdam.

Figure 3.5 View of *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. The painting on the left: *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere* (1712); on the right: *Portrait of Wollebrand Geleynsz de Jongh* (1674). © The Rijksmuseum

[306] Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks. *Asia in Amsterdam*, 56.

Figure 3.6 *Portrait of Wollebrand Geleynsz de Jongh* (1674) by Caesar van Everdingen. Oil on canvas. Size: high 214.5 cm; width 182.2 cm. Collected in the Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar. Inventory number: 020926

Figure 3.7 (left) *View of the Golden Bend in the Herengracht* (1671-1672), by Gerrit Berckheyde. Oil on Panel. Size: high 42.5 cm; width 57.9 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-5003
Figure 3.8 (right) *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere* (1712) by Jan van der Heyden. Oil on canvas. Size: high 75 cm; width 63.5 cm. Collected in Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest

Figure 3.9 View of *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. © The Rijksmuseum

Figure 3.10 View of *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. © The Rijksmuseum

The VOC's trading network in Asia is introduced in *Gallery 3 In Asia/Batavia*. According to the gallery plan, this gallery and the next one, *Gallery 4 Portugal and Spain in Asia*, both lead viewers back to *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* before they can continue visiting the remaining galleries. This layout makes the two galleries more like two subsections of *Gallery 2* (see **Figure 3.1**). The rest of the galleries (Galleries 5-10) of the exhibition show the Dutch reception of Asian luxuries with different emphases, including scholarly collecting and studying, fashion, interior decoration, local artistic innovation (e.g. Delftware), and tea drinking. In what follows, I would like to draw particular attention to the display in the last two galleries, *Gallery 9 Interactions in Ceramics* and *Gallery 10 Asia Everywhere*. Once we associate the last two galleries with the first two galleries (*Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam* and *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain*), a coherent narrative of the Dutch domestication of Asian goods becomes evident.

Gallery 9 Interactions in Ceramics focuses on the interactions between the visual languages of porcelain and ceramics from China, Japan, and the Netherlands (**Figure 3.11**). Its wall caption indicates how the imported Chinese and Japanese porcelain "inspired potteries in Delft [who] found a way of making a very refined kind of earthenware that could compete with Asian porcelain." The gallery shows a mixed arrangement in which pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in a European style are juxtaposed with pieces of Delftware in a Chinese or Japanese style. Here, a blue and white palette is no longer necessarily an identifier of China, and might mean a piece is from Delft. Similarly, works with multi-colored decorations may not be Japanese porcelain and could be Delft earthenware. In this way, it is almost impossible for general audiences to recognize whether these ceramic (or porcelain) pieces were produced in China, Japan, or the Netherlands without reading the labels in the gallery. In this way, the arrangement blurs, to some extent, the difference between the things made in Asia and in the Netherlands. Notably, some pieces of Delftware showcased in this gallery are seen again in *Gallery 5 Innovators* in *Asia in Amsterdam*, where the focus is not how similar Delftware is to Chinese porcelain, but rather how Delft potters developed diverse products for different export markets, including Japan and France (**Figure 3.12**).

Figure 3.11 (left) View of *Gallery 9 Interactions in Ceramics* in *Asia > Amsterdam*. © The Rijksmuseum
Figure 3.12 (right) View of *Gallery 5 Innovators* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. The showcase on the left is captioned "Not all DELFTWARE is blue!" The showcase on the right is captioned "DELFTWARE for diverse markets." © The PEM

The mixed arrangement in *Gallery 9* in *Asia > Amsterdam* echoes the theme of the exhibition's final gallery, *Gallery 10 Asia Everywhere*. This final gallery shows a variety of materials, including fabric fragments from both India and Amsterdam, two pieces of silverware could be made in either the Hague or Southeast Asia, Chinese and Dutch tea services, a Dutch still life with teacups, and a Dutch painting depicting a Dutch family drinking tea. These objects are brought together to highlight a fact that after Asian luxuries were shipped to Amsterdam during the seventeenth century, they subsequently found their way throughout the Netherlands, to fascinate, to inspire, and to be absorbed into the Dutch arts and lifestyle.

Given the arrangements in the last two galleries, it seems that *Asia > Amsterdam* ends its story with an ideological subtext, showing how Asian goods were domesticated from signaling the exotic to signaling Dutchness in a process of "evolving identification."[307] This domestication process is especially visible if one compares the wall captions in the exhibition's first and final galleries:

> This exhibition focuses on the most beautiful objects from Asia to reach the Netherlands and charts their impact there. How this *exotic* luxury inspired Dutch painters, potters, lacquerware craftsmen, cabinet-makers and silk weavers is also explored. (wall text of *Gallery 1 Asia > Amsterdam*; emphasis added)

> The Asian objects that had been the subject of fascination in the beginning of the 17th century became increasingly *embedded* in Dutch culture… (wall text of *Gallery 10 Asia Everywhere*; emphasis added)

Acting as the opening and concluding remarks of the exhibition, these two wall texts outline a process of domestication: after being imported to Amsterdam, Asian goods were gradually separated from their exotic roots and became incorporated, embedded in Dutch material culture. The title of the final gallery, *Asia Everywhere*, can be understood as signaling the result of this domestication, of re-identifying Asian goods from exotic to Dutch; there seems to no need to distinguish *them* from *us*, as *they* (Asian material objects) were gradually embedded in *our* (Dutch) material culture; ultimately, *they* have become part of *us*.

Now, let us shift attention to the narrative structure of *Asia in Amsterdam* at the PEM. I will highlight differences in storyline organization and interpretive strategy between the two exhibitions.

3-1-2 Asia in Amsterdam at the PEM

Asia in Amsterdam has five galleries: *Gallery 1 Networkers*; *Gallery 2 Tastemakers*; *Gallery 3 Thought Leaders*; *Gallery 4 Fashionistas*; and finally, *Gallery 5 Innovators* (**Figure 3.13**). Clearly, these galleries are named to highlight certain groups of people who worked together to bring about great prosperity in seventeenth-century Dutch art and commerce. Like in *Asia > Amsterdam*, through the floor plan of *Asia in Amsterdam*, we can see its narrative has a clear beginning and end. The gallery walls are colored differently to help audiences maintain orientation. For example, *Gallery 3 Thought Leaders* is painted in yellow, while *Gallery 4*

[307] Dawn Odell, "Delftware and the Domestication of Chinese Porcelain," in *EurAsian Matters: China, Europe, and the Transcultural Object, 1600-1800*, eds. Anna Grasskamp and Monica Juneja (Cham: Springer, 2018), 177.

Fashionistas is painted in red (**Figures 3.14-3.15**). Without the fancy patterns seen in the wallpapers in *Asia > Amsterdam*, these colored walls are less distracting.

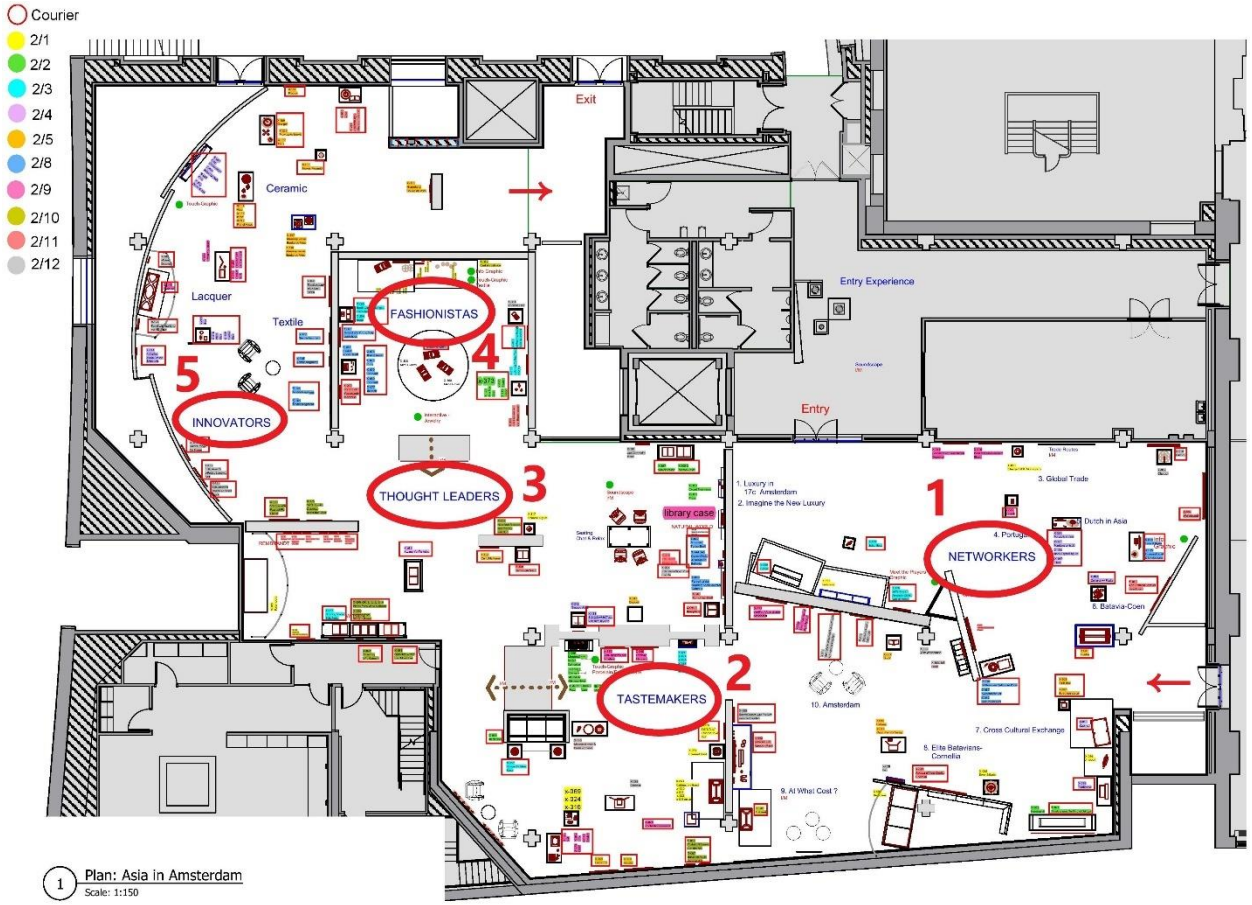

Figure 3.13 Floor plan of *Asia in Amsterdam*. The numbers 1-5 (indicating Galleries 1-5) and the red oval frames are added by the author. © The PEM

Figure 3.14 (left) View of *Gallery 3 Thought Leaders* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. © The PEM
Figure 3.15 (right) View of *Gallery 4 Fashionistas* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. © The PEM

As described in the previous section, *Asia > Amsterdam* draws attention mainly to what happened after Asian goods were imported into Amsterdam. In contrast, *Asia in Amsterdam* allocates its first, and also its largest, gallery, *Gallery 1 Networkers*, to present what happened before Asian luxuries reached Dutch

domestic interiors: that is, what happened out there in Asia. This gallery uses integrated media to map out the VOC shipping routes throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe (**Figure 3.16**). The animation offers, at a single glance, an overview of how Asian goods were exchanged for one another in inter-Asian trade, and how some of them were transported onto the Dutch ships, sailing from the VOC's Asian headquarters in Batavia, bypassing the Cape of Good Hope, and eventually reaching Amsterdam. Showcases in this gallery include maps and paintings that show the Dutch activity in Asia, some pieces of Dutch commissioned European-style furniture made in Batavia, and personalized Asian products bearing the coats of arms of the Governors-General of the Dutch East Indies. This gallery also showcases some objects that indicate Portuguese trade and missionary activity in Asia.

Gallery 1 is followed by a subsection called *Amsterdam*. This subsection displays seventeenth-century Dutch paintings and engravings that represent the economic prosperity of Amsterdam (**Figure 3.17**). Two wall infographics are also featured here; one introduces the city's population boom because of the rising global trade, and another explains the relation between the VOC and the birth of capitalism. According to Karina Corrigan, at the time the PEM's Associate Director of Collections and the curator of *Asia in Amsterdam*, this subsection is "essentially the conclusion of the first section [*Gallery 1 Networkers*]. Kind of a 'meanwhile back in Amsterdam…' moment to introduce the city to our visitors."[308] To this end, this subsection mainly displays paintings and engravings that profile Amsterdam. Indeed, compared to *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum, where audiences can easily get an impression of Amsterdam right outside the museum, the exhibition at the PEM has more, or different, explaining to do. For a museum in the United States, both Asia and Amsterdam are, to a certain degree, foreign in a cultural and geographic sense. This subsection thus provides a sort of transition, a bit more information about Amsterdam before the exhibition's American-based audiences continue their visit.

Figure 3.16 View of *Gallery 1 Networkers* in *Asia in Amsterdam* with an animation of the VOC trade routes. © The PEM

[308] According to an email on October 25, 2016 from Karina Corrigan.

Figure 3.17 View of the subsection *Amsterdam* of *Gallery 1 Networkers*. © The PEM

After the *Amsterdam* subsection, the rest of the galleries (Galleries 2-5) of *Asia in Amsterdam* show how the imported Asian goods affected Dutch art and life in terms of interior decoration, scholarly collecting and publishing, fashion, and artistic innovation. These themes are basically the same as in *Asia > Amsterdam*. However, the two exhibitions have significant differences in the ways they conclude their stories and in their interpretive strategies.

Asia > Amsterdam, as suggested, adheres to the seventeenth-century timeframe throughout its narrative, and concludes its story with the idea of 'Asia everywhere', or the Dutch domestication of Asian goods. In comparison, the timeline in the final gallery of *Asia in Amsterdam*, *Gallery 5 Innovators*, is more panchronic. In addition to showing how the seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, ceramics, textiles, and furniture were influenced by Asian luxury, the gallery displays three 2015 works by contemporary Dutch artist Bouke de Vries to indicate that such inspiration continues to this day. Two of these works are called *Memory Vessel XXX* and *Memory Vessel XXXI*, which are a pair of contemporary glass vessels filled with the collected remains of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain jar and of a seventeenth-century Dutch delftware tobacco jar and clay pipes, respectively. The third piece, called *Homeland, Blue and White*, is a collage/map of the Netherlands today that is composed of fragments of seventeenth-century Chinese porcelain and Dutch delftware (**Figure 3.18**). All these three pieces were acquired by the PEM in 2016, ahead of the *Asia in Amsterdam* exhibition. The works by de Vries are the last showpieces, followed by the concluding wall text of the exhibition right beside the exit:

> At certain times, great achievements in art, science, and commerce come together to define a golden age. During the 17th century, art and ideas from Asia profoundly influences just such an era in the Netherlands.
> [Graphic callouts placed around the text above to list some similar moments]
> The Roman Empire
> Tang dynasty China
> Renaissance Florence
> Mughal India
> New York City in the 1920s
> Where and when will the next big moment occur?

The exit text conceptualizes the so-called Golden Age in a more collective dimension by expanding its timeline through the centuries, and concluding with an open-ended question that allows multiple responses and looks into the future.

Figure 3.18 View of *Gallery 5 Innovators* near the exit of Asia in Amsterdam. The objects in the left showcase: *Memory Vessel XXX* (left); *Memory Vessel XXXI* (right). The object on the wall: *Homeland, Blue and White*. © The PEM

The raising of questions without definite answers is a key aspect that differentiates *Asia in Amsterdam* from *Asia > Amsterdam*. By drawing on interactive installations and wall captions that pose open-ended questions allowing multiple interpretations, *Asia in Amsterdam* encourages audiences to engage with the exhibition in a more bodily and self-reflective way. For example, there are three hands-on displays in the exhibition: one in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* with a European earthenware cup and a Chinese porcelain dish (**Figure 3.19**); another in *Gallery 4 Fashionista* with four fabric swatches of wool, linen, silk, and cotton; and a third in *Gallery 5 Innovators* with three fragments of Chinese porcelain, European earthenware, and Delftware (**Figure 3.20**). Each hands-on display is accompanied by a callout that invites audiences to think for themselves based on their own bodily experiences touching the objects on the tables:

> Touch and pick up these ceramics. What difference between earthenware and porcelain can you discover? Which seems more luxurious? (caption for the interactive table with a Chinese plate and a European cup in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers*)

> Touch and compare the materials. Which ones catch the light? Which feel smooth or rough? Handle them to see which are thick or thin, heavy or nearly weightless. Imagine you are a 17th-century fashionista. Which fabric would you wear? (caption for the interactive table with fabric examples in *Gallery 4 Fashionista*)
>
> Look at and touch these ceramic fragments. What differences between porcelain and delftware do you notice? (caption for the interactive table with three fragments of Chinese porcelain, European earthenware, and Delftware in *Gallery 5 Innovators*)

All these questions have no standard answer, but might generate different ones depending on individual perception.[309]

Figure 3.19 (left) Interactive table with a European earthenware cup and a Chinese porcelain dish in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. © The PEM
Figure 3.20 (right) Interactive table with three fragments of Chinese porcelain, European earthenware, and Delftware. Above: showcase with three dishes (from left to right): Dish, Portugal, 1610-1635; Dish, the Netherlands, 1630-1650; Dish, the Netherlands, 1650-1660. © The PEM

In addition to acknowledging Dutch commercial prosperity, *Asia in Amsterdam*, compared to *Asia > Amsterdam*, sheds more light on the human cost behind the luxuries it displays, and it does this by providing labels and captions with alternative interpretations. Consider, for example, the *Portrait of Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh* (1674) (see **Figure 3.6**). The portrait is displayed in both exhibitions (*Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Gallery 1 Networkers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*), and yet with different interpretations. In explaining the enslaved persons serving in the background, the label in *Asia > Amsterdam* choose an artistic perspective: "Note the stereotypical depiction of the African

[309] This design of open-ended questions and hands-on displays echoes the visitor-centric policy that the PEM has promoted for the past two decades. The policy underlines the importance of encouraging the museum's audiences to explore their own subjective experiences in their interactions with exhibitions and objects. The museum's emphasis on the subjective interpretations and experiences of audiences, as reflected in *Asia in Amsterdam*, brings it closer to what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill calls the "post-museum." In the post-museum, meanings of objects are plural rather than singular, and the meaning-making process is a two-way construction (participated both the specialized knowledge of curators and the subjective experiences of audiences are involved here) rather than a one-way transmission. See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 142-143.

man and the little boy, which is very different from Wollebrand's portrait." In comparison, the interpretation of the portrait in *Asia in Amsterdam* uncovers the historical and social background of slavery:

> The other figures [the two Africans] portray a troubling aspect of the Dutch legacy in Asia—slavery. The Dutch enslaved thousands of Asians in VOC settlements. The Africans depicted in this painting reflect the artist's ideas about people in forced servitude—there were actually few African slaves in Asia. These figures also point to a double standard. Slavery was not tolerated in the Netherlands itself.

Clearly, the label in *Asia in Amsterdam* brings more of a moral judgement to bear than the label in *Asia > Amsterdam*.

One more obvious example of the different levels of moral criticism in the two exhibitions is seen in the *Portrait of Jan Pietersz Coen* (1625) attributed to Jacob Waben. Coen was the fourth governor-general of the VOC and founded the capital of the Company in Batavia. The painting's label in *Asia > Amsterdam* takes a somewhat implicit tone in describing Coen's negative deeds:

> In 1617 Jan Pietersz Coen became the fourth governor-general of the VOC. He founded Batavia, the Company's headquarters in Asia. He fully understood that in Asia money would be made primarily from the trade with the various settlements. To this end, he used every means at his disposal. In 1621 he forced the people of the Moluccas, after considerable bloodshed, to sell their mace and nutmeg exclusively to the VOC.

To some extent, the label gives one an impression that the considerable bloodshed (with no details regarding what exactly happened) was an unavoidable upshot of a commercial conflict of interest, a necessary price to pay. Meanwhile, the same portrait is captioned in a more reflective tone in *Asia in Amsterdam*: "A skillful yet ruthless governor-general…" Moreover, its label reads as more judgmental and informative in regards to the Bandanese massacre of 1621:

> When Coen posed for this portrait, he had already founded Batavia (now Jakarta). He began building the city in 1619 without seeking permission from the local ruler. Instead, with the aid of 17 VOC ships, he expelled the local people and burned their town to the ground. Then Coen turned to gaining control over local trade in nutmeg and mace. The trees that produced them grew only on the Banda Islands, but not everyone there would cooperate with Coen. When the people on one island refused to sell exclusively to the company, he 'remedied the situation.' Coen slaughtered the islanders in 1621; only a few hundred of the 15,000 survived. Although the Heren XVII (the VOC officials in the Netherlands) denounced Coen's conduct, they did not fire him. Watch the video nearby to see how this brutal mass murder is remembered on the island today.

Listing the number of local people killed, the label also describes more sanguinary details of the Bandanese massacre, and the VOC's disregard for this violence in order to secure its nutmeg monopoly.

The power of captioning the displayed objects in a reflective tone is also seen in the case of a painting introduced previously: *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere* (1712) (see **Figure 3.8**; see also **Figure 3.5** for its display in *Asia > Amsterdam*). As mentioned above, its interpretation in *Asia >*

Amsterdam focuses on the contained, costly treasures. However, the painting in *Asia in Amsterdam* is captioned with a question to remind audiences that there is a price for every prize: "So much luxury… at what cost?" (**Figure 3.21**). Especially troubling is the moral cost, as the introductory wall text around the entrance of *Asia in Amsterdam* notes: "[T]he human cost of the first global capitalist enterprise was sometimes high." The caption "So much luxury… at what cost?" not only reframes the way we see this picture full of luxuries from distant lands; also, considering the painting's positioning at the end of *Gallery 1 Networkers*, it reframes the way we see the luxuries displayed in the rest of the exhibition's galleries. Put differently, the painting and its caption together constitute a *frame* that potentially affects the viewing experience in the exhibition. Perhaps, the invisible human cost is what the exhibition encourages audiences to bear in mind while they are fascinated by the visible property and prosperity of the Netherlands displayed in the succeeding galleries.

Figure 3.21 The wall caption "So much luxury… at what cost?" above *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere*, right in front of *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. © The PEM

So far, I have compared the different narrative structures and interpretive strategies of the two exhibitions and analyzed their distinctive productions of meaning. In what follows, I will focus on specific galleries of the two exhibitions, exploring how the operation of different types of focalization in these galleries serves to create special viewing experiences and to highlight certain messages.

3-2 Internal Focalization in *Asia > Amsterdam*: Embodied Spectatorship

This section will focus on the strategy of focalization in *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum. The aim is to see how the juxtaposition of Chinese porcelain and Dutch still life in the gallery, accompanied with labels prescribing a particular viewing order, constitutes an internal focalization with Dutch artists acting as the internal focalizors. This internal focalization offers audiences a specific viewing experience that can be called *embodied spectatorship*.

Embodied spectatorship refers to a sense of physical touch imaginatively evoked by the viewing subject's close engagement with the textural details of the viewed object.[310] *Asia > Amsterdam*, I suggest, offers its viewers a haptic engagement, not by means of physical touch (as in the hands-on displays in *Asia in Amsterdam*), but a *haptic way of seeing*: that is, an embodied engagement of viewers with material properties of objects generated by a tactile impression evoked by their eyes. Drawing on a phenomenological perspective on how tactile qualities can be experienced with visual perception, the film scholar Laura Marks refers to a haptic way of seeing (or haptic visuality/visual tactility, as she uses alternatively) as the viewers' inclination to perceive surface details and tactile qualities of the images on screen and thus closely engage with the tactile sense they produce.[311] A film or video might facilitate such an inclination by using close-ups to create haptic images, engaging the viewers tactilely by inviting them to see things as if touching them.[312] In *Gallery 2* in *Asia > Amsterdam*, I propose, such an inclination is facilitated by the juxtaposition of porcelain and still life with labels encouraging a specific order of viewing these objects. This order of viewing creates an internal focalization, in which the viewer is invited to perceive the viewed objects through the vision of Dutch Golden-Age artists.

Sensation is a keyword for both *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* to show the impact of imported luxuries on Dutch art and culture. In this context, sensation refers to both a state of intense public interest and excitement regarding Asian luxury imports and to seventeenth-century Dutch artists' and consumers' embodied experiences of the material qualities of Asian objects.[313] Chinese porcelain, in particular, was greatly appreciated by the Dutch for its unprecedented whiteness and glossiness. Specifically, in terms of *Asia > Amsterdam* exhibition, the Dutch fascination with the sensual allure of Chinese porcelain is manifested through accompanying porcelain with still life in *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* (see **Figures 3.9-3.10**).

The object labels in *Gallery 2* draw audiences to connect certain pieces of porcelain in the showcases to akin ones depicted in the paintings. This means that audiences are invited to observe the

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[310] See Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[311] See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 162-164.
[312] Marks vividly describes the haptic way of seeing with reference to her viewing experience of the filmmaker Shauna Beharry's video *See Is Believing* (1991), in which an extreme close-up of a sari is employed: "I realize that the tape has been using my vision as though it were a sense of touch; I have been brushing the (image of the) fabric with the skin of my eyes." Ibid., 127.
[313] Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks. *Asia in Amsterdam*, 16. Referring also to the press release of *Asia > Amsterdam*: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/asia-in-amsterdam [Accessed January 20, 2021]; and an online archive of the press release of *Asia in Amsterdam*: http://john-andrews-yemh.squarespace.com/local-distractions/2015/12/1/asia-in-amsterdam-the-culture-of-luxury-in-the-golden-age [Accessed January 20, 2021].

shape, ornament, and texture of the Chinese porcelain on display—whether in showcases or in paintings—in a more attentive way. This gallery design, I propose, constitutes a specific embodied viewing experience that is engendered by internal, or character-bound, focalization that draws audiences to see the visual and material qualities of china as if through the eyes of Dutch artists.

Let us start with a porcelain beer tankard, one of the rare objects that has been portrayed in Dutch still life. This gallery showcases a Chinese beer tankard with a label encouraging viewers to look for its identical twin:

> Following protracted negotiations, in 1635 the VOC received a consignment of porcelain fashioned after wooden models, including beer tankards. Just such a vessel features in the still life by Willem Heda on display in this gallery.

The beer tankard with metal lid and floral patterns that Heda depicted looks almost the same as the one in the glass case (**Figures 3.22-3.24**). Interestingly, the label of Heda's painting leaves another clue for audiences, encouraging them to carefully look around the gallery again:

> Dutch painters excelled in the precise rendering of materials. To this end, some of them sought rare objects to depict, such as this beer tankard and Kraak porcelain bowl. The motif on this bowl also occurs on an early 17th century Chinese plate in the display case in this gallery.

The motif this label refers to is a shield showing a hydra with two human heads and five of beasts. The matching ornament is found on a Chinese charger showcased nearby (**Figure 3.25**).

Figure 3.22 (left) Beer tankard made in Jingdezhen, China. 1635-1640. Porcelain with European silver mounts. Collected in Museum de 5000 Morgen, Hoogeveen, The Netherlands. Ill. from: Corrigan, Van Campen, and Diercks, *Asia in Amsterdam* catalogue, 267
Figure 3.23 (right) *Breakfast Still Life* (1638) by Willem Heda. Oil on canvas. Size: High 118.4 cm; width 97.5 cm. Collected in Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

Figure 3.24 Detail of Figure 3.23

Figure 3.25 Chinese charger, 1600-1620. Collected in the PEM. Object number: E84086

There are more visual pairings in this gallery waiting for audiences to uncover them. Take, for instance, a Chinese bowl decorated with deer which is showcased together with the hydra charger (**Figure 3.26**). A similar piece with a matching lotus-shaped rim and kraak-style panels (though the decoration is not the same) is depicted in *Still Life with Cheese* (1615) (**Figure 3.27**). The thinness of the porcelain bowl in the still life is accentuated by the carefully piled up apples (**Figure 3.28**). A typical large kraak dish

showcased in the gallery also has a twin in *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* (1627) (**Figures 3.29-3.31**). According to the label of *Still Life with a Turkey Pie*: "Especially eye-catching are the porcelain plate and the nautilus shell." A similar turbo shell mounted on a stand of silver-gilt is also showcased in *Gallery 2* (**Figure 3.32**). Its label indicates: "As with porcelain, the fascination for such shells lay chiefly in the material, the lustrous nacre and the thin wall." In addition to this material connection, the juxtaposition of the mounted shell and Chinese porcelain in *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* and in the exhibition's *Gallery 2* further evokes the early modern European conception of porcelain's dual status as both an artificial artifact (*artificialia*) and a natural treasure (*naturalia*). As the art historian Thijs Weststeijn suggests in considering the collocation of porcelain and shells in seventeenth-century Dutch still life: "the etymology of the term porcelain that related its constitution to seashells, harking back to Marco Polo's day when the term *porcellana* derived from a type of thin white shell resembling a piglet (*porcellino*)."[314] The dual natures of porcelain are equally expressed in its spatial arrangement in European cabinets of curiosities in combination with sets of natural and artificial objects.[315] Back to the display in *Gallery 2*, another visual pairing is alluded to in the label of *Still Life with Oysters and Confectionery* (1610) (**Figures 3.33-3.34**): "In the centre of this still life, the Flemish painter Isias Beert depicted a so-called klapmuts, a deep, broad-based, lipped porcelain bowl." Such bowls were made specifically for the European market and, indeed, it is not difficult to find a comparable porcelain bowl with identical lotus-shaped rim and kraak-style panels showcased nearby and labelled "*klapmuts*" (**Figure 3.35**).

Figure 3.26 Chinese bowl, 1580-1600. Collection of Thomas Lurie. No.465

[314] Thijs Weststeijn, "Cultural Reflections on Porcelain in the 17th-century Netherlands," in *Chinese and Japanese Porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age*, eds. Jan van Campen and Titus M. Eliëns (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, in collaboration with Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, Groninger Museum, Keramiekmuseum Princessehof Leeuwarden, 2014), 216.

[315] For more about the connotations behind the display of Chinese porcelain in European cabinets of curiosities, see Stacey Sloboda, "Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland's Museum," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 4 (2010): 455-472.

Figure 3.27 *Still Life with Cheese* (1615) by Floris Claesz. van Dijck. Oil on panel. Size: high 82.2 cm; width 111.2 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object Number: SK-A-4821

Figure 3.28 Detail of Figure 3.27

Figure 3.29 Chinese porcelain kraak dish, 1610-1630. Collection of Thomas Lurie. No.583

Figure 3.30 *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* (1627) by Pieter Claesz. Oil on panel. Size: high 75 cm; width 132 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: SK-A-4646

Figure 3.31 (left) Detail of Figure 3.30
Figure 3.32 (right) Mounted turbo shell, 1607. Size: 19x14.5x11.5 cm. Collected in Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. Object number: 1009592

Figure 3.33 *Still Life with Oysters and Confectionery* (1610) by Osias Beert I. Oil on canvas. Size: high 74 cm; width 108.5 cm. Private Collection

Figure 3.34 (left) Detail of Figure 3.33
Figure 3.35 (right) Chinese porcelain klapmuts, 1590-1610. Collection of Thomas Lurie. No.735

Pacing between porcelain and still life, looking attentively at their visual (and even tactile) qualities so as to correlate them, there seems to be an internal act of focalization implied in such a viewing experience. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Mieke Bal conceptualizes internal focalization as hierarchically lower and embedded in "the all-encompassing vision" of external

focalization.[316] Thus, Bal reminds us to note the "attribute signs," or markers of shifts in focalization level, which indicate the shift from first-level external focalization to second-level internal focalization.[317] In a literary text (e.g. a novel), Bal argues, such verbs as "see" and "hear," which "communicate perception," usually act as attribute signs.[318] An example that Bal provides here is a set of three narrative sentences: Mary participates in the rally; I saw that Mary participated in the rally; Michele saw that Mary participated in the rally. Clearly, the agent "which is doing the perceiving, and whose perceptions are being presented to the reader" is different: in the first sentence there is an external focalizor; in the second sentence 'I' becomes the internal focalizor; while in the third sentence, 'Michele' acts as the internal focalizor.[319] According to Bal, in this set of sample sentences the verb form 'saw' indicates where "the focalization is transferred from the first [external] to the second [internal] level."[320]

This kind of transition from external to internal focalization with the verbs of perception mediated in between is vital to expose the Dutch-grounded internal focalization in *Gallery 2*, for a shift from external to internal focalization is equally observed in this gallery. In explaining the relation between porcelain and still life, the gallery's wall caption adopts an externally focalized narrative:

> […] Prior to 1600 Antwerp was the centre of trade for Asian goods. Asian riches thus featured in Flemish still lifes already early in the 17th century. After Amsterdam took over this leading position and trade in the Dutch Republic increased, porcelain became a coveted item that was depicted countless times in paintings by Dutch artists.

The focalizor of the text is un-personified. However, the maneuvering of audiences into attentive looking in *Gallery 2* may guide them to see and perceive the visual and material qualities of Chinese porcelain as if through the eyes and the hands of Dutch artists. This suggests a shift from external to internal focalization, or how the focalization is rendered to a certain character (i.e. the seventeenth-century Dutch artists) in the story world. In this sense, what the gallery really enacts is not just "the fascination with porcelain," as indicated in its title, but rather a *subjectivized* fascination with porcelain.

Particularly, the use of internal focalization in *Gallery 2* promotes an embodied mode of spectatorship. Such an embodied spectatorship generated through a Dutch-grounded internal focalization performs a sensory transposition. This sensory transposition mostly comes from how the viewer is invited to respond to the haptic compositions of Dutch still lifes in an embodied way, thereby facilitating sensory impressions of both sight and touch. The haptic compositions of Dutch still-lifes are structured with two senses of tactility. The first is the tactility elicited by the exquisite depictions of material textures. Textural characteristics of objects are so meticulously depicted in Dutch still lifes that they create an intertwining of vision and touch, as the viewer seems to be able to *see* the coolness of pewter plates and the smoothness of porcelain plates. In the words of the historian Simon Schama, Dutch still life "makes the eye do the work of the hand, registering the alternations experienced in running fingers

316 Bal, *Narratology*, 158.
317 Ibid.
318 Ibid., 158-159.
319 Ibid., 157.
320 Ibid., 158.

over changing surface textures and temperature."[321] But in *Gallery 2* in *Asia > Amsterdam*, the viewer not only *sees* the rich material texture of the things depicted; more importantly, with the specific object arrangement and suggested viewing order in this gallery, their vision is as if they are *seeing through* the eyes of the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century. The haptic viewing experience generated in this gallery, then, is one that is specifically filtered by the subjective sensory impressions of the Dutch artists; that is, we (audiences) are here seeing how the Dutch saw and perceived china.

The second sense of tactility in Dutch still life is generated by a sense of touch invoked through the invisible presences of the hands of the Dutch artists (and/or the bourgeoisie owners) who set up these tableaus with carefully placed materials. Most of the still-life paintings displayed in *Gallery 2* show idealized representations of dinner tables composed of careful arrangements of foods and vessels. Still lifes of the dinner table, to paraphrase the art historian Norman Bryson, set up a "haptic space" through making the viewer "much more aware of the human hand in establishing the scene."[322] Bryson's point helps to draw attention to the otherwise invisible presence of the hands of the Dutch artists or bourgeoisie in carefully organizing these tabletops: stacking the cheese, slicing the bread, peeling the lemon, cutting the apple, overturning the glass, spooning the pie, and filling the porcelain bowl with fruits or confectionery, to name just a few tactile interventions. Viewed in this way, the pictorial space of Dutch still life is full of marks left by hands. The display strategy in *Gallery 2* in *Asia > Amsterdam*—the juxtaposition of porcelain and still life, accompanied by labels instructing a particular viewing order, through which the akin pieces of porcelain in the showcases and in the paintings are closely associated with one another—I propose, acts to enhance audiences' attention to these visible marks left by invisible hands.

To give but one example, there is an association between two Chinese *klapmutsen*, one in the showcase and another in *Still Life with Oysters and Confectionery* (see **Figures 3.33-3.35**). The visual conjunction between these two *klapmutsen* kindles a rich embodied experience. The strong chiaroscuro of the painting helps to highlight tactile differences between the porcelain *klapmuts*, the pewter plates, and the glass goblets. Compared to the subtle sheen on the *klapmuts*, the pewter plates have a much brighter reflection, giving them a sense of coolness, and the glasses have a much thinner, transparent material, making part of them fade into the dark background. The *klapmuts* overflowing with confectionery gives audiences a sense of its volume (see **Figure 3.34**). The pewter and porcelain plates covered with oysters and sweetmeats look flat and shallow. Relatively, the *klapmuts* is deep, and has a thin and flattened rim on which we can see how carefully the sweets were piled up to avoid them falling. In fact, many other things' arrangement also connotes cautious handling: the wine glass on the table edge; every oyster with the meat facing up; the tilted wooden box. Connecting the *klapmuts* in the showcase with the one in the still life, a bodily intimacy—the hands of the Dutch artist (or owners) touching these materials to compose an idealized tableau—is called to mind.

This embodied spectatorship, in which a Dutch internal focalization is implied, contributes to making explicit a process of domestication. In section 3-1-1, I discussed how the Dutch domestication of

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[321] Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-Life Painting and the 'Empire of Things'," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 478.
[322] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 72.

Asian luxuries from exotic to part of Dutch material culture is implied in the structure of the exhibition's storyline. The embodied spectatorship generated in *Gallery 2* also produces such an ideological imprint of the Dutch domestication of Asian goods. As Anne Gerritsen proposes, embodied experience plays an important role in the Dutch domestication of Asian goods from signaling the exotic to signaling Dutchness. Through a close reading of the painting *Thomas Hees with his Nephews Jan and Andries Hees and a Servant* (1687) by Michiel van Musscher, especially the bodily proximity of the Dutch figures with the Asian products, Gerritsen puts the following forward:

> It is through this representation of physical proximity between global goods and their consumers—their depiction within domestic spaces, their adornment of bodies, their closeness to the hands and feet that touch them—that these global goods become domesticated. They are appropriated, integrated and reinvented as goods that belong in a Dutch environment, thereby constructing a seventeenth-century Dutchness that is not confined to the geographical space of the Netherlands, but incorporates overseas territories, possessions and connection.[323]

Indeed, whether Chinese porcelain plates filled with fruits, spices such as cinnamon and cloves that are integrated into pies, or the turbo shell, these objects in Dutch still lifes act as a 'synecdoche' of the Dutch commercial empire.[324] In this sense, what audiences perceive in *Gallery 2*, perhaps, is both the Dutch perception and possession of exotic goods.

The object layout in the gallery is also significant in generating the visual discourse of china as a token of Dutch prosperity: audiences are surrounded by pieces of porcelain in showcases and in still-life paintings. This layout, in my view, acts to subjugate the viewers' senses to a spectacle of lavish abundance. It amply visualizes the ubiquity of Chinese porcelain on display in (idealized) Dutch domestic environments. The ubiquitous porcelain signals the capacity of the Dutch to gather luxury goods from distant lands into domestic interiors within reach.

An embodied viewing experience, in contrast, is not evoked in *Asia in Amsterdam*, where most of the Chinese porcelain and Dutch still lifes are not juxtaposed but separated. Many pieces of porcelain that are seen in *Gallery 2* in *Asia > Amsterdam* are showcased in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*, while most of the Dutch still lifes are displayed in *Gallery 5 Innovators*. (**Figures 3.36-3.37**).[325] The separation of Chinese porcelain and most of the Dutch still lifes seems to inevitably dissolve their potential sensorial connection.

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[323] Anne Gerritsen, "Domesticating Goods from Overseas: Global Material Culture in the Early Modern Netherlands," *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (2016), 232.

[324] See Hal Foster, "The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, eds. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 251-265.

[325] The pieces of Chinese porcelain in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* are grouped in two showcases. According to the labels here, one showcase contains pieces that exemplify Chinese potters' imitations of the wooden models of Dutch silver objects that the VOC staff brought to them; meanwhile, the pieces of kraak porcelain dishes and bowls in another showcase show the visual designs and material characteristics of Chinese porcelain. It should be noted here that, according to an email on November 23, 2016 from Karina Corrigan, the arrangement of Chinese porcelain in *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* also reflects the donor's will. The group of six pieces of Chinese porcelain in the first showcase (see the showcase B in Figure 3.36) are all from the collection of Thomas Lurie, who prefers his collection to be grouped together (the porcelain pieces from his collection are also grouped together in *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum).

Figure 3.36 View of *Gallery 2 Tastemakers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. A: The showcase with seven pieces of Chinese porcelain in Dutch customized shapes; B: The showcase with six pieces of Chinese porcelain decorated in kraak-style (all from the collection of Thomas Lurie). © The PEM

Figure 3.37 View of *Gallery 5 Innovators* with Dutch Still Life in *Asia in Amsterdam*. The wall caption in *Gallery 5 Innovators* refers to Dutch still lifes as one of the innovative Dutch products inspired by imported Asian objects, a new style painting that the seventeenth-century Dutch artists "developed and mastered." © The PEM

In this section, I have discussed the combination of embodied spectatorship and internal focalization found in *Gallery 2* in *Asia > Amsterdam*, and accessed the specific viewing experience this combination may offer to its audiences. Now, I shift the focus towards *Asia in Amsterdam* at the PEM. As mentioned, *Asia in Amsterdam* pays more attention to the human cost behind the prosperity of the VOC's Dutch-Asia trade. Below, I focus on the practice of external focalization in *Gallery 1 Networkers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*. External focalization allows the exhibition to construct a more general (or at least less Dutch-centric) narrative, which arises from curatorial intentions to highlight the unsettling human cost of the dazzling luxuries displayed in these galleries.

3-3 External Focalization in *Asia in Amsterdam*: Prize and Price

The layout of *Gallery 1 Networkers* provides its visitors a relatively detached viewpoint, a kind of bird's-eye view, through which both distant places—Asia and Amsterdam—are conjured up at once. The focus here shifts from Dutch and Portuguese activities in Asia to the Dutch lifestyle in Batavia, and finally to the prosperity generated by the lucrative trade network in Amsterdam. There is no indication that the focalization here lies with any specific character who participates in the plot elements. Rather, the gallery maintains an external focalization to create a panoramic overview of things happening before Asian luxuries reached Amsterdam, and of how the same historical period can be viewed differently from Dutch and Asian perspectives. The latter is manifested through the alternative interpretations provided for visitors. For example, the labels of *Portrait of Wollebrand Geleynsz de Jongh* and *Portrait of Jan Pietersz Coen* offer a notable amount of information about the slavery and historical massacre behind the rise of the vast Dutch maritime empire, as I discussed in section 3-1-2.

Perhaps, the practice of external focalization is made most prominently in the gallery's incorporation of the video, *The Cakalele Dance of Banda* (2016). In *Asia in Amsterdam*, the label of *Portrait of Jan Pietersz Coen* reminds audiences to watch this video nearby "to see how this brutal mass murder [the Banda massacre of 1621] is remembered on the island today." This five-minute video is projected around the end of *Gallery 1*, nearby the painting *Still Life with Precious Objects from Asia and Elsewhere* and the eye-catching caption "So much luxury…at what cost?" (**Figure 3.38**). The video shows how the Banda massacre has been adapted into a traditional war dance and performed in the Banda Islands in Indonesia today, accompanied by a pre-dance ritual ceremony that calls for the souls of ancestors to come back (**Figure 3.39**). As the narrator of the video, Tamalia Alisjahbana, who is a member of the council of elders in the Village of Raktu in the Banda islands, explains:

> The dancers have a flower in their mouth and this represents that they must remain silent. They may not speak about this. They have handkerchiefs tied to their hands and that represents the tears that have been shed. And behind the dancers stand people with bamboo poles with branches to which are tiled little bits of cloth and these represent the forty-four chieftains who were beheaded and quartered and their body parts stuck to the bamboos. […] In this massacre, three-quarters of the Bandanese disappeared. About ten thousand died. What remained was mainly women and children. These women were very traumatized because they were not allowed to speak about this, you know? So, what they did was they took the story of the massacre and they put it into the *cakalele* dance. At the very end of the dance comes out a person bearing

> the flower of the coconut tree, which has become the tree of life, and this symbolizes that we shall rise again. We shall survive. Our culture will survive.

This short video provides rich information on how this historical tragedy has been braided into the cultural fabric of the contemporary Banda Islands through the performance of dance and ceremony, and how the performance is made not only to transmit but also to heal the collective traumatic memory of the massacre. From the showpieces that indicate the seventeenth-century Dutch activity in Asia to the video of the contemporary Bandanese war dance, the gallery layout provides audiences an outside view through which things that happened in different times and places are co-present.

The layout of *Gallery 1 Networkers*, in terms of both time and space, reveals its narrative as predominately externally focalized. In contrast to internal focalization, external focalization means that the viewer does not look along with a specific character. The focalizor is beyond the story world, and this narrative appears less restrictive. In order to further clarify the effects of external focalization, I will here incorporate the idea of "the perceptual facet" of focalization, proposed by the narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan.

Figure 3.38 (left) View of *Gallery 1 Networkers* with a screen projecting the Banda Video (the left of this figure). © The PEM
Figure 3.39 (right) Screenshot of the video with the performance of the Banda war dance

Rimmon-Kenan's approach to focalization is quite similar to Bal's in that she agrees with Bal's model of internal and external focalization as a practicable revision to Genette's tripartite concept. Nevertheless, the focalization theory developed by Rimmon-Kenan remains distinct from Bal's in some respects. Particularly, Rimmon-Kenan argues that to consider focalization merely in the visual sense is too narrow. Instead, she points out three facets to access manifestations of internal/external focalization: the perceptual facet (sight, hearing, smell, etc.), the psychological facet (cognition and emotions), and the ideological facet (norms: ideological positions of seeing the world).[326] In this framework, the opposition between internal/external focalization becomes an opposition between restricted/unrestricted

[326] See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2005[1983]), 79-84.

perception and knowledge and between involved/uninvolved emotions. Her proposition of the perceptual facet is particularly pertinent to my analysis and comparison of the different practices of focalization in these two exhibitions.

Rimmon-Kenan refers to space and time as two sets of perceptual coordinates to distinguish internal focalization from external. For her, the external focalizor generally takes a bird's-eye view, whereas the internal focalizor suggests more limited observation. The position of the external focalizor, therefore, yields "either a panoramic view or a 'simultaneous' focalization of things 'happening' in different places."[327] This is reflected in the spatial layout of *Gallery 1 Networkers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*, in which audiences are invited to take in the overseas trading activity in Asia, the urban expansion and civic prosperity in Amsterdam, and to the commemorative ceremony that is still performed in the Banda Islands today. The temporal dimension of external focalization, for Rimmon-Kenan, is "panchronic," as an un-personified focalizor can freely grasp across the past, the present, and the future.[328] Though based in the seventeenth century, *Asia in Amsterdam* shifts its temporal position by showing the Banda video recorded in 2016.

The PEM expects that, by presenting objects from a broader viewpoint and drawing on labels and installations to offer alternative interpretations, they can increase visitors' empathy towards cultural groups other than their own.[329] However, does the thought-provoking question posed in this first gallery actually leave an impression on audiences' minds, and affect how they perceive the Asian objects shown in the rest of the exhibition? Reviews from the guest book show us an affirmative answer, at least to a certain degree:

> I liked the fact that you did not "hide" the ugly side of how all this beautiful art came to be.
>
> The Banda dance was heartbreaking.
>
> Wonderful! I especially enjoyed the film on explaining what they did to the people.
>
> A fitting show for PEM. Glad that the Banda dance was incorporated as part of the story.
>
> Thank you! It was also terrific that you included the human costs (in Asia and on the seas) in the equation.
>
> Loved it! The interpretation of social history—the massacre, the way it shapes art and culture, the human cost of trade, very well done!
>
> Such beautiful objects. Such sober backstory of colonialism unfiltered.
>
> Well-balanced history + art, nice discussion of negative aspects of colonialism/capitalism without being heavy handed.

[327] Ibid., 79.
[328] Ibid., 80.
[329] Levitt and Cali, "Using the Local to Tell a Global Story," 147.

> […] The special exhibit was fantastic because it not only touched upon a lot of the history and socioeconomics, it also brought to light the abuse and subjugation of indigenous Asian communities by some individuals in the Dutch East India Trading company. It's important to consider all these perspectives of art and history.[330]

According to this guest book, the exhibition, by incorporating the Banda video, did elicit compassion for the colonized in some audience members.[331]

Inspired by *Asia in Amsterdam*, the PEM's new Asian Export Art Gallery opened in September 2019 also offers audiences more information about the unsettling dark sides of beautiful showpieces.[332] This semi-permanent gallery features Asian luxury commodities such as Chinese porcelain, Indian textiles, and Japanese lacquerware from between the late fifteenth century and the mid nineteenth century. Certain pieces on display were seen in *Asia in Amsterdam*. Located in the center of the gallery is a video showing "the uncomfortable truth that many of these works of art were originally purchased with profits derived from the illegal opium trade." [333] To a certain extent, this installation shows the PEM's commitment to decolonization through more critical engagement with the provenance of its collections.[334] Interestingly, in 2021, the Rijksmuseum will host a new special exhibition, *Slavery*, which also commits to decolonization.[335] Focusing on the Dutch West India Company's role in transatlantic slavery and the VOC's colonial slavery in Southeast Asia, the exhibition aims to stimulate reflection on the enslaver–enslaved relationship in terms of constraint and violence.[336] The exhibition aligns with the Rijksmuseum's broader, long-term policy of rethinking its role as a national museum and its overseas

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[330] This is an online feedback from Google which is also recorded in the file of the guest book by the curatorial team of *Asia in Amsterdam*.

[331] The Rijksmuseum also conducted a visitor survey during the *Asia > Amsterdam* exhibition. However, according to an email sent on November 28, 2016 from the museum's staff Marieke Zekveld, the survey was mainly interested in who the visitor was and how s/he got to know the exhibition, and so did not include quotes or viewpoints from visitors.

[332] According to an email on October 28, 2016 from Karina Corrigan, the curation of *Asia in Amsterdam* contributed to the reinterpretation of the PEM's collection of Asian export art.

[333] See the PEM's website 'Asian Export Art Gallery': https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/asian-export-art-gallery [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[334] For more about museums and the issue of decolonization, see Annie E. Coombes and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Museum Transformations: Decolonization and Democratization* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020).

[335] Since December 2015, the Rijksmuseum's Terminology Working Group has been critically scrutinizing and adjusting the terminology and titles used in labels and wall texts in exhibitions, publications, the website, and audio tours in order to replace outdated, Eurocentric, and even racist words. For example, a portrait of a young girl by Simon Maris (c. 1906, object number: SK-A-2931) was initially titled "Little Negress," and has now been retitled "Isabella," after the girl's first name. See the Rijksmuseum's website 'Terminology': https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/onderzoek/ons-onderzoek/overkoepelend/terminologie [Accessed January 20, 2021]. See also Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld, eds., *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector* [works in progress] (Amsterdam: Tropenmuseum; Heilig Landstichting: Afrika Museum; Leiden: Museum Volkenkunde; Rotterdam: Wereldmuseum, 2018). Online at: https://www.materialculture.nl/sites/default/files/2018-08/words_matter.pdf.pdf [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[336] To make a more balance narrative, the exhibition will incorporate immaterial sources, including the oral histories of enslaved people that have been passed down for generations. Moreover, during the exhibition period, some seventy objects on permanent display will be given an additional label emphasizing their connections with the Dutch history of slavery. See the website of the *Slavery* exhibition: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/slavery [Accessed January 20, 2021].

collection, with an emphasis on fostering "increased attention for colonial history from a variety of perspective."[337]

With these developments in mind, a potentially fruitful area for further research is how to use the concept of focalization, as both a narrative device and analytical tool, to expand perspectives of display and interpretation in response to the trend of museum decolonization. Compared to external focalization which takes a panoramic view, internal focalization could perhaps provide a more engaging approach to expand exhibition perspectives beyond dominant (formerly colonializing) cultural groups to underrepresented (formerly colonized) communities. As Bal reminds us, "the same object or event can be differently interpreted according to different focalizors."[338] With internal focalization, museums could perhaps show how differently the various characters (different internal focalizors) in their story world, such as enslaved people and slaveholders, view the same events.

Conclusion: Focalization as a Manipulation

In this chapter, I first compared the narrative structures of *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the PEM. I then examined how the two exhibition's different uses of focalization enable them to highlight different messages. Focusing on *Gallery 2 Amsterdam/The Fascination with Porcelain* in *Asia > Amsterdam*, I proposed that the object layout and label design here construct an internal focalization and facilitate an embodied spectatorship: inviting audiences to perceive the visual and material qualities of Chinese porcelain as if through the eyes and the hands of seventeenth-century Dutch artists. The internally-focalized narrative of the exhibition contributes to visualizing the process of domestication in which *they* (Asian material objects) increasingly became part of *us* (Dutch material culture), and it signals *our* (Dutch) capability to gather luxuries from beyond our national boundaries. This shows how whose vision a narrative primarily depends on can significantly affect how an exhibition conceptualizes a specific Self-Other relationship. By comparison, *Gallery 1 Networkers* in *Asia in Amsterdam*, on which I focused, maintains an external focalization, as there is no indication that the gallery renders the focalization to any specific character in its story world. The use of external focalization enables the gallery to take a distant, panoramic view to reveal both the price and the prize of Dutch trade with Asia.

To explore strategies of focalization in exhibitions is meaningful, for the same event can be interpreted in quite different ways through different focalizors. As an analytical tool, focalization enables a more critical reading of exhibitions, as it raises a series of complementary questions that need to be kept in mind when analyzing how certain meanings are generated: who is seeing? Who or what is seen or unseen? How do audiences engage in a viewpoint? Whose viewpoint? How does all this create or influence viewing experiences? These questions facilitate awareness of the strong visual manipulation implicit in the construction of an exhibition, and of how this mediates ways of understanding the objects on display and the exhibition's emphasis. What is more, focalization helps to identity the subject-positions produced by museum exhibitions. To put it differently, identifying the implicit subject of focalization in museum

[337] See the website of the *Slavery* exhibition: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/slavery [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[338] Bal, *Narratology*, 164.

displays and exhibitions helps to make explicit how audiences' viewing experiences might be filtered through a specific realm of subjective experience.

Focalization is a "subtle means of manipulation," as Bal points out: the "significance of certain aspects cannot be viewed unless it is linked to focalization."[339] Following Bal, this chapter applied focalization as an analytical tool, but not to judge which type of focalization practiced in the two exhibitions is better. Rather, my point is to expose how the displays in the two exhibitions perform specific types of focalization and thereby highlight specific messages that might not be easily noticed if the displays were not linked to the idea of focalization. This chapter tried to demonstrate that focalization is a fruitful lens for more careful readings of museum presentations, for making a seemingly neutral or objective display discussable and arguable, thereby exposing its performative dimension.

As a technique of display analysis, focalization helps to expand the field of visual narratology into museum exhibitions. An existing body of literature deals with issues of focalization in diverse medias, such as novels, films, graphic narrative, and picture books.[340] In comparison, how focalization works in exhibition narrative remains a relatively unexplored field. This chapter sought to identify some of the ways in which focalization can enrich the analysis of museum displays. For example, museum exhibitions operate in three dimensions and, thus, the interactions between spatial layouts of objects and movements of audiences in gallery spaces plays a key role in understanding how the effects of focalization work in museum space. Hence, not only can we understand museum displays through the concept of focalization, but also understand focalization through museum practices.

The embodied experience of seeing as if touching discussed in this chapter will be explored further in the following chapter in a case study of a very popular, yet controversial fashion exhibition: *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. I will examine how embodied spectatorship is promoted by the exhibition as a way of casting a positive light on Orientalism. This, however, results in a misleading visual narrative that performs a resurgence of Orientalist othering.

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[339] Ibid., 171.

[340] See, for example, Perry Nodelman, "The Eye and the I: Identification and First-Person Narratives in Picture Books," *Children's Literature* 19, (1991): 1-30; Verstraten, *Film Narratology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Slike Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri, "Focalization in Graphic Narrative," *Narrative* 19, no. 3 (2011): 330-357.

CHAPTER 4 Fetishization: Stereotypes and Exoticism in China: Through the Looking Glass at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

To believe that the Orient was created—or as I call it, "Orientalized"—and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous.

Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*

Introduction: An Aestheticization of Orientalism

This chapter draws on the special exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass* (hereinafter referred to as *Looking Glass*) hosted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (hereinafter referred to as the MET) in 2015 to demonstrate how a misleading narrative design may lead to the exact opposite of the exhibition-makers' intent. This shows the potential gap between curatorial aims and the actual visual experience provided to audiences.

Looking Glass was curated by the Costume Institute in cooperation with the Department of Asian Art in the MET in 2015. The exhibition's unexpected juxtaposition of fashion garments with the sources of their inspiration—Chinese porcelain, silk, calligraphy, lacquerware, bronze, and so on—generated record-breaking attendance of more than 81,000 visitors. It was also the largest temporary exhibition hosted at the Met, occupying a series of Chinese galleries (Galleries 206-218), an Egyptian gallery (Gallery 132), and two galleries (Galleries 980-981) of the Costume Institute (**Figure 4.1**).[341] The exhibition had no definite visiting route through its thematically classified galleries, but allowed visitors to wander between them freely.

The juxtaposition of fashion with Chinese art does not merely create visual appeal; it also serves the Costume Institute's goal of seeing fashion not just as clothing but as an art form.[342] Although this blockbuster exhibition was praised as fascinating and seductive, with its captivating scheme of

[341] It was only in 2018 that both its size and attendance record were broken by the Costume Institute's new show *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, which had more than 1.6 million visitors.

[342] For more about the Costume Institute and its positioning, see Sarah Scaturro and Joyce Fung, "Ethics and Aesthetics at the Costume Institute Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York," in *Refashioning and Redress: Conserving and Displaying Dress*, eds. Mary M. Brooks and Dinah D. Eastop (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2016), 159-172.

juxtaposition, it was also widely criticized as an endorsement of Orientalism.[343] However, paradoxically enough, the exhibition had set out to be a deconstruction, not a fulfillment, of Orientalism. As the exhibition's curator Andrew Bolton notes: "I want [the exhibition to be] a sort of deconstructive stereotype."[344] So, what led the exhibition to just the opposite of its intention?[345]

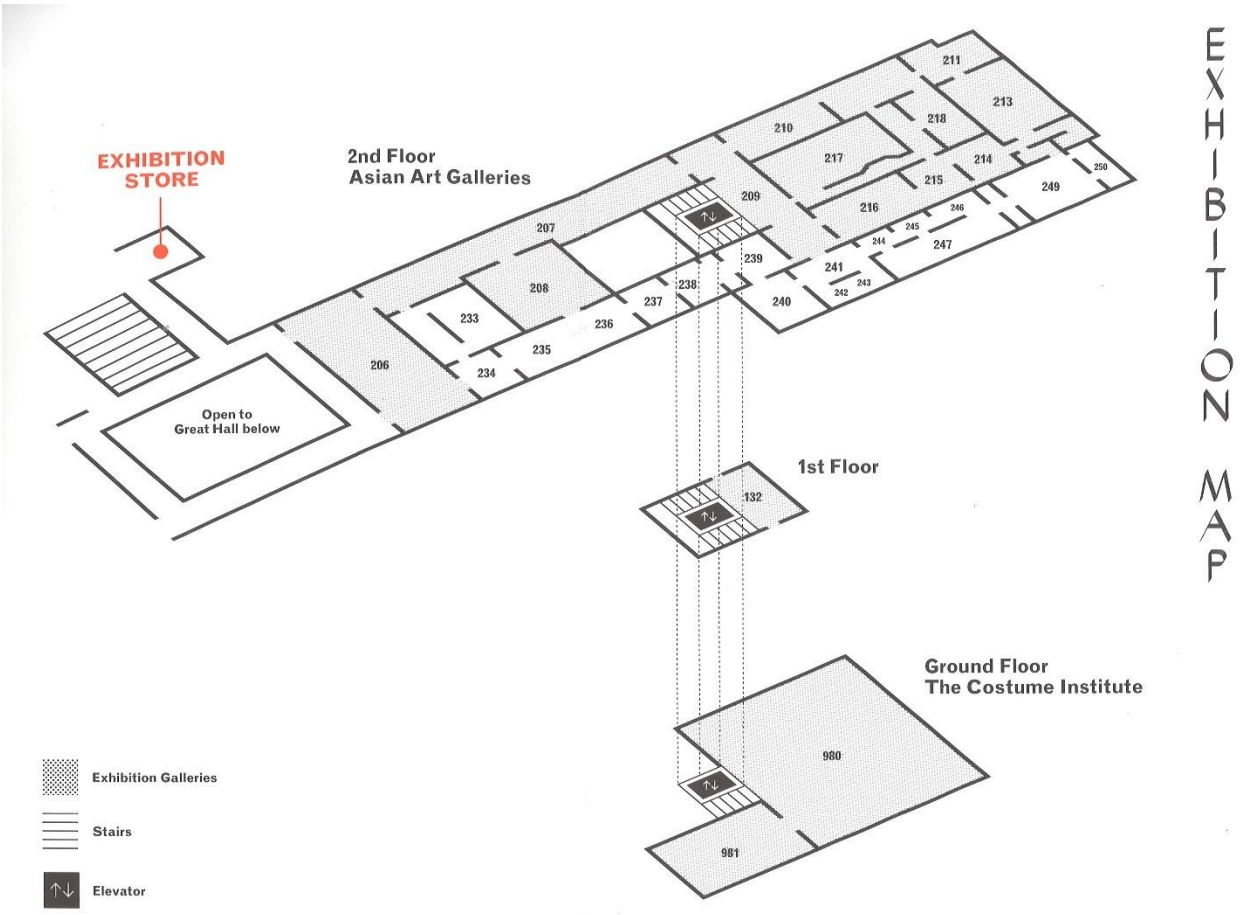

Figure 4.1 Floor map of *Looking Glass*. © The MET

Indeed, the nineteenth-century Orientalist paradigm that Edward Said describes in *Orientalism* haunted the exhibition all along. The exhibition *is* about Orientalism, as Bolton recognizes, but it attempts to recast this Orientalism in a "less politicized and more positivistic" light by mobilizing two dichotomies: an authentic China image versus a dream-like imagination of China and an aesthetic of surfaces versus

[343] See, for example: Zhang Ling 張泠, "Youan hahajing li de huayue liangxiao" 幽暗哈哈鏡裡的花月良宵 [The rhapsody in a Dark Distorting Mirror], June 5, 2015, https://www.artforum.com.cn/slant/8022; Connie Wang, "The Met's New Exhibit Is About Orientalism, Not China," *Refinery 29*, May 5, 2015, https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/05/86838/met-china-orientalism; Robin Givhan, "The Fantasy of China: Why the New Met Exhibition is a Big, Beautiful Lie," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/05/05/the-fantasy-of-china-why-the-new-met-exhibition-is-a-big-beautiful-lie/?utm_term=.c23bcdae8116; Rachel Silberstein, "China: Through the Looking Glass," *Caa.Reviews*, November 2, 2016, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2755#.W7oCYmgzaUk [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[344] See the documentary about the exhibition, *The First Monday in May* (2016).

[345] This chapter focuses on the Orientalist implications produced by the exhibition in its galleries and catalogue. It will not examine the 2015 Met Gala accompanying *Looking Glass*, as it lies beyond the focus of this dissertation.

an essence governed by cultural contextualization.[346] Regardless of whether it is possible to de-politicize a concept so deeply rooted in political ideology, these two binary relations are problematic in that they lead the exhibition to enact not a deconstruction—as the curator intends—but rather a resurgence of clichéd cultural stereotypes.

The first dichotomy, an authentic China versus a dream-like imagination of China, is expressed in the exhibition title. *China: Through the Looking Glass*, according to the curator, borrows from Lewis Carroll's fiction *Alice through the Looking Glass* to suggest that the exhibition is "not about China *per se* but about a China that exists as a collective fantasy."[347] The mirror as a metaphor for a make-believe world is also seen in its Chinese-version subtitle: *jing hua shui yue* 鏡花水月 [flowers in the mirror; moon in the water]: a Buddhist metaphor used to describe everything in the world as nothing but an illusion. The title is so vague that it seems to artfully circumvent the East-West binary.[348] Yet, China in such a syntax is implicitly positioned as a passive object to be looked at and inspired by.[349]

Perhaps even more problematic is that the very dichotomy between a real China and a fictional take on China can never really work as an approach to step away from Said's Orientalism. This is because, following Said, Orientalist discourse *never* really hinges on the misrepresentation of an authentic Orient:

> [T]he phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient. […] The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.[350]

The internal consistency that Said calls attention to includes a European view of the Orient that is homogenizing, a "penchant for dramatizing general features, for reducing vast numbers of objects to a smaller number of orderable and describable *types*."[351] What is at stake in his Orientalist discourse, therefore, is how the process of Orientalization is inextricable from restructuring, artificiality, homogenization, and reduction. As the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues, "The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation."[352] This leads us to the second binary relation, between surface aesthetics and cultural contextualization, through which the exhibition sets out to disperse the reek of Orientalism.

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[346] Andrew Bolton, "Towards an Aesthetic of Surfaces," in *China: Through the Looking Glass*, ed. Andrew Bolton et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 17.
[347] Ibid., 20.
[348] In the 1990s, fashion exhibitions in the United States about how China becomes a stylistic reference for Western designers tended to be titled based on the East-West binary model. For example: *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress* (December 8, 1994-March 19, 1995, at the MET); *China Chic: East Meets West* (February-April 1999, at the Fashion Institute Technology Museum in New York).
[349] In total, there are over forty designers' works on display, and yet very few of them are Chinese; the majority are still Europeans. Most problematic of all, as I will explore further in this chapter, the works on display by the Chinese designers who are present, such as Guo Pei, Vivienne Tam, and Laurence Xu, generally reference China in ornamental terms, just like those of European designers.
[350] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 5, 21 (emphasis in original).
[351] Ibid., 119 (emphasis in original).
[352] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983), 27.

The exhibition attempts to use the aesthetic delight of material surfaces as a justification to decontextualize the combination of European fashion and Chinese objects from the postcolonial discourse of Orientalism. The curator's apolitical manifesto reads:

> Postcolonial discourse perceives an implicit power imbalance in such Orientalist dress up, but designers' intentions often lie outside such rationalist cognition. They are driven less by the logic of politics than by that of fashion, which typically pursues an aesthetic of surfaces rather than an essence governed by cultural contextualization.[353]

Two primary strategies are employed in the exhibition to promote this so-called "aesthetic of surfaces." First, showpieces are placed adjacent to each other and accompanied by exquisite lighting effects that encourage audiences to take a close and comparative look at their visual designs and tactile qualities. Second, brief labels with only a list of designers, materials, and provenance maintain our focus on material beauty.[354] Not only is the amount of information small, but the lighting also makes these labels hard to read. Some labels had even peeled off by the time I visited the exhibition. The result is that the show was belittled as superficial eye candy, shying away from the deeper issues implicit in its subject matter.[355] This chapter, however, takes this aesthetic of surfaces seriously, arguing that it is not a cultural decontextualization as the curator intends, but a precisely cultural construction of otherness, taking the form of Western exoticism. More bluntly, it is the emphasis on an aesthetic of surfaces that makes the exhibition a perfect embodiment of Orientalism.

As is well known, exoticism is not an inherent quality to be found in certain people, places, or material objects, but is instead assigned to them from certain points of view. As anthropologist Bruce Kapferer points out: "Everything and anything is potentially in an exotic relation. Nothing is intrinsically exotic except through the relations into which it is drawn."[356] The aesthetic of surfaces that the exhibition calls attention to, I propose, serves to mystify material surfaces and, to emphasize the otherness of China.

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[353] Bolton, "Towards an Aesthetic of Surfaces," 19. Bolton's proposition of "an aesthetic of surfaces" is reminiscent of what Zhang Xiaohong 張小虹, the scholar of feminism and cultural theories, calls "biaomian moshi 表面模式 [the surface model]." According to Zhang, the surface model refers to fashion as a de-politicized and de-historicized pure sign, which is empty, without substance. See Zhang Xiaohong 張小虹, "Xushi zhongguo: liuhang shishang sheji zhong de wenhua aimei" 虛飾中國：流行時尚設計中的文化曖昧 [Fabric-Ating China: Cultural Ambivalence in Fashion De-Sign], *Zhongwai wenxue* 中外文學 [*Chung Wai Literary Quarterly*] 29, no. 2 (2000): 26-46.

[354] For the Costume Institute, appropriating theatrical and cinematic elements—light, sound, and stage design with mannequins positioned in dramatic ways—for fashion displays has been a habitual approach to enhancing sensuous pleasure for audiences since 1960s, ever since Diana Vreeland, the former editor-in-chief of the fashion magazine *Vogue The United States*, became a special consultant at the Institute. Her emphasis on creating *mise-en-scène* in fashion exhibitions continues to be carried forward by Harold Koda, who was the former associate curator of Vreeland and became Curator-in-chief of the Institute between 2000-2016, and Andrew Bolton, who succeeded Koda as the Head Curator in 2016. See Harold Koda and Jessica Glasscock, "The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: An Evolving Story," in *Fashion and Museums: Theory and Practice*, eds. Birgitta Svensson and Marie Riegels Melchior. (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 21-32.

[355] For example, the art historian Rachel Silberstein criticizes the exhibition in that "the absence of more historically or conceptually substantive moorings, the reliance of these juxtapositions upon patterns and palettes makes many of these pairings somewhat facile." Rachel Silberstein, "China: Through the Looking Glass."

[356] Bruce Kapferer, "How Anthropologists Think: Configurations of the Exotic," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 4 (2013): 815.

It provides a specific viewing experience in which audiences are encouraged to perceive the Chinese materials on display as "enigmatic objects" (a term used in the exhibition) with *fetishized surfaces*.[357]

I borrow the term fetishized surface from the art historian Kobena Mercer and his analysis of the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's engagement with the black male body.[358] Fetishizing here refers to the process through which Mapplethorpe's photos become cultural artifacts with the power to evoke racial otherness.[359] According to Mercer, "Mapplethorpe's camera-eye opens an aperture onto aspects of stereotypes," as his camera's point of view always leads viewers to "a unitary vanishing point: an erotic/aesthetic objectification of black male bodies into the idealized form of a homogeneous type."[360] Framed by such a fixed way of seeing, the black man's glossy and shiny skin is turned into a "fetishized surface [that] serves and services a white male desire to look and to enjoy the fantasy of mastery."[361] For Mercer, Mapplethorpe's overly-eroticized framing of black men's bodies stabilizes racial otherness, and thus articulates the process of fetishization at work in the colonial fantasy. This echoes Bhabha's claim that "[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness."[362] Seen from this perspective, I propose that *Looking Glass* fails to effectively disentangle Orientalism from its postcolonial anchor because of its mechanism of fetishization. The mechanism of fetishization is expressed in the exhibition's overemphasis of a surface-level beauty that transforms, or flattens, Chinese porcelain and other Chinese objects on display into a motley collection of fetishized surfaces, their patterns acting as stereotypical exotic imageries. In this way, the exhibition still maps out a fixed Self-Other relation in which China is the Other to be imagined; the complex matrix of meanings around Chinese objects and decorations are reduced to an overriding assemblage of surface patterns that are defined as exotic, mysterious, and yet representative of Chinese-ness.[363]

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[357] The terms Enigmatic Bodies, Enigmatic Spaces, and Enigmatic Objects are used by the exhibition catalogue to categorize the Chinese objects and fashion garments on display.

[358] Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

[359] Fetishization refers to the process through which things are endowed with symbolic or even mysterious powers. In this process, the sociologist Tim Dant reminds us, the point is not whether the thing itself really possesses the symbolic quality or not, but to acknowledge the process as "a means of mediating social value through material culture." He thereby suggests: "the term fetishism can be extended to look at the way the social value of some object is 'overdetermined' as against the routine ways in which they are appropriated into culture." See Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 42.

[360] Mercer. *Welcome to the Jungle*, 173-174.

[361] Ibid., 176.

[362] Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," 18.

[363] The lighting installation and the juxtaposition of fashion garments with various Chinese objects in *Looking Glass*, as I will discuss at more length later, promote a sense of material beauty. This emphasis on the sensuous allure of the displayed objects is reminiscent of the concept of *sensuous surfaces* proposed by the art historian Jonathan Hay in his richly illustrated book *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2010). Hay examines the different ways human bodies interact with the textural richness of objects' surfaces, how visual and tactile experiences work together to elicit sensory pleasures. He treats the appearance and material properties of individual objects as a topography of sensuous surfaces. Thinking of decorative arts as sensuous surfaces enables Hay to highlight how distinct material qualities can be understood as a coherent whole providing rich sensory associations that appeal not merely to the eyes, but also to the hands and skin of a beholder (whether in physical or imaginative terms). In *Looking Glass*, a material object, indeed, might be perceived as a sensuous surface as its strategies of display do enable viewers to experience the surface/material details of the showpieces with tactile stimuli added further to the visual, at least in their imaginations. However,

In addition to the fetishized surfaces, stereotype-laden exoticism is also manifested in the exhibition through feminine gender-coding. This leaves the exhibition even less able to break free of the distasteful implications of Orientalist misrepresentation. Femininity as a primary signifier of exoticness and otherness is commonly in Orientalist narratives.[364] As an exhibition in which Orientalism is unavoidably central, *Looking Glass* is a medium through which gender becomes enacted: the porcelain body is the female skin; the Chinese domestic space is a sensual woman's boudoir; the Orientalist imagination of China speaks through the figure of either the Dragon Lady or the Lotus Blossom. The juxtaposition of Chinese porcelain with fashion garments in both the gallery and the catalogue seems to generate a metonymic relationship in which the porcelain body is analogous to the female body.

This chapter argues that the exhibition reflects an Orientalist fascination with the conflation between China (as a cultural entity)/china as well as excessive aestheticization and feminization. Even more importantly, it naturalizes such a conflation, making it inevitable, entrenched, and pervasive. Hence, my purpose here is not to criticize the Orientalist style upheld by fashion designers in Europe, China, or anywhere else, but to explore "the reductionism of the Orientalistic" performed in *Looking Glass*.[365] Obviously, the exhibition embraces the aesthetic taste fashioned especially in eighteenth-century Europe called *chinoiserie*, which, according to the art historian Catherine Pagani, "had very little to do with China per se but rather reflected an idealized and highly decorative concept of the Far East."[366] However, the exhibition is not anchored around this term (albeit one of the exhibition's galleries is called *chinoiserie*), but rather sought to de-politicize, or to aestheticize, such a politically-charged concept as Orientalism. This greatly complexifies the exhibition.

This chapter is composed of three sections. The first focuses on the exhibition catalogue because its layout, framing of photos, and design, without information-rich captions, make it an epitomization of the exhibition. Moreover, many images in the catalogue were posted on websites to advertise the show before it was unveiled, and in this way can serve to shape a sort of first impression. Based on a close reading of *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*, the second and third sections explore how Chinese porcelain is exoticized and gendered feminine. The corresponding displays in other galleries and fashion exhibitions will be considered and compared as well.

4-1 Fetishized Framing: Ornamentalization and Feminization

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this chapter employs the term *fetishized surface* instead of the *sensuous surface*, because the idea of fetishization specifically contributes to unraveling the Orientalist implications (excessive exoticization, ornamentation, and feminization) embedded in the exhibition's promotion of an aesthetic of surfaces.

[364] Said considers the classical Greek tragedy *The Persians* by the poet Aeschylus (525/24–456/55 BC) to be the oldest extant example of the Orientalist attitude: "the Orient [in *The Persians*] is transformed from a very far distant and often threaten Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus's case, grieving Asiatic women)." Said, *Orientalism*, 21. More recently, the playwright David Henry Hwang in his famous work *M. Butterfly* (1988) articulates through the mouth of the Chinese male protagonist Liling Song: "I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man." David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 83.

[365] Said, *Orientalism*, 169.

[366] Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence and European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 126.

Taken by the British photographer Platon, the photos in *Looking Glass*'s catalogue are framed to foreground an overabundant surface-beauty and femininity in two ways. First, an embodied engagement of viewers with material properties of objects photographed in close-up encourages a specific way of seeing. This way of seeing transforms the physical objects into the ornamental surfaces. The catalogue's spatial layout is also worthy of consideration: all these photos are printed in full-page format without any textual notes whatsoever (a list of the illustrations with brief information, such as the fashion designers, materials, and dates, is attached at the end of the catalogue). This design seems to encourage a close and undistracted eye on the visual (and tactile) interests of these photos. Second, these photos in the catalogue generate an intimate association between the object body and the female body through a metonymic reading of the photos' layout. In some cases, the associations made between the objects and the dresses are clearly derived from the exhibition's own invention, rather than the fashion designer's original idea. The catalogue acts as an epitomization of the exhibition, for its emphasis on surface beauty and femininity is equally seen in the exhibition's galleries, as I will show in later sections.

Platon is particularly well-known for his portraits of world-renowned politicians and celebrities. He uses detailed close-ups, in which a momentary facial expression is frozen, and post-modifications, such as increasing contrast and controlling tints, in order to capture and reinforce a flash of personality, and these tactics can also function to force our eyes to linger over the textural quality of material surfaces. His close-ups invite a haptic way of seeing with, as Laura Marks aptly describes, "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch."[367]

In the exhibition catalogue of *Looking Glass*, Platon's photos of a Valentino dress and an Eastern Zhou bell (early 5th century BC) are two manifestations of this haptic way of seeing (**Figures 4.2-4.3**). Compared to the archival image of the Chinese bell in the MET's collection database, it is clear that Platon enhances the bell's tonal contrast in order to bring out its texture (**Figure 4.4**). The rough and rusty surface of the bronze bell offers strong contrasts with the smooth and glossy surface of the satin dress. Platon's interest in texturing is even more evident in juxtaposed photos of another Valentino dress and a piece of Ming lacquerware (**Figures 4.5-4.6**). The MET's archival image of the lacquer dish shows us its wooden grain (**Figure 4.7**). In contrast, Platon accentuates the lacquer dish's luster so it becomes leathery, echoing the fabric of the floral dress.

Clearly, the juxtaposition of Chinese objects and fashion garments intend to foreground their visual resemblance, to show how the latter is inspired by the former. It should be noted that, however, some of the juxtapositions shown in the catalogue indicate associations that are actually invented by the exhibition makers, not fashion designers. An example is found in the grouping between a handle-shaped jade blade and a Madeleine Vionnet evening gown (**Figures 4.8-4.9**). Compared to the MET's archival image of the jade blade, it is obviously that the toning and composition of Platon's photo make the jade blade look alike the green silk dress (**Figure 4.10**). However, according to the Musée de la Mode de la Ville in Paris, the museum where this Vionnet dress is now collected, the pattern of the dress is actually inspired by the classical Greek logos designed by the Italian artist Ernesto Thayaht in 1919.[368]

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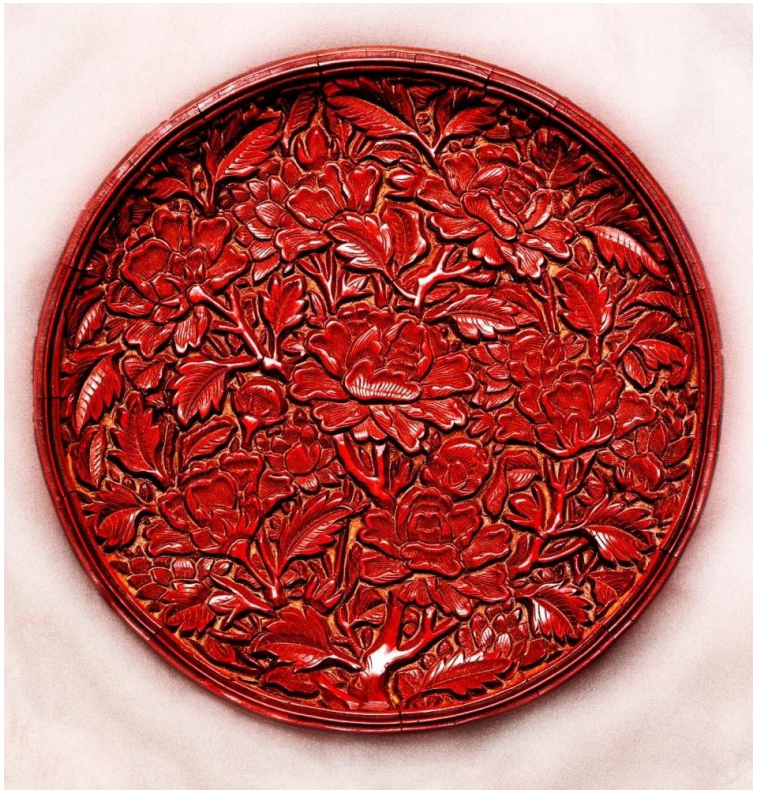
[367] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 162.

[368] For the information of this Madeleine Vionnet evening gown, see: https://www.palaisgalliera.paris.fr/en/work/evening-gown-madeleine-vionnet [Accessed January 20, 2021].

Figures 4.2-4.3 Eastern Zhou bell (left) and Valentino dress (right). Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 198-199

Figure 4.4 Bell. Bronze. Early 5th Century BC. Size: High: 38.3 cm; width 24.4 cm. Collected in the MET. Accession Number: 1988.20.7



Figures 4.5-4.6 Ming lacquerware dish (left) and Valentino dress (right). Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 206-207

Figure 4.7 Dish with flower. Carved Red Lacquer, late 14th century. Diameter: 15.2 cm. Collected in the MET. Accession number: 2015.500.1.30a, b



Figures 4.8-4.9 (left and middle) Western Zhou handle-shaped blade and Madeleine Vionnet evening gown. Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 196-197
Figure 4.10 (right) Western Zhou handle-shaped blade. Jade. 10th-9th BC. Length: 26.1 cm. Collected in the MET. Accession number: 1985.214.96

In addition to emphasizing (invented) visual connections between Chinese objects and fashion dresses, the layout of the catalogue's photos promotes an intimate association between objects and dressed female bodies. Take, for instance, the pairing of a Qing hexagonal vase and a Chanel evening gown made of white silk organza and embroidered with blue, white, and crystal beads (**Figures 4.11-4.12**).[369] The Qing vase and the Chanel dress share very similar hierarchical differentiations and a decorative motif consisting of elegant scrolls, flowering branches, and bands meandering around their necks and waists. Not only are their appearances alike, but the way they are framed and put into vignettes by Platon also makes their silhouettes allude to each other. Such a meaningful analogy is also seen in another pairing, a Ming enameled vase and a polychrome printed dress by Mary Katrantzou (**Figures 4.13-4.14**). Their photos are cropped to highlight the resemblance between the gourd-shaped porcelain vase and the curvy female body.

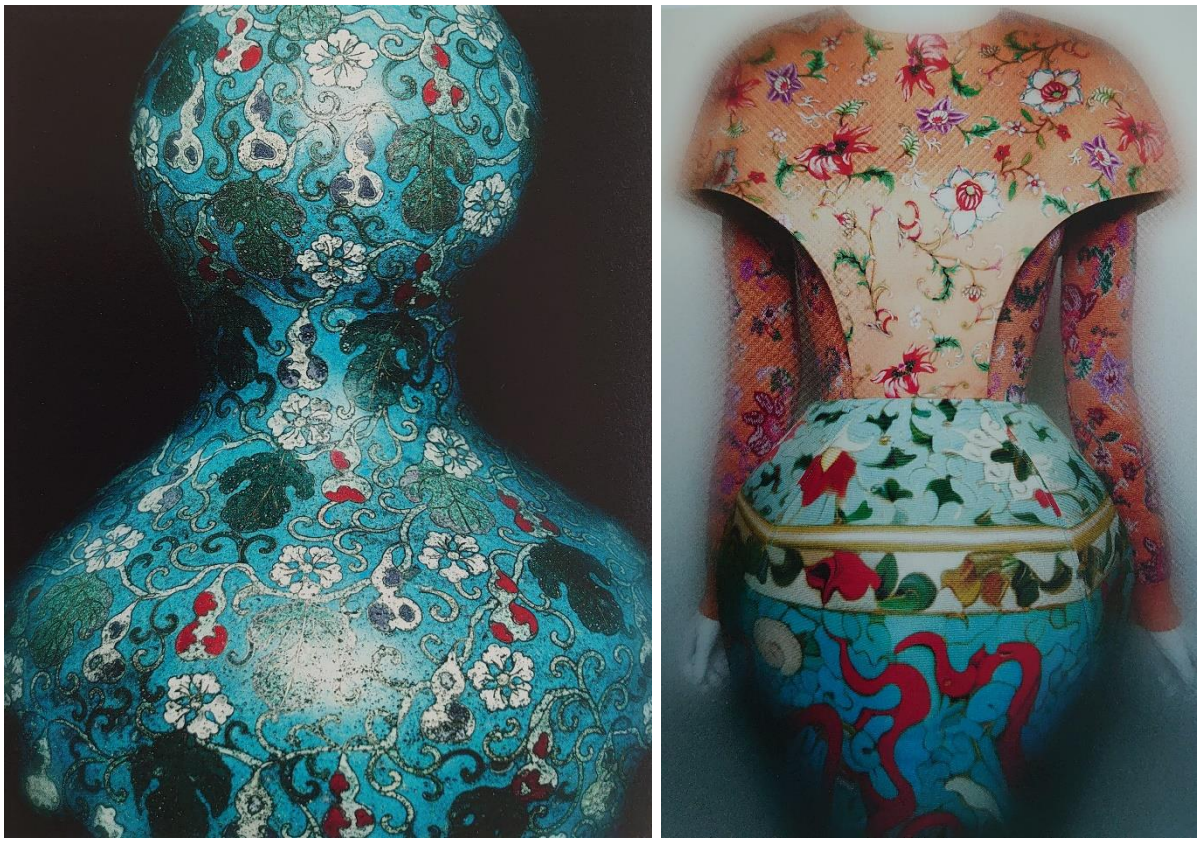
The association between the female body and porcelain body is presented even more corporally by a gourd-shaped Qing vase paired with an Alexander McQueen evening dress (**Figures 4.15-4.16**). The dress is full of visual and tactile contrast. Its bodice consists of blue and white porcelain shards which closely fit the contour of the body, while its skirt is made of softly colored layered organza which is fluffy and blooming. Between the vase and the dress is a sheet of translucent vellum with a close-up of *Beijing Memory No. 5*, a dress made of Ming-Qing porcelain shards by the contemporary Chinese artist Li Xiaofeng. Its surface is magnified to allow one to see in detail how the shards are sewn together with metal threads, evoking a rugged tactility. The placement of this close-up image is meaningful in that it creates a narrative flow: the gourd-shaped vase was deformed into shards and was then transformed into a female torso with a narrow waist similar to the vase. Read metonymically, then, the layout of these three images can be interpreted as follows: the porcelain shards *are* the female flesh; the female body is shaped by, or fragile as, porcelain.

[369] Before *Looking Glass* was unveiled, *Vogue The United States* published a photo of the Chanel evening gown with an interesting caption: Porcelain Doll. See Leslie Camhi, "From Chanel to Valentino, a First Look at the Dresses in the Met's 'China through the Looking Glass'," *Vogue The United States*, April 23, 2015, https://www.vogue.com/article/china-through-the-looking-glass-met-gala-2015 [Accessed April 20, 2021].

The catalogue also includes close-ups shots of fetishized female body parts, as if to advocate that the erotically charged female body plays an indispensable role in forming "an image of China that exists in the Western imaginations."[370] In these images, Platon vitalizes the inanimate mannequins by cropping their whole bodies into partials sections, which eroticizes the act of looking, seducing our eyes into ever more intense explorations. As we can see, a close-up of a French chiffon dress lets our eyes penetrate its translucent fabric to the female body and its slim waist (**Figure 4.17**). The silk dyes the torso with a layer of seductive pink. The embroidered dragon pattern moves our vision along with its meandering body, downwards, until a butterfly blocks our voyeuristic gaze. Similarly, the body below the tear-shaped neckline of a cheongsam-inspired dress by Yves Saint Laurent dominates our vision (**Figure 4.18**). The photo invites us to look closely at its fabric: the light-reflecting quality of the layered polychrome sequins turns the surface of the dress into a dark lake glistening, reflecting the moonlight and carrying the falling flowers. However, one's eye might be mesmerized by her faint bosom, her bodily enchantment underneath. The composition of this photo keeps the head of the (perhaps headless) mannequin out of frame, thereby enabling an imagination that the luminous bronzed skin belongs to a sensual female body. These photos suggest a process of fetishizing female body parts, in that chest, waist, and torso are all invested with the power to evoke erotic fantasy. The eroticized femininity as an Orientalist motif is also perceivable in the exhibition's galleries, which I will discuss in the third section of this chapter. The excessive ornamentation and femininity expressed in the juxtaposition between fashion garments and Chinese porcelain are equally seen in the exhibition's galleries, to which I will now turn.

Figures 4.11-4.12 Qing vase (left) and Dior evening dress (right). Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 176-177

[370] Cited from the transcript of the video *China: Through the Looking Glass—Gallery Views*, https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/ci/china-looking-glass-gallery-views [Accessed January 20, 2021].



Figures 4.13-4.14 Ming gourd-shaped vase (left) and Mary Katrantzou dress (right). Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 192-193

Figure 4.15 Qing gourd-shaped vase and *Beijing Memory No.5* (detail). Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 184-184v

Figure 4.16 *Beijing Memory No.5* (detail) and Alexander McQueen evening dress. Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, pp. 184v-185

Figure 4.17 (left) Callot Soeurs Dress. Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, p. 85
Figure 4.18 (right) Yves Saint Laurent Evening dress. Photographed by Platon for the *Looking Glass* exhibition catalogue, p. 115

4-2 The World of Myth: Surface Patterns as Signifiers of Exoticism

Most pieces of Ming porcelain showcased in the *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain* section of the exhibition came from the Department of Asian Art's semi-permanent gallery: *Gallery 204 Chinese Ceramics*. Such a displacement happens to inform us of how Ming porcelain is moved from one fetishized locus to another: from the presentation of commodity fetishism to the one of Orientalist fetishism.

4-2-1 Porcelain in Shop Window: The Presentation of Commodity Fetishism

Gallery 200 through *Gallery 205*—all titled *Chinese Ceramics*—are set up along the second-floor Great Hall Balcony, introducing the development of Chinese ceramics and porcelain in a roughly chronological order. If we step back a little bit from the wall cases in these galleries to consider the porcelain in tandem with the architectural characteristics and spatial layout of the Great Hall Balcony, one of china's interesting meanings—as a signifier of privilege—comes to the fore.

The display techniques and interior décor in the Great Hall Balcony evoke those typically used in the department stores to create an impression of luxury.[371] The Great Hall Balcony has immense domes and a mosaic-marble floor. Bathed in soft light from above, the colorful pieces of Chinese porcelain lined up as if luxury items in a series of glass cases from one end of the Balcony to another (**Figures 4.19-4.21**). Visitors in this viewing environment become like window shoppers. The architectural style and layout of the Great Hall Balcony seems reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Paris arcades as seen through the eyes of the philosopher Walter Benjamin: "a center of commerce in luxury items," "temples of commodity capital," or "forerunners of department stores."[372] As the nineteenth-century *Illustrated Guide to Paris* that Benjamin would later quote describes:

> These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops…[373]

The pieces of Chinese porcelain behind glass lure our eyes in a way akin to how the French novelist Balzac so beautifully portrays the scene in arcades: "the great poem of display chants its stanzas of colour from the Church of the Madeleine to the Porte Saint-Denis."[374] The world of the Paris arcades is a world of commodity fetishism, "where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore."[375] It is a place in which the fetishistic character of the displayed

[371] Department stores and museums borrowed display techniques from one another after the mid nineteenth century. See Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2005), 30-35.
[372] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999[1982]), 3, 37.
[373] Ibid., 3.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 81-82.

commodities—not just the exchange but also the symbolic values of the objects on display—are magnified. Specifically, Chinese porcelain in the Great Hall Balcony becomes a fetishistic object not only because of the spatial form and the display techniques shared with the department stores, but also because of spatial function: The Great Hall Balcony, at a specific time of day, will turn into a place of restricted, commodified access.

Figure 4.19 View of Great Hall Balcony. Photographed by the author in 2016

Figure 4.20 (left) View of Great Hall Balcony with Chinese porcelain. Photographed by the author in 2016
Figure 4.21 (right) View of the Benjamin Altman Collection of Chinese Qing Porcelain adjacent to the Great Hall Balcony. Photographed by the author in 2016

The Great Hall Balcony embodies what the geographer David Harvey calls the "porosity" of the boundary between public and private spaces.[376] Every day, from 10 a.m., when the museum opens its

[376] David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 43. In describing how the boundaries between public and private spaces became porous in nineteenth-century Paris, David Harvey takes the arrival of the new cafes as an example: "The public space of the new boulevard provides the setting, but it acquires its qualities in part through the commercial and private activities that illuminate and spill outward onto it. The boundary between public and private spaces is depicted as porous. […] The café is not exactly a private space either: a selected public is allowed in for commercial and consumption purposes. The poor family sees it as a space of exclusion, internalizing the gold that has been taken from them." Ibid., 215.

doors, until the afternoon, museum visitors can enjoy coffee, salad, sandwiches, and snacks in the Great Hall Balcony Café centered around *Gallery 204 Chinese Ceramics*. Moreover, every Friday and Saturday, from 4 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. (just half an hour before the museum closes), the Great Hall Balcony Bar welcomes customers with beer, cocktails, wine, appetizers and live performances. The seats of the Great Hall Balcony Café and Bar are placed along the rim of the Balcony, so audience members who do not want to spend five dollars on a cappuccino can still stroll within the gallery space (**Figures 4.22-4.23**). They can appreciate porcelain close-up, although it may make one a bit uneasy to walk around in front of a group of people dining. As long as you are willing to consume, you are allowed to have a seat with a vantage point, overlooking the downstairs clamor, and to symbolically possess the pieces of Chinese porcelain on view for a moment. In a sense, the Great Hall Balcony Café and Bar sells not only things that can fill your stomach, but also, and perhaps more importantly, feelings that can fill your heart, feelings such as taste, elegance, and style. From the point of view of beholders, perhaps, the pieces of porcelain on display become signifiers of privilege, and the Great Hall Balcony becomes a place where commodity fetishism and conspicuous consumption triumph.

The movement of Ming porcelain from *Gallery 204 Chinese Ceramics* to *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain* in *Looking Glass* indicates a shift from signifier of privilege to a signifier of exoticism. On the face of it, *Gallery 213* is designed to evade any culturally informed interpretive practice by seducing the eyes of viewers with the material beauty. However, a close reading of the display reveals its Orientalist tendencies.

Figure 4.22 (left) View of the Great Hall Balcony Bar with the performance of a concert. Photographed by the author in 2019

Figure 4.23 (right) View of the Great Hall Balcony Bar with a red stand on the table reads: "Welcome to the Great Hall Balcony Bar. Please wait for the host to be seated." Photographed by the author in 2019

4-2-2 Flowing Patterns across Materials: The Presentation of Orientalist Fetishism

The space of *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain* is filled with interplays of light and darkness. Originally, the gallery was used to display Chinese painting, calligraphy, and a few pieces of furniture in a warm light

(**Figure 4.24**). The exhibition team of *Looking Glass* did not keep much from the original light arrangements. Instead, they set up a cobalt-blue lighting installation (**Figure 4.25**). The color echoes the pigment of porcelain, immersing the gallery in an atmosphere of night. Additional spotlights make the mannequins' skin glisten from the dark, and make the black acrylic stages under their feet appear like a sparkling pond, on which pleating hemlines resemble floating lotus leaves. The showcases and the acrylic stages are designed in a way that allows audiences to take a closer look at the surface textures of material objects on display, with their bodily contours foregrounded by the light distribution.

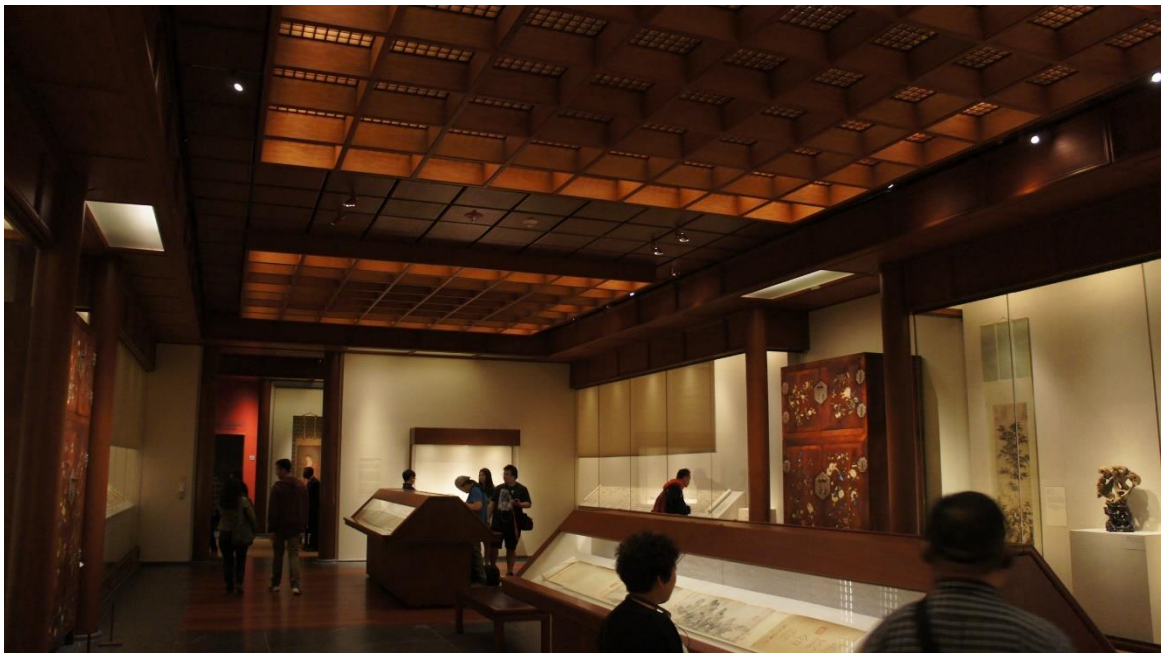


Figure 4.24 View of *Gallery 213 Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*. Photographed by the author in 2016

Figure 4.25 View of *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain* in *Looking Glass*. Photographed by the author in 2015

Flowing within this atmospheric gallery layout is one surface pattern after another. Consider the dragon totem, one of the most auspicious motifs of Ming China. Five pieces of Ming porcelain decorated with five-clawed dragons—the symbol of imperial power in China, indicating that these porcelain pieces were made for imperial use—are framed by black acrylic and the lighting installation make their glossy, light-reflecting surfaces even more eye-catching (**Figures 4.26-4.27**).[377] Staged in front of the group of Ming porcelain with dragons is a stunning evening gown by Roberto Cavalli (**Figure 4.28**). A four-clawed dragon occupies the satin surface, as if it was flying through the color of the night, from the glossy vase to the smooth dress, with a claw left behind. What this dragon loses is not only a claw, but also its identity as an emblem of imperial power and masculinity. Instead, the dragon is mobilized by the Italian designer as a signifier of mysterious exoticism with its meandering body inhabiting and accentuating the female body.

Compared to the dragon motif, the flowing of floral motifs across material surfaces of different kinds is manifested in a more compelling way in this gallery. The floral patterns on the pieces of Chinese porcelain in the showcase demonstrate rhythm and continuity accompanying smooth tactility. In contrast, the floral patterns on the irregular blue and white fragments of the porcelain dress *Beijing Memory No.5* are composed incoherently, like a misassembled puzzle in which the visual languages that used to be readable are now unreadable (**Figure 4.29**). The porcelain dress is positioned in a way that invites viewers to appreciate its texture in detail from the front and the side. Hence, its shattered surface stitched with metal sutures can be seen clearly, with a sharp and uneven tactility made palpable as our eyes is pierced by its jagged edge. Distinct from this broken topography, the McQueen dress has a bodice consisting of floral-patterned porcelain shards that are sliced into smaller pieces with a more regular shape (**Figure 4.30**). A smoother surface is made, which nonetheless remains cracked by dense fissures. Moving on, the Chanel evening dress in a porcelain-vase shape shows a topography without being splintered. Decorated with leafy and floral branches gracefully curving upward, the dress is textured by crystal beads, giving it a glittering graininess (**Figure 4.31**). Placed nearby this dress is an evening gown by Guo Pei, decorated with lotus and tailored in a very specific way (**Figure 4.32**). In contrast to the streamlined contour of the Chanel dress, the blossoms flourishing on the dress by Guo Pei unfolds a pleated topography that strikingly reshapes the female body. In short, the combination of porcelain and fashion dresses enthralls audiences through the flowing of surface patterns across materials with rich and diverse tactile properties.

As an interface where the surface textures of different materials are associated with each other through the fluid visual intersection of particular motifs, the gallery space attempts to map out a cultural exchange in fashion. This is seen in that the gallery also includes a group of Delft blue and a set of fashion dresses that riffle on Delft blue (**Figures 4.33-4.34**). This arrangement echoes the curatorial statement that the exhibition attempts to "reimagine the relationship between East and West not as one-sided mimicry or appropriation, but rather as a layered series of enfolded exchanges."[378] This lofty claim is, however, greatly weakened by the gallery design: neither the wall caption nor object label here reveal to audiences how a seemingly Chinese-inspired garment may actually be Dutch-influenced. As such, it is reasonable to

[377] The five-clawed dragon was restricted to imperial use in the late Yuan dynasty. See Jessica Harrison-Hall, *Catalogue of late Yuan and Ming Ceramics in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 54, 56.

[378] Bolton, "Towards an Aesthetic of Surfaces," 18.

assume that, for audiences who are not familiar with fashion history, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish which dress follows the designs of Ming porcelain and which plays a homage to Delftware; they all seem to be Chinese-inspired.[379]

Figure 4.26 View of the group of Ming porcelain with dragons. Photographed by the author in 2015

Figure 4.27 Ming Dish with five-clawed dragon amid waves, Xuande period (1426-1435). Diameter: 20.6 cm. This porcelain piece was displayed in *Looking Glass*. Collected in the MET. Accession number: 1975.99

[379] The exhibition received many reviews and comments. Yet almost no one recognized that some dresses displayed in *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain* are actually inspired by European ceramics rather than Chinese porcelain.

Figure 4.28 Evening gown by Roberto Cavalli. Photographed by the author in 2015

Figure 4.29 (left) *Beijing Memory No.5* by Li Xiaofeng. Photographed by the author in 2015
Figure 4.30 (right) Alexander McQueen Evening Dress. Photographed by the author in 2015

Figure 4.31 (left) Chanel evening dress. Photographed by the author in 2015
Figure 4.32 (right) Evening gown by Guo Pei. Photographed by the author in 2015

Figure 4.33 View of the group of Delft tin-glazed earthenware. Photographed by the author in 2015

Figure 4.34 View of the group of dresses inspired by Dutch Delft blue, including two evening gowns by Valentino (two pieces on the left), a coat by Giambattista Valli (middle), an evening gown by Dior (right). Photographed by the author in 2015

Generally, the exhibition's emphasis on surface-level material beauty transforms all the displayed Chinese objects into fetishized surfaces: that is, their material qualities are highlighted, and their surface configurations are exoticized, transformed into a series of enigmatic graphic signs that cannot be

deciphered, but can only be fascinated with. "There is no room in the Orientalist imagination for national, ethnic, or historical specificities," as the literary scholar Anne Aline Cheng aptly describes: indeed, "China [in *Looking Glass*] equals ornament."[380] This process of exoticization and ornamentation is seen in many galleries of the exhibition in addition to *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*. For example, in *Gallery 210 Opium and Chinoiserie*, the garden pavilions are extracted from the narrative scenes engraved on a Chinese unfolded lacquer screen, ornamentalized and retextured by plastic sequins and gold beads (**Figure 4.35**); in *Gallery 214 Calligraphy*, the meaningful graphic language of a Tang calligrapher complaining about his painful stomach is ornamentalized into the meaningless exotic patterns on the Dior silk dress (**Figure 4.36**). Especially in this gallery on calligraphy, the processes of mystification and ornamentalization are clearly indicated by the wall caption: "Because [Chinese graphic] language is seen as 'exotic' or 'foreign,' it can be read as purely allusive decoration [for European fashion designers]."

Significantly, as I have noted in the previous section, some of the analogies between Chinese objects and fashion dresses are actually invented by the exhibition's makers, instead of designers. An example is seen in the juxtaposition of a Tang silver mirror and a silk dress by Lanvin in *Gallery 207 Ancient China* (**Figure 4.37**). According to the MET's collection database, the beautiful roundels decorating this Lanvin dress resemble either "embroidered Manchu court badge motifs or the glinting scales of Mongol armor interpreted in Western embroidery."[381] However, its combination with the Tang mirror forces the latter to project an exotic aura. The problem here is that it is quite challenging for audiences to understand what they are looking at is actually mirrored by, or mirroring, the curator's own fantasy.

Figure 4.35 Showcase with a Qing folding screen (1689-1690) by Feng Langgong and two evening coats by Chanel in *Gallery 210 Opium and Chinoiserie*. Photographed by the author in 2015

[380] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 88.
[381] See the MET's collection database: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/81462?&searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=C.I.62.58.1&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1 [Accessed January 20, 2021].


Figure 4.36 (left) Showcase with Dior dress and *Du tong tie* 肚痛帖 [*Letter about a Stomachache*] by Zhang Xu (ca. 675-759), nineteenth-century rubbing of a tenth-century stone carving, in *Gallery 214 Calligraphy*. Photographed by the author in 2015
Figure 4.37 (right) Showcase with dress by Lanvin and a Chinese Eastern Han mirror (1st-3rd century) in *Gallery 207 Ancient China*. Photographed by the author in 2015

The techniques of display used in *Looking Glass* bring us to a critical point: recognizing that attempts to refer to or position the exhibition as "culturally and historically decontextualized" seem to be untenable.[382] Regarding this point, how the exhibition galleries are categorized is equally thought-provoking. The exhibition's makers unify most of the exhibition's galleries, including the galleries discussed above, under the theme of *Empire of Signs*, after the French philosopher Roland Barthes' *Empire des Signes* (1970).[383] However, as I will now argue, compared to *Empire des Signes*, the exhibition is perhaps more pertinent to what Barthes describes as the process of myth-making in his earlier writing *Mythologies* (1957), a semiotic treatise and the counter-text of *Empire des Signes*.

4-2-3 Essentializing: The Effect of the Real

In *Empire des Signes*, a semiotic treatise written following his journey to Japan, Barthes perceives his fictional Japan as a system of empty signs. As the bond between signifier and signified is ruptured, there

[382] Bolton, "Towards an Aesthetic of Surfaces," 18.
[383] *Looking Glass* is comprised of two categories: *From Emperor to Citizen* and *Empire of Signs*. The former includes three galleries: *Gallery 980 Machu Robe*, *Gallery 981 Hu Die*, and *Gallery 132 People's Republic of China*. The latter includes the remaining thirteen galleries: *Gallery 209 Anna May Wong*, *Gallery 206 Wuxia*, *Gallery 207 Ancient China*, *Gallery 208 Guo Pei*, *Gallery 210 Saint Laurent and Opium*, *Galleries 211-212 Perfume*, *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*, *Gallery 214 Calligraphy*, *Galleries 215-216 Export Silk*, *Gallery 217 Moon in the Water*, and *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture*.

is no need to search for deep significances. The Japanese bow is only "a graphic form [of] two bodies which inscribe but do not prostrate themselves;" Japanese *haiku*, compared to French classical writing, is not "embellished with significations, with moralities."[384] Obviously, Barthes's observation is not based on any Japan in reality, but on a Japanese image forming in his mind during travel. As he clarifies:

> Orient and Occident cannot be taken here as 'realities' to be contrasted historically, philosophically, culturally, politically. I am not lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence—to me the Orient is a matter of indifference.[385]

Looking Glass draws on this perspective as a desirable underpinning to disentangle aesthetic pleasure from the Saidian paradigm of Orientalism. As Bolton notes: "Like Barthes, the designers who engage in dialogues with these enigmatic signifiers do not feel the need to go beyond their surfaces."[386] Such an analogy, however, risks omitting the critical thrust of Barthes' work: namely, a reflection on the excessiveness of the symbolic order in Western society. The result of this omission is that, it seems to me, the link between signifier and signified is not obliterated in *Looking Glass* but rather made more obvious; the exhibition enacts not Barthes's *Empire of Signs*, but rather his *Mythologies*. [387]

Mythologies aims to uncover modes of signification attached to physical objects. It exposes and criticizes the process of mystification by demystifying and re-politicizing the (seemingly) purified myth.[388] "All the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness," Barthes argues, and the process of mystification is to naturalize, to depoliticize speech "so as to make it suitable for communication."[389] This suggests that, with myth there is always some purposes; in the process of mystification, the sign is not free-floating, but rather floating centripetally towards a privileged cultural connotation. As a result, Barthes argues, the signified can have several signifiers, and the world that myth organizes for us is "a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something

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[384] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982[1970]), 68, 82. A *haiku* is a Japanese poem consisting of three short, un-rhymed lines, which was well-developed by the sixteenth century. The *haiku* Barthes cites in Empire of Signs includes the work by the famous poet Matsuo Bashō:
"The winter wind blows
The cats' eyes
Blink." Ibid., 82.

[385] Ibid., 3.

[386] Bolton, "Towards an Aesthetic of Surfaces," 19.

[387] *Empire of Signs* can be seen as a companion volume to *Mythologies* not only because of their similar form (both consist of small, thematic essays) but also and more importantly, because some cases in the former found their antithesis in the latter. Take wrestling for instance. The Japanese wrestling presented in *Empire of Signs* is only "the sign of a certain hefting [that has] no crisis, no drama, no exhaustion." Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 40. In comparison, the French wrestling portrayed in *Mythologies* is much more "an immediate pantomime," with "the gesture of the vanquished wrestler signifying to the world a defeat." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972[1957]), 14, 17.

[388] One famous example Barthes offers here is a cover photo of a French magazine, showing a young black man dressed in a French uniform and saluting, probably, a French flag. In Barthes's view, what the image signifies to him is a myth that "France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors." Ibid., 115.

[389] Ibid., 108 (emphasis in original).

by themselves."[390] This homogeneous world without contradiction and diversity, I argue, is exactly the world that *Looking Glass* mirrors to its audiences.

The exhibition transmutes what is culturally constructed into something that appears to be a transparent fact, a natural reality. It amalgamates a variety of selected surface patterns—blue and white flowers, dragons, pagodas, pavilions, gardens, bridges, and so on—presenting them in a way that makes them a group of signifiers referring to exoticism. Ornamentation with these graphic signs is *essentialized* as the sole way to make a dress Chinese-style in the exhibition. The technique of display here, therefore, embodies what Mieke Bal criticizes as the "visual rhetoric of realism," or creates what Roland Barthes calls the "effect of the reality," a mode of interpretation through which things are described as simply out there, serving a certainty of reality.[391]

In *Looking Glass*, there is not much difference between the calligraphy-inspired dresses of Dior and those of Chanel, or between the porcelain-inspired gowns by Roberto Cavalli and by Guo Pei, or between the lacquerware-inspired garments of Chanel and Valentino. In general, these selected costumes put on display all employ their graphic signs in similar ways—destructing, restructuring, deforming, and transforming patterns on the level of surface—to suggest the overarching theme of an Orientalist fantasy of China. The documentary about the exhibition, *The First Monday in May* (2016), provides an example in this respect: The French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier misidentified a blue and white gown by Guo Pei (see **Figure 4.32**) as by John Galliano. Indeed, it is hard to tell what exactly the intrinsic differences are between the dress by Guo Pei and those by the European designers in this gallery, or which dress embodies a more respectful appreciation, or which ones constitute disrespectful appropriations. They all refashion Chinese motifs and palettes of blue and white in line with a European silhouette. Thus, what we see in the exhibition—and what is highlighted by the exhibition's techniques of display—is a double-sided decontextualization: not only are the rich meanings of Chinese decorations reduced to a set of surface patterns that can only evoke exoticism, but the potentially complex process through which fashion designers are inspired by Chinese artistic elements is also reduced to pictorial imitation, collage, and transformation. The exhibition shows almost no design drafts, interviews, or other materials that might help audiences to understand *how* exactly the designers are inspired by Chinese objects.[392]

By comparison, the Costume Institute's 1995 exhibition, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western dress*, which included some costumes also displayed in *Looking Glass*, was more informative in that its object labels indicated more about exactly which part of the costumes took inspiration from Chinese design and imagery. To give but one example, an evening jacket by Lanvin collected in the MET is seen in both exhibitions (**Figure 4.38**). In the 1995 *Orientalism* exhibition, its label reads:

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[390] Ibid., 143.

[391] See Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 562; and Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986[1984]), 141-148.

[392] The only exception is seen in a series Yves Saint Laurent's creative sketches for the fragrance *Opium* (1977) shown in *Galleries 211-212 Perfume*.

> By the 1930s, the sleek silhouette of the cheongsam had come to represent a modern Orientalism, but the fantasy of Genghis Khan and the feudal extravagance of the Ch'ing [Qing] court under the last Dowager Empress, Ts'u-his, provided opportunities for more dramatic manifestations of a Chinese style.

The label explains why the jacket is defined as Chinese-inspired. The same jacket is equally seen in *Looking Glass*, but the label here only describes the jacket's materials: "Black silk taffeta embroidered with green silk and silver metallic thread, and synthetic pearl, silver, black, and gold beads and paillettes; silver lamé and ivory silk tulle embroidered with metallic silver thread." In *Looking Glass*, the jacket is juxtaposed with a Chinese bronze vessel, encouraging audiences to compare their horizontal-line decorations (**Figure 4.39**). This, again, is an association invented by the exhibition based on its own ornamental vocabulary.

Figure 4.38 (left) View of *Gallery 2 China* in the Costume Institute's 1995 exhibition, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress*. Photo, 1995. A: Evening jacket by Jeanne Lanvin. Collected in the MET, object number: CI.66.58.1
Figure 4.39 (right) Showcase with evening jacket by Lanvin and a Chinese Western-Zhou bronze vessel (early 9th century BC) in *Gallery 207 Ancient China*. Photographed by the author in 2015

Looking Glass does not just depict an image of China that is ornamentalized, reduced to layers of beautiful and timeless patterns, but, more fundamentally, the exhibition makes it self-evident. The overwhelming purpose of the exhibition is to represent Chinese exoticism through a set of fetishized material surfaces. The exhibition suggests a monolithic treatment of the style called Chinese-ness, as there seems to be no Chinese aesthetic in the world of fashion other than an aesthetic of surfaces. As the art historian Rachel Silberstein argues, "Bolton's choice of mainland Chinese designers is carefully curated to avoid [including those Chinese designers who] position themselves against a Western-defined 'Chinese' aesthetic."[393] From this perspective, what is asserted as a collective fantasy of China is selective. Perhaps, such a selected framework of representation conforms to what Said describes in Orientalism as

[393] Silberstein, "China: Through the Looking Glass."

"an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness."[394] The so-called culturally and politically decontextualized pure fantasy that the exhibition asserts might be perceived by Barthes as an act of purification: "Myth is depoliticized speech. […] it purifies [things], it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact."[395] It is in this sense that the literary critic Jonathan Culler refers to myth as "a delusion to be exposed."[396] The exhibition mirrors the image of China as enigmatic, exotic, ornamental and, as I will argue in the next section, feminine. The exhibition provides no critical reflection on the socio-cultural values interwoven in the Orientalist imagination of China, but presents them as if indisputable and thereby essentialized.

So far, I have exposed how the aesthetic of surfaces the curator proposes is not as culturally decontextualized as it might appear at first glance. On the contrary, it is a cultural artifact. Chinese porcelain and other objects on display are presented as fetishized surfaces with their patterns acting as stereotypical exotic imageries. There is yet another layer of meaning attached to china here—a feminized object—that the exhibition adds by reinforcing the bodily intimacy of both porcelain and femininity based on a metonymic process. This meaning is reminiscent of the gender-specific chinoiserie style and Orientalist discourse.

4-3 Gender-Coding: The Overt Association of china/China with Femininity

How does an object become a medium through which the idea of gender is communicated? It is already well-known that gender is not a natural fact but a social and cultural construction.[397] Similarly, an object *per se* hardly has inherent masculine or feminine qualities (or both simultaneously) without being associated with a particular cultural and historical setting. This is to say that objects becoming gendered are always contextualized. The association between objects and gender, according to the archaeologist Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, might be based on

> some objects' ability to provide physical embodiment of culturally held views of what constitute feminine and masculine. This refers to the ability objects have of being the material expression of qualities such as fragility or robustness.[398]

Sørensen makes an example of the drawing-room in late nineteenth-century England, how its design, aiming at elegance, cheerfulness, and lightness, was deemed to be ladylike by the interior design manuals of the time. This made the drawing-room an embodiment of idealized femininity, in contrast to the

[394] Said, *Orientalism*, 6.
[395] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.
[396] Jonathan Culler, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 33.
[397] Sex, as a biological facticity, is distinguished from gender, as a historical construct and a cultural interpretation. See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.
[398] Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 83.

dining-room which was strongly associated with masculinity.[399] In addition to their visual and physical forms, objects are involved with gender through the practices associated with them. An example Sørensen provides is swords during the European Bronze Age which were bound up with masculinity as they were frequently found with men in graves.[400] To think about how objects are gendered is to think about the physical presence of objects, how they interact with people and are engaged in people's daily lives to produce meanings.[401]

Below, I will discuss how Chinese porcelain and a China that exists as a cultural Other subjected to the European imagination are gendered feminine in *Looking Glass*. Specifically, the connection between femininity and China/china needs to be explored by considering its cultural substrate, since what meant to be feminine is always culturally specific. As the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern reminds us: "What it means to be a woman in this or that situation must rest to some extent on the cultural logic by which gender is constructed."[402] In the case of *Looking Glass*, its gender-coding of china and China recalls feminine images rooted in cultural contexts of chinoiserie, Aestheticism, and Orientalism.

4-3-1 The Porcelain Body and Female Body

Porcelain and ceramics are often characterized using anatomical terms analogous to those for the human body: lip, mouth, neck, shoulders, body, and foot. Notably, such a bodily projection is more commonly identified as feminine than masculine.[403] The metaphorical representation of femininity is equally attested to by Chinese porcelain. Research on material culture has shown how the porcelain body and female body were recurrently linked to one another through a close metaphorical relationship in the vogue of chinoiserie in eighteenth-century Europe.[404] The sensual seduction of Chinese porcelain often relied on its visual and material qualities of whiteness, glossiness, ornamentation, and fragility, which were deemed to be like those of women.[405] As the literary scholar Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace points out: "The

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[399] Ibid., 83-84.
[400] Ibid., 92.
[401] Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield, eds., *The Gendered Objects* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4. This book focuses on the contemporary gender-coding of things in daily use. These things are diverse in kinds and functions, such as the washing machine and bicycles. With these various objects, Kirkham and Attfield demonstrate that "[t]he degree to which gendered objects are part of, and inform, wider social relations are exemplified at every level of daily life." Ibid., 5.
[402] Marilyn Strathern. "Culture in a Netbag: The Manufacture of a Subdiscipline in Anthropology," *Man* 46, no. 4 (1981): 683.
[403] For an extensive study of the association between ceramics/porcelain and femininity, see Moira Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 254-255.
[404] For more about the intersection of chinoiserie and femininity, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Stacey Sloboda, "Porcelain Bodies: Gender, Acquisitiveness, and Taste in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Material Cultures, 1740-1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 19-36; and Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, "'Frailty, the Name is China': Women, Chinoiserie and the Threat of Low Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Women's History Review* 18, no. 4 (2009): 659-668; and David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[405] A famous example of this is in the poetry *To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China* (1725) by the English poet John Gay (1685-1732), in which he attributes the whiteness and refinement of porcelain to "the types of woman-kind."

very utility of china as a trope for femininity seems to have stemmed from its property as surface."[406] Working through associations of likeness, the material properties of china became a metaphor for not just physical but also moral qualities that were viewed as feminine in the eyes of eighteenth-century European men. In addition to these physical properties, the gender-coding of china was also engraved in certain contexts of use, especially tea-drinking.[407] Whether through its physical properties or its associated activities, Chinese porcelain, as Kowaleski-Wallace notes, "made it possible for [European] people to talk about women and their qualities in a particular way."[408]

Implied in the particular association of china and femininity in the context of chinoiserie is the production of difference. To gender an object is not only to anchor it into a static categorization of feminine or masculine but also to generate the differentiation based on a specific cultural logic and thus to define identity.[409] The chinoiserie style was considered a combination of femininity and foreignness (signified by both china and China), two elements that were both defined in terms of otherness in a European-male dominated discourse.[410] This corresponds to the Orientalist gender paradigm in which the Orient is feminized, serving to produce difference and to self-define Western masculinity. Interestingly, this stereotypical gendering of Chinese porcelain is recollected in *Looking Glass* by virtue of spatial continuity as metonymy.

The porcelain body and the female body are intimately correlated in *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*, and this becomes clear through a metonymic reading of the way the gallery's objects are laid out. Moving from the grouping of Chinese porcelain, to the porcelain dress *Beijing Memory No.5*, (see **Figure 4.29**) and finally to the McQueen dress (see **Figure 4.30**) with porcelain bodice, this walking tour creates a metonymic link through which china becomes clearly established as a metonymy for female skin and flesh. This metonymic relation is anchored by two verbs: breaking and reshaping. If one walks from the grouping of Chinese porcelain to *Beijing Memory No.5* showcased nearby, a spatial narrative might be conjured up: the pieces of porcelain are broken into fragments, a deed of aggression, and are then reshaped into a female-body-like dress. The narrative continues to unfold if one continues to walk from *Beijing Memory No.5* towards the McQueen dress: the porcelain shards are broken down even smaller, and are now used to reshape the female torso represented by the exhibition mannequin, giving it a mosaic-like texture.

Placing *Beijing Memory No.5* directly opposite the McQueen dress is particularly enthralling and significant, as it embodies a process in which the porcelain body is becoming more and more incorporated into the female body. *Beijing Memory No. 5* is not entirely a material object, nor a female body: the porcelain shards are amalgamated to make up a dress, with her breasts brought to the fore. The texture of the dress makes it appear like armor, with sharp protruding edges taking on a boundary function to protect its (now

[406] Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 54. What also cannot be overlooked is that the delicate texture of porcelain was frequently used to signify the moral fragility of women while also alluding to their insatiable passion for purchasing china. See Alayrac-Fielding. "'Frailty, the Name is China'," 666-667.
[407] See Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 19-36.
[408] Ibid., 53.
[409] Kirkham and Attfield, *The Gendered Objects*, 4.
[410] Alayrac-Fielding, "'Frailty, the Name is China'," 667.

absent) female wearer from the ambient environment, as if the dress is her defensive *second skin*.[411] In comparison, the crackle porcelain body of the McQueen dress is so skintight that the boundary between torso and cloth becomes unclear. This makes porcelain not so much a fabric of the bodice as a tissue of the body (**Figure 4.40**). Thus, in the gallery context, Chinese porcelain refers to female skin not by way of metaphoric substitution, but by way of metonymic transfer.

Figure 4.40 A model dressed in the McQueen porcelain evening dress walks the runway during the Alexander McQueen Autumn/Winter 2011-2012 show. This image shows how the porcelain shards fit the model so tightly that they look just like tissue of her body. © *Vogue The United Kingdom*

[411] Clothing is often regarded as a second skin, as it acts like an extension of the human body, a skin-like barrier protecting the body inside from the environment outside. See Ingrid Loschek, *When Cloths Become Fashion: Design and Innovation Systems* (Oxford and New York: Berg 2009); and Stella North, "The Surfacing of the Self: The Clothing-Ego," in *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*, eds. Sheila L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

In *Looking Glass*, the bodily connection between woman and porcelain is also performed by referring to the nineteenth-century American Aestheticism. Two paintings with their artists associated with the Aesthetic style are picked out by the exhibition's makers to collocate with its porcelain display: *The Blue Jar* (1913) by William McGregor Paxton (1869-1941) and *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks* (1864) by James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) (**Figures 4.41-4.42**).[412] *The Blue Jar* is reprinted in the exhibition catalogue. The visual representation of *Purple and Rose* is projected onto the wall of *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*. Both paintings portray the female gaze at and touch on Chinese porcelain, showing how touch, arguably "the most intimate sense," closely bounds together the porcelain body with female body.[413] Permeated by soft light, the young woman in *The Blue Jar* gently touches and uncover the ginger jar that seems to invite the viewer to sense its roundness and smoothness with her fair and tender flesh. The physical intimacy is equally represented in *Purple and Rose*. The model there reclines in a chair placed within a tableau the artist has set up for her.[414] She wears a Chinese robe with brightly colored flowers, and is surrounded by a variety of objects that were considered essential for building a stylish interior that embodies the ideals of Aestheticism, including a lacquer tray and circular fan from Japan and some pieces of Chinese blue and white porcelain.[415] Her left hand hangs down gently, holding a porcelain vase.

Figure 4.41 (left) *The Blue Jar* (1913) by William McGregor Paxton. Oil on canvas. High: 76.5 cm; width 63.8 cm
Figure 4.42 (right) *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks* (1864) by James McNeill Whistler. Oil on canvas. Height: 93.3 cm; width: 61.3 cm. Collected in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Museum number: Cat. 1112

[412] For more about these two artists and their relationship with the Aesthetic movement, see Doreen Bolger Burke et al. *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).
[413] Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 41.
[414] Linda Merrill, "Whistler and the 'Lange Lijzen'," *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1099 (1994): 683.
[415] For more about the association between Chinese porcelain and the interior design in the vogue of nineteenth-century Aestheticism, see Anne Anderson, "'Chinamania': Collecting Old Blue for the House Beautiful, c. 1860-1900," in *Material Cultures, 1740-1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, eds. John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 123-136.

It seems not a coincidence that both paintings demonstrate the visual achievements of the artistic movement known as Aestheticism. Evolved from the design reform ideas in nineteenth-century Victorian Britain, the American Aestheticism, also called Aesthetic Movement began to emerge as early as the 1830s, and reached its heyday in the second half of the nineteenth century. Embracing the concept of "art for art's sake," the Aesthetic movement proposed that the aesthetic value of art should be foregrounded above all deeper meanings.[416] The exhibition's makers choose these two paintings, perhaps, to create a parallel between the cult of beauty and pure sensuous pleasure that the Aesthetic Movement embraces and the aesthetic pleasures of surfaces that the exhibition sought to present. However, it has already been recognized that Aestheticism was never itself entirely ideologically innocent. As the art historian Roger Stein argues, "The vocabulary of art for art's sake partially masked the degree to which this stylistic appropriation was indeed a form of cultural appropriation, particularly over the non-Western regions of the Near East and the Orient."[417] The Aesthetic movement sought to bring visible beauty into life. Yet, its artificial combination of various artistic elements taken from other cultural contexts into "an 'aesthetic' unity" to fashion an ideal Self inevitably makes it a suspect of cultural appropriation.[418]

Moreover, the ideological issue of the Aesthetic movement also lies in the movement's drawing of the parallels between the female body and *objet d'art*. Chinese porcelain was at the time collected, displayed, and depicted as a purely decorative art, served as inspiration for its collectors or other artists. The female figures portrayed in *The Blue Jar* and *Purple and Rose* are represented as an ornamental element just like the pieces of porcelain they fondle: in *The Blue Jar* we can see how the ornament of the ginger jar—the blossoming plums—resonates with the blue and white fabric set behind the young woman, who wears a blouse that also has patterns in blue and white; and in *Purple and Rose*, the woman gently holds a blue and white vase decorated with elongated female figures whose slender body shapes look just like hers. The woman in *Purple and Rose*, according to the art historian Kimberley Wahl, "is a collected object as much as anything else on display in this work."[419] Both paintings are indeed "pictorial representations of ideal aesthetic womanhood" in that the feminine figures became as exquisite and displayable as the alluring *objet d'art* with which she is bodily connected.[420] As the art historian Roger Stein poetically describes: "The women hover on the borderline between being merely beautiful objects in elegant displays and being lonely human beings, lost thought and isolated in space."[421] The entrenched association in Aestheticism

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[416] For a general discussion of the historical and cultural background and development of the Aestheticism, see Roger Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, Doreen Bolger Burke et al. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 22-51.

[417] Stein, "Artifact as Ideology," 27.

[418] Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25. The art historian Anne Anderson notes that the nineteenth-century Aestheticist vogue for collecting antiques, including Chinese blue and white porcelain (the Old Blue china), was rooted in an "aristocratic linkage […]; through ownership of antique objects the aesthete could connect with a past that was not his." This symbolic genealogy of connoisseurship enables a form of self-aggrandizement. See Anderson, "'Chinamania'," 112-113.

[419] Kimberley Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), 65.

[420] Anne Anderson, "Aesthetic Woman: The 'Fearful Consequence' of 'Living Up' to One's Antiques," in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 189.

[421] Stein, "Artifact as Ideology," 42.

between china (as an exotic collectible) and the feminine (has her body dressed in exotic fashion and represented as an *objet d'art*)—both serve as the focalized objects under the gaze of male artists—recalls the Orientalist gender paradigm.

In addition to Chinese porcelain, in what follows, I discuss two other representative examples—Chinese space, and a China that exists as a cultural other subjected to the Western imagination—to illustrate how femininity is enacted in other galleries of *Looking Glass*. Expanding the discussion from the porcelain gallery to other galleries helps reveal how pervasive the specific gendered imagery—Orientalized womanhood—is mobilized in the exhibition.

4-3-2 *Exotic and Erotic Womanhood*

Nearby *Gallery 213 Blue and White Porcelain*, the exhibition's *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture* is a space coded as feminine. Originally, the gallery was an adjoining period room, the Ming Room, of the Astor Court (Gallery 217), featuring Ming hardwood furniture (**Figure 4.43**). The Astor garden court is modeled on a scholar's garden called *wang shih yuan* 網師園 [the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets] in Suzhou, China. The Ming Room is based on a small study room within the garden called *tien chun yi* 殿春簃 [the Late Spring Studio]. The garden was first built in the twelfth century by a Song scholar-official who called it *yu yin* 漁隱 [The Fisherman's Retreat]. Inspired by the pure and solitary lives of Chinese fishermen depicted in philosophical writings and poems, the garden was built as a place for the literati to study and pass time undisturbed. Adopting the designs of the garden and the associated Late Spring Studio, the Astor Court and the Ming Room opened to the public in 1981, showing audiences once private places where Chinese elite men sought their inner peace.[422] By contrast to this, however, the Ming Room is re-gendered as feminine in *Looking Glass*: it is immersed in a sensual red, giving off a sort of red-light district connotation, that transforms the meaning of the gallery space from a man's studio to a woman's boudoir.

Gallery 218 Ming Furniture is overwhelmed by the multiple significances of the color red (**Figure 4.44**). The gallery's wall caption explains the metaphorical meaning of the color: "In Chinese culture, the color red, which traditionally corresponds to the element of fire, symbolizes good fortune and happiness. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, red also came to represent the communist revolution." Indeed, the strong association between red and China is manifested in the garments displayed here. The mannequins dress in red, see-through tulle gowns that all come from Valentino's 2013 *Shanghai* collection. Red is a signature color of Valentino. It is also considered by Valentino as the symbolic color of China, as the creative director of Valentino Pierpaolo Piccioli mentions: "The red in this manifesto collection is the colour of China in our imagination."[423] The scarlet backdrop of the gallery, therefore, can

[422] The project of building the garden court and the Ming Room in the MET was conceived by the museum trustee Brooke Russell Astor. Astor spent part of her childhood in Beijing, China. In her opinion, a garden courtyard could provide the museum visitors "a place of repose in the midst of conventional galleries." See Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong, "The Astor Garden Court and Ming Room," in *Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Amelia Peck et al (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 297.
[423] See the report: Ng Yi Lian, "Red Letter Day," *Harper's Bazaar Singapore*, March 1, 2014. Online at: https://www.pressreader.com/singapore/harpers-bazaar-singapore/20140301/281547993816781; see also the review in *Vogue Italia*: https://www.vogue.it/en/shows/show/no-season/valentino [Accessed January 20, 2021].

be seen as echoing this idea. However, if we consider the mannequins that are posed sensually in this interior setting in association with one of the film clips played here, *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) by Zhang Yimou, the red becomes a signifier of the women's boudoir, an unsettling place where eroticism and exoticism are bound together (**Figures 4.45-4.46**).[424]

Gallery 4.43 View of *Gallery 218 Ming Room*. Photographed by the author in May 2016

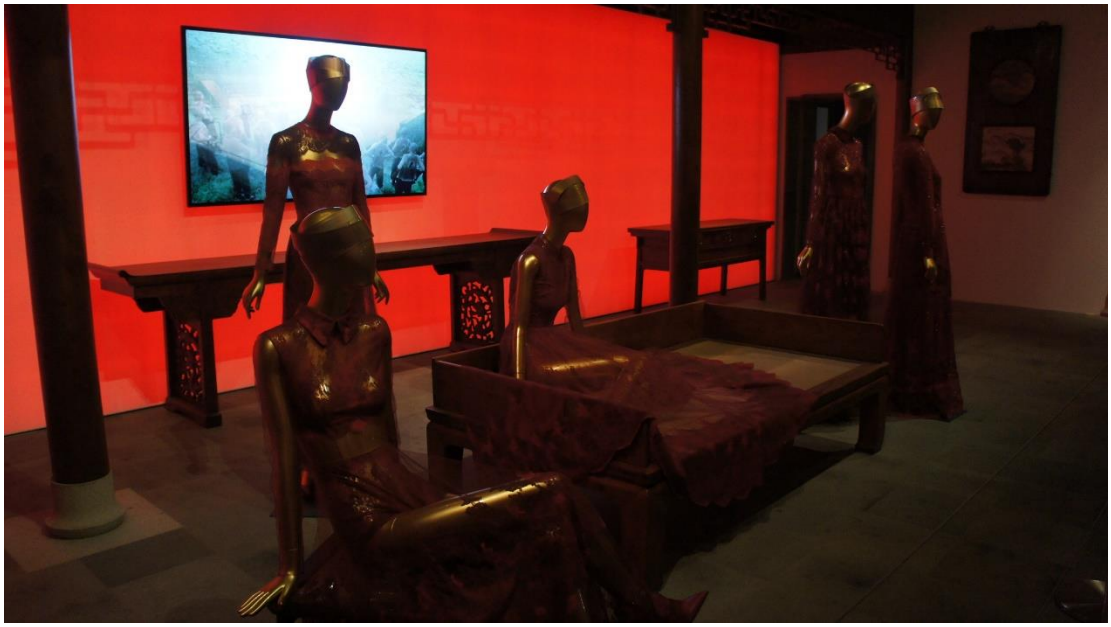

Figure 4.44 View of *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture* in *Looking Glass*. Photographed by the author in June 2015

[424] There are four edited film clips played in *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture*: *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) by Yimou Zhang; *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) by Kaige Chen; *Mei Lanfang's Stage Art* (1955) in China Film Archive; and *Two Stage Sisters* (1964) by Jin Xie. While the first relates to women's boudoirs, the latter three show costumes from Chinese operas, echoing the fashion dresses displayed in *Gallery 217 Moon in the Water*, which are inspired by Chinese performing arts.


Figure 4.45 (left) *Raise the Red Lantern*, 1991 (This scene was projected in *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture*)
Figure 4.46 (right) Gong Li in *Raise the Red Lantern*, 1991 (This scene was projected in *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture*)

Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* is set in 1920s China. It describes how an educated woman is forced to marry into the wealthy Chen family, becoming the third concubine of her older husband, Master Chen, whose face is never shown during the entire movie. Every concubine has a red lantern raised at the doorway of her room. Whoever Master Chen chooses to spend the night with, has her red lantern lit. The red lanterns are hence symbolic: their lighting and extinguishing indicate each mistress's irresistible fate; and the red colour signifies power struggle, sexual dominance, and women's oppression under the patriarchy of the Chinese feudal system personified by a domineering older man.[425] For some critics, the visual appeal of Zhang's film—strong colors and the close-ups of female faces and body figure—leads to the film an exemplification of the self-exoticization, an attempt to please the eyes of the foreigners from the West.[426] Seen from this perspective, the glowing red light becomes the trope of both eroticism and exoticism. Back to *Gallery 218 Ming Furniture* in the exhibition, this colour of desire is overflowing from the screen set in the background and, in this way, the whole gallery space is metonymically linked with the rooms of the concubines; the gallery *is* a woman's red boudoir. The erotic sense is further heightened by the sensual poses of the dressed female bodies in the gallery. Potentially, this makes the Valentino dresses a signifier of lust and seductiveness and induces audiences to imagine that they are intruding accidentally into a private feminine space. This imposition of the erotic significance of the dresses recalls what Roland Barthes identifies as the activity of myth-making, which I have discussed in the previous section.

An erotic femininity is also manifested in the film clips projected in other galleries of *Looking Glass*. For example, *Gallery 981 Hu Die* shows the modern cheongsam (qipao, a typical Chinese dress of Manchu origin), most were made between the 1920s and the 1930s. Here, a label indicates that, "The modern qipao emerged as a sartorial signifier for China in the 1920s." However, if we consider the film clips played at this gallery, it seems that the modern qipao is further used as a signifier of female sensuality. These film clips include: *The Goddess* (1934) by Wu Yonggang; *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) by Richard Quine; *In the Mood for Love* (2000) by Wong Kar Wai; *The Hand from Eros* (2004) by Wong Kar Wai; and *Lust, Caution* (2007) by Ang Lee. The themes of these films are all related to erotic desires and are particular known for their capturing of the sensual properties of the body-hugging qipao and the Chinese femininity as beautiful

[425] See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
[426] See Jane Ying Zha, "Excerpts from 'Lore Segal, Red Lantern, and Exoticism'," *Public Culture* 5, (1993): 329-332; and Dai Qing, "Raised Eyebrows for Raise the Red Lantern," *Public Culture* 5, (1993), 333-337.

and beguiling. Especially, the film *The World of Suzie Wong*, a story of a British artist and a Chinese prostitute who fall in love, has been considered purveying a romantic Orientalist enchantment.[427]

Clearly, the Orientalist imagination of China mirrored in *Looking Glass* is a feminized one. The most direct manifestation of this is found in *Gallery 209 Anna May Wong*. As the first Chinese-American actress in Hollywood to achieve stardom, Anna May Wong (黃柳霜, 1905-1961) struggled between the lotus blossom and dragon lady archetypes. The lotus blossom, also known as the China doll or Madame Butterfly, refers to a passive and submissive female character who is eager to please a white male figure, who abandons her, leading to her suicide.[428] The dragon lady, on the contrary, is associated with seduction, predatory and treacherous; she is dangerous, tempting the white male protagonist away from his "civilizing 'mission' and reducing him to naivety."[429] However, the power of good ultimately triumphs over the power of evil, and the dragon lady's inevitable fate is also death. The wall caption of the gallery indicates how Hollywood cinema made China speak through the figure of either the Dragon Lady or the Lotus Blossom, two most enduring, "opposing stereotypes of the Enigmatic Oriental," the caption reads. The wall caption shows an attempt to deconstruct these two stereotypical modes of representing femininity. Ironically, however, the fantasy of Orientalist femininity is reenacted in the gallery. Here, each showcase contains a fashion garment decorated with blooming flowers or meandering dragons, and photos of Anna May Wong wearing dresses with similar patterns are projected above (**Figures 4.47-4.48**). By having viewers shift their focus from the garments to the images of Wong, a metonymic link is established between the two. Thus, the sartorial patterns are made emblems of otherness; the dragon on the black garment *is* the Dragon Lady, and the blossom on the pink dress *is* the Lotus Blossom.[430]

The curator has claimed that the design of *Gallery 209 Anna May Wong* aims to deconstruct Saidian Orientalism.[431] Indeed, the black acrylic in this gallery is used as a black mirror to produce some inverted images that might be regarded as producing a mirror-image metaphor for tendentious Western visions of China (see **Figure 4.48**).[432] However, since the exhibition does not specifically inform audiences the metaphorical overlay of these installations (also, it is quite hard to convince audiences that what they are looking at is not authentic, only an illusionary reflection of China in the Western imagination), the display device produces more a melodramatic stage effect than a metaphorical symbolism. Consider, for example, these two photos: the setup in *Gallery 980 Manchu Robe* in *Looking Glass*; and the display in the 1991 exhibition *China Chic: East Meets West* in the Fashion Institute of Technology Museum in New York (**Figures**

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[427] See Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril:" Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993).

[428] See Lisa Funnell, *Warrior Women: Gender, Race, and the Transnational Chinese Action Star* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 10.

[429] See Yasmin Jiwani, "The Eurasian Female Hero[ine]: Sydney Fox as Relic Hunter," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 4 (2010), 184.

[430] There are five film clips with Anna May Wong projected in the gallery, showing the stereotypical images of the Dragon Lady and the Lotus Blossom: *The Toll of the Sea* (1922) by Chester M. Franklin; *Piccadilly* (1929) by E. A. Dupont; *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) by Lloyd Corrigan; *Shanghai Express* (1932) by Josef von Sternberg; and *Limehouse Blues* (1934) by Alexander Hall.

[431] See Laia Garcia, "Meet Andrew Bolton, the Man behind the Costume Institute's Genius Exhibitions," *Yahoo Style*, February 17, 2015, https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/meet-andrew-bolton-the-man-behind-the-costume-111231491233.html [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[432] Reflective surfaces such as black acrylics and mirrors are extensively used in *Looking Glass*.

4.49-4.50). Their arrangement appears to be similar; that is, it seems challenging to assert that the mirrors and black acrylics in *Looking Glass* makes the exhibition more self-reflective or contemplative than *China Chic*. Making such "a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient," as Said might put it, visible, the display in *Looking Glass* seems to be strengthening, rather than deconstructing Orientalist stereotypes.[433] This seems especially true if one considers the gallery's lack of self-reflexivity around this dichotomous framing produced by a Western cultural view of the Other. Ultimately, the Orientalist metonymy supersedes the de-Orientalist, looking-glass metaphor.

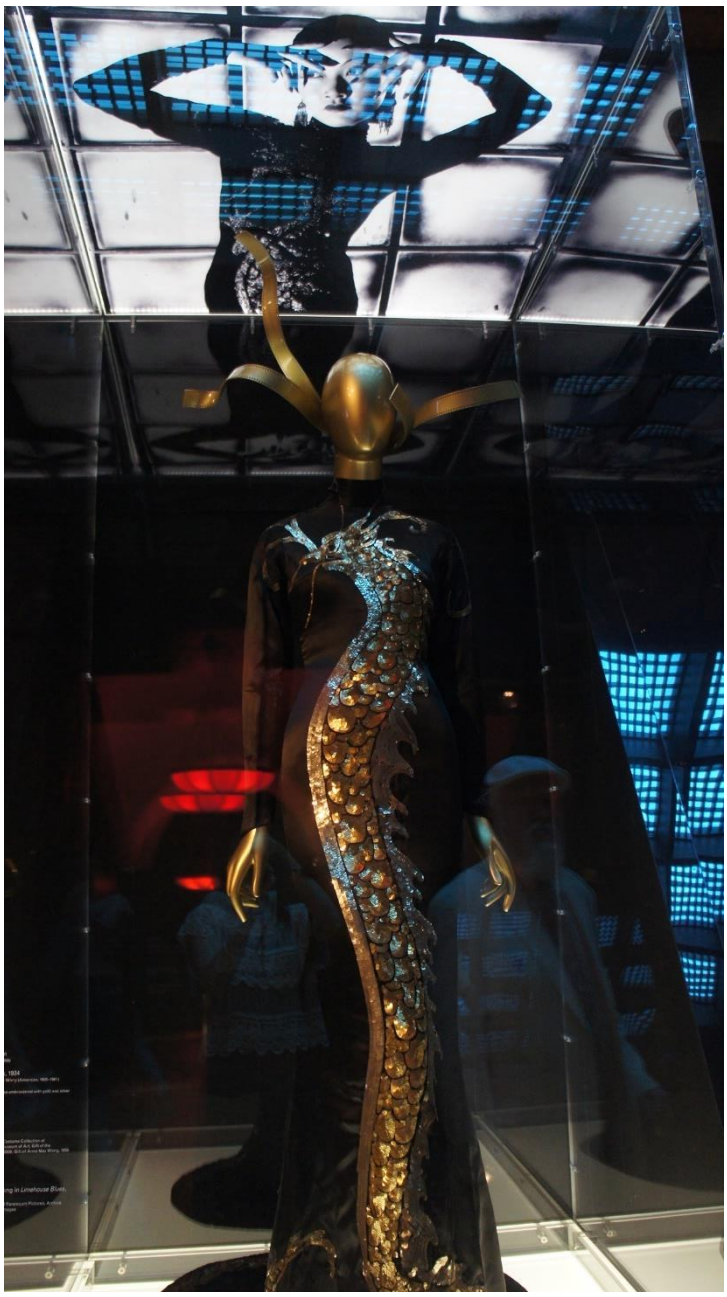

Figure 4.47 Showcase in *Gallery 209 Anna May Wong*. Black silk dress by Travis Banton and photo of Anna May Wong for *Limehouse Blues* (1934), courtesy of Paramount Pictures. Photographed by the author in June 2015

[433] Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

Figure 4.48 Showcase in *Gallery 209 Anna May Wong*. Dress by Paul Smith and photo of Anna May Wong by Paul Tanqueray. © The MET

Figure 4.49 (left) View of *Gallery 980 Manchu Robe* in *Looking Glass*. Photographed by the author in 2015
Figure 4.50 (right) View of *China Chic: East Meets West*. © The Fashion Institute of Technology Museum

Conclusion: The Misleading Looking Glass

In this chapter, I took the curatorial statement "towards an aesthetic of surfaces" as a point of departure and proposed that the aesthetic pleasures the exhibition provides are not simply a culturally decontextualized celebration of superficies. Rather, the visual and tactile pleasures that the exhibition privileges suggest an image of China as enigmatic, ornamental, and feminine. The exhibition invites audiences to see how Chinese motifs are readily appropriated and retextured by both European and Chinese designers (albeit some associations seen in this exhibition are actually invented by the curatorial team, not the fashion designers), and this may seem to be a way for the exhibition to evade Orientalist dichotomies. However, undertones of Orientalism still linger, and not only because the surface aesthetic that the exhibition valorizes risks simplifying and mystifying Chinese imagery. The gender-coding of Chinese porcelain, Chinese space, and the Western imagination of China is recognizable here. The perspective of the exhibition, as Said might criticize, "depends more on the West than on the Orient."[434]

In the postscript to *Orientalism*, written in 1995, Said mentions that "one of the great advances in modern cultural theory is the realization, almost universally acknowledged, that cultures are hybrid and heterogeneous."[435] *Looking Glass* sets out to rethink Orientalism, and yet it shows a china/China gendered feminine and reduced to a series of beautiful but homogenized surface patterns connoting appealing exotic charm. The exhibition, therefore, acts more like a resurgence than a deconstruction of stereotypical othering.

Looking Glass provides an example of how exploring the performativity of museum exhibitions (how exhibitions *act*) helps to assess whether their display strategies sustain their curatorial aspirations. As shown in this chapter, the exhibition's design seems not so to embody the conceptual underpinnings—a deconstruction of Orientalism—of the exhibition. In the next chapter, I focus on an arguably more controversial case study, the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. The history of the Chinese collection in the museum is entangled with the complicated historical relations between China and Taiwan, and this means that in order to explain the performativity of the museum's display, we need to peer through a broader socio-political lens.

[434] Ibid., 22.
[435] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003[1978]), 348.

CHAPTER 5 Repositioning: The Politics of Identity as Constructed by the National Palace Museum in Taiwan

> [E]ach country uses its museums to represent and reconstitute itself anew in each generation.
>
> Flora Kaplan, *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves'*

Introduction: The Changing Positionings of the Museum and the Changing Cultural Identities in Taiwan

This chapter focuses on the china display in a specific museum that, compared with the preceding case studies, shares a more intimate and yet a more confrontational relationship with mainland China: The National Palace Museum (*Guoli Gugong Bowuyuan* 國立故宮博物院, hereinafter referred to as the NPM) in Taipei, Taiwan.[436]

The NPM's collection is principally inherited from the imperial collection of the Qing dynasty. This collection came from consecutive imperial collections: an important part of the Qing imperial collection is comprised of holdings from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties.[437] This collection was transported to Taiwan between the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949, following the split of China into two governing entities: the People's Republic of China (established in 1949 by the Communist Party; hereinafter referred to as the PRC) and the Republic of China (established in 1911 by the Nationalist Party on the Chinese mainland after the Qing fall, and relocated to Taiwan in 1949 after the loss of the Civil War with the Communists; hereinafter referred to as the ROC). Even today, the official name of Taiwan is the Republic of China. That is to say, there are currently two political entities each calling itself 'China': The PRC, and the ROC in Taiwan. However, as this chapter will show, following the

[436] In this chapter, the National Palace Museum, or the NPM, refers to the museum in Taiwan, not the one in Beijing, China. When I refer to the Palace Museum in Beijing, I will call it the Beijing Palace Museum.

[437] Much of the NPM's collection can be found in the imperial catalogues compiled in these dynasties. For a detailed survey of the NPM's collection, see Chang Lin-Sheng 張臨生, "Guoli Gugong bowuyuan shoucang yuanliu shilue" 國立故宮博物院收藏源流史略 [The Formation of the Chinese Imperial Collection under the Aegis of the Ch'ing Emperors], *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 [*The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly*] 13, no. 3 (1996): 1-82. "Ch'ing" is the Wade-Giles romanization, while "Qing" is the Hanyu Pinyin system of romanization. In what follow, I use Hanyu Pinyin, unless the cited references use the Wade-Giles romanization.

growth of Taiwanese self-consciousness from 2000 onwards, Taiwanese people become increasingly identify with Taiwan than the ROC as the name of their country.[438] The NPM in Taiwan celebrated its opening in 1965, although it tends to trace its roots back to 1925, the year after the last Emperor of the Qing dynasty, Puyi (1906-1967), was evicted from the imperial palace (or Forbidden City) and the palace was reopened as a public national museum, today's Palace Museum in Beijing.[439] For decades, the NPM branded itself as a guardian of Chinese culture. This image-building, however, inevitably delineated the museum as a Chinese enclave in Taiwan, a controversial position to occupy as new forms of Taiwanese awareness and subjectivity began to be manifest at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The moving of Beijing Palace Museum's treasures accompanying art-historical professionals to Taiwan between 1948 and 1949 has made the NPM an important cradle for cultivating Chinese art-historical professionals in Taiwan.[440] Before the PRC's opening-up policy took hold in the late 1970s, the NPM's collection was the most fundamental material in the study of Chinese art in the world.[441] Beyond its role as an educational institute for collecting and displaying Chinese art, the NPM is an arena of national and cultural identity. As a subordinate of the Executive Yuan (the highest administrative body of the Taiwanese central government), the NPM's director-general, under political appointment, is equivalent to a cabinet minister.[442] Thus, changes in national policy and social milieu can greatly shift the museum's orientation. This mechanism makes the NPM a special case in that its policy-making is always bound up with the changing Taiwanese identity.

The growth of Taiwanese consciousness has prompted the NPM to reconsider its locality. The establishment of its southern branch (hereinafter referred to as the NPMSB) in Chiayi, at the end of 2015, is an embodiment of such consideration. By broadening the existing exhibition perspective (previously centered on the aesthetic tastes of the Qing emperors as reflected in their collections) to portray an Asian network of cultural exchange which Taiwan also engages in, the NPMSB is attempting to answer calls for localization and diversification. This, however, has plunged the museum into a politicized morass of de-Sinicization, as a weakening Chineseness and an increasing Taiwaneseness currently coexist and conflict in Taiwan. That is, for some Taiwanese, the NPM represents the Chinese Other, while for some others the

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[438] As the ruling party of Taiwan today, the local Taiwanese party, Democratic Progressive Party, has implemented many policies to increase Taiwan's international visibility as 'Taiwan' instead of 'Republic of China'. An example is seen in the new Taiwan passport design announced in 2020: the word Taiwan is made larger and in bold on the new passport, while the words Republic of China are shrunk down in a smaller font.

[439] See the NPM's website 'History of the National Palace Museum': https://www.npm.gov.tw/en/Article.aspx?sNo=03001502 [Accessed January 20, 2021]. See also Hsu Ya-Hwei 許雅惠, "Zhi gugong kaiguan 53 zhounian" 誌故宮開館 53 週年 [The 53rd anniversary of the Opening of the National Palace Museum], *Lishixue ganzaidian* 歷史學柑仔店 [*Kám-á-tiàm*], November 12, 2018, https://kam-a-tiam.typepad.com/blog/2018/11/誌故宮開館 53 週年.html [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[440] In 1971, the NPM cooperated with the National Taiwan University and established the division of Chinese art history of the Graduate Institute of History, National Taiwan University. This was the first research affiliation specializing in Chinese art history in Taiwan. The art history division was later made independent as the Graduate Institute of Art History, National Taiwan University. See Shih Shou-Chien 石守謙, "Taiwan de yishushi yanjiu" 台灣的藝術史研究 [Art History Research in Taiwan], *Hanxue yanjiu tongxun* 漢學研究通訊 [*Newsletter for Research in Chinese Studies*] 31, no. 1 (2012): 7-15.

[441] Ibid., 14.

[442] Even today, the administration of the NPM is still controversial in Taiwan. See Liu Kuan-ting, Yu Hsiang, and Hsu Elizabeth, "Culture minister defends downgrading of National Palace Museum," *Focus Taiwan*, November 30, 2020, https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202011300019 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

museum reflects the glory of *our* Chinese nation. The founding history and political status of the NPM imply that its display strategies need to be understood within the broader context of the repositioning of Taiwanese cultural identity.

This chapter explores the multiple configurations of the Self and the Other suggested in the NPM's and the NPMSB's semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions in terms of transfer and transformation. The transfer referred to is the movement of the Qing imperial collection from mainland China to Taiwan between the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949. The transformation referred to is the NPM's shifting self-positioning based on changing political frameworks from the international situation during the Cold War in the second half of the twentieth century to contemporary relations between China and Taiwan.

This chapter has three parts. The first examines how the Chinese imperial collection made its way into the NPM. This section shows how the NPM is a product of the history of military conflict that has played out in China's twentieth century. Instead of portraying a detailed process of relocation that has been well covered in previous studies, I will focus on the correspondence between objects and power, and the symbolic functions that the 'national treasures' (*guobao* 國寶) in the NPM have performed in ideological formations.[443] This helps to explain the political impetus behind the NPM's Sinicization of the cultural identity of Taiwan from the museum's opening in 1965 to at least 2000. In the second part, I discuss the tension between Chinese and Taiwanese identity that has revolved around the newly-established NPMSB since 2001, when its building proposal was first approved, and still does today. The 2000 change in political parties was a sign of a growing sense of Taiwanese self-identity. Correspondingly, the NPM began to reflect on its past Chinese-centric narrative. This, however, provoked the controversy around de-Sinicization that has haunted the NPM for decades now. The founding of the NPMSB in particular lies at the heart of such accusations, for its goal of being an Asian Arts and Culture Museum has been criticized by some as a cultural uprooting from the Chinese motherland. This section offers a reassessment of this controversy and details the meaning of the Asian orientation of the NPMSB in this context. In the third section, I focus on some recent exhibitions at the NPM and the NPMSB with Chinese porcelain on display to explore more specifically what different interpretations can be produced under an Asian perspective.

This chapter unfolds chronologically. This contributes to elaborating on how the changing reception of the Chinese imperial collection in Taiwan corresponds with the transformation of cultural identities in Taiwanese society. This chapter will end by proposing that a nationalist and monolithic conception of both Chinese and Taiwanese identity is ineffective in addressing the issue of how to reinterpret the NPM's collection in ways that can enrich its meaning and deepen its connection with Taiwan. Rather, it seems to me that broadening the scope of exhibitions to include more diverse perspectives and explore cultural exchange is a fruitful approach to making the most of the museum's collection today. The aim of this chapter is to show how its collection history and the socio-political environment within which the NPM is embedded have a considerable impact on the way we understand the ideologies implied in the museum's display.

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[443] There is extensive material on the founding history of the NPM and the transfer of Chinese treasures to Taiwan during times of war (from the 1930s to the end of the 1940s). See for example, Jeannette Shambaugh Elliott and David Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005).

5-1 Objects and Power: The Political Dimension of the Establishment of the NPM

In imperial China, inheriting the collected objects of the preceding dynasty was a way to legitimize the political authority of the succeeding regime. As the art historian Lothar Ledderose puts it, "[t]he treasures of the imperial storehouses of antiquity were tangible proof that their owner had received the mandate of Heaven."[444] This explains why there is a strong internal continuity amongst the imperial collections during dynastic turnovers; the accumulation of objects symbolized the legitimization of the dynasty, while the dispersion of objects entailed the inevitable fall of the dynasty and the withdrawal of Heaven's mandate.[445] Interestingly, as I will show below, such a parallel between the possession of material objects and the affirmation of political legitimacy was also taken up and further intensified throughout the second half of the twentieth century in a series of military conflicts between the ROC and the Empire of Japan, as well as between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party.

5-1-1 From Mainland China to Taiwan: The Background of the NPM's Collection

The massive sell-off of the Qing collection by Emperor Puyi in the early Republican period resulted in a dilution of the political significance originally attached to the imperial collection.[446] This triggered an immense call to nationalize the palace holdings and thus preserve the spiritual wealth of the nation. In part to prevent further dispersal of imperial treasures, and in part to preclude the geographical and political continuity of the Chinese nation from being disrupted by the emperor's presence at the heart of the capital, Puyi was forced to leave the palace in 1924 and the Beijing Palace Museum in the Forbidden City was opened on October 10, 1925, the fourteenth anniversary of the national day of the ROC (today's official name of Taiwan).[447] The museum's opening speech called upon the Chinese people: "*Ru you pohuai*

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[444] Lothar Ledderose, "Some Observations of the Imperial Art Collection in China," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 43, (1978-1979): 34.

[445] Shih Shou-Chien 石守謙, "Qingshi shoucang de xiandai zhuanhua—jianlun qi yu Zhongguo meishushi yanjiu fazhan zhi guanxi" 清室收藏的現代轉化—兼論其與中國美術史研究發展之關係 [The Transformation of the Ch'ing Imperial Collection in the Early Twentieth Century], *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 [*The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly*] 23, no. 1 (2005): 3.

[446] Nicole T.C. Chiang, "Redefining an imperial collection: problems of modern impositions and interpretations," *Journal of Art Historiography* 10, (2014): 1-22.

[447] In 1924, the Nationalist government promulgated a revised version of the preferential treatment for the Qing imperial family. It delimitated the scope of ownership over palace holdings so that, principally, the Qing imperial family could keep their private property, such as currency and houseware basics, that were regarded as having no historical value. However, things that were considered historically important and/or had been passed down for generations and so expressed a sense of historical continuity were codified as national property belonging to the government. On this basis, a significant part, if not the whole, of the Qing imperial collection was elevated to Chinese national treasures. See Zhongguo diyi lishi danganguan 中國第一歷史檔案館 [The First Historical Archives of China], "Puyi chugonghou tumou huifu youdai tiaojian shiliao" 溥儀出宮後圖謀恢復優待條件史料 [Puyi attempts to restore the preferential treatment after leaving the Forbidden City], *Lishi dang'an* 歷史檔案 [*Historical Archives*] 1, (2000): 66-67.

bowuyuan zhe, ji wei pohuai Minguo zhi jiajie. Wuren yi gong baowei zhi. 如有破壞博物院者，即為破壞民國之佳節，吾人宜共保衛之。[Those who might seek to loot or plunder the museum, will also plunder the joyous festival that marks the founding of the nation. We must all share in its defense]."[448] This statement is highly emotive as it evokes a sense of national pride, implying that the fate of the nation is embodied in the fate of the national museum. Furthermore, as the art historian Nicole Chiang notes, "all objects once kept at the Qing imperial court were now all seen as a single entity [in the sense that] they were all elevated to the equally important position as 'national treasures."[449] That is, the foremost value of these Qing collection pieces, besides their respective meanings, is that of creating a national identity.[450]

As a material medium that embodies a sense of historical continuity, the Chinese idea of a national treasure serves to reinforce the internal cohesion and self-consciousness of the national community.[451] It has been well recognized that "more than material wealth, the Chinese imperial collection had long been considered [as] the source of spiritual authority and political legitimacy."[452] This connotation is not abolished in the nationalization of the Qing imperial collection. On the contrary, possessing a group of Chinese national treasures crystallized through the ages is considered equal to possessing the orthodox political lineage of the Chinese nation. This irony, that the legitimacy of power in Republican China is defined by the property of imperial China, is most substantially shown, perhaps, in the escape journey of the treasures between 1931 (after the Japanese invaded northeastern China) and 1949 (after the transfer of the treasures to Taiwan). In the context of the turbulent Sino-Japanese and Nationalist-Communist conflicts, the Nationalist government moved the national treasures (as a strong political symbol) from the Forbidden City to southern mainland China, and eventually to Taiwan. Its relocation was conducted not just for the sake of protecting cultural relics but also to ideological ends: that is, to prevent the national treasures from falling into the wrongful hands of the threatening Others outside of the national/political community.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Nationalist government moved the treasures south to protect them from Japanese invasion. The selected objects arrived in Shanghai in 1933 and Nanjing in 1936, and

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[448] Na Chih-Liang 那志良, *Fujin yiwang hua guobao: Gugong wushi nian* 撫今憶往話國寶：故宮五十年 [*Reflections on Past Stories of National Treasures in Light of the Present: Fifty Years at the Palace Museum*] 香港 (Hong Kong): 里仁出版(Le Jin Books, 1984), 38. The English translation is cited from Tamara Hamlish, "Preserving the Palace: Museums and the Making of Nationalism(s) in Twentieth-Century China," *Museum Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (1995): 20.

[449] Chiang, "Redefining an Imperial Collection," 20.

[450] Making the imperial collection a national treasure with the symbolic value of shaping the national image and defending the national dignity removes the collection from the world of commerce. In 1928, the Chinese educator Jing Hengyi 經亨頤 proposed to dismantle the Beijing Palace Museum and to auction or displace the museum's collection, which was downgraded in his view as merely "*nichan* 逆產 [the remains of a treasonous past]." His proposal was denied. In 1932, there was another proposal to sell off the museum's collection in exchange for five hundred fighters against the Japanese. See Zheng Xinmiao 鄭欣淼, *Gugong yu Gugongxue* 故宮與故宮學 [The Imperial Palace and the Studies of the Imperial Palace] 台北(Taipei): 遠流出版(Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 2009), 48-49. The proposal was also turned down finally. The repudiation of these two propositions entails a growing consensus that the imperial collection pieces are not antiques that can be sold at will, but rather national treasures with symbolic functions and thus irreplaceable and unexchangeable.

[451] By 'national treasure' in singular, I here mean national treasure as a concept for consolidating Chinese national identity. By 'national treasures' in the plural, I mean the Qing imperial collection pieces that are regarded as the national treasures by the Nationalist government.

[452] Hamlish, "Preserving the Palace," 24.

then were diverted to other inland cities between 1937 and 1939, due to exacerbated Sino-Japanese tensions. This was an arduous and painstaking journey, yet the collection remained generally intact. Thus, there was a belief that the national treasures were indestructible because they "*you ling* 有靈 [has spirits]."[453] The symbolic significance accorded to the treasures reinforces their function in stimulating the integrated cohesion of national consciousness, and their intactness is seen as connoting the continuity of "*guojia zhi fuming* 國家之福命 [the blessed lifeline of the nation]."[454] This shows a transfer from one symbolic context to another: the imperial collection was removed from its original symbolic context (as the symbol of Heaven's mandate to its collector, the emperor) in the political evolution of the imperial system to a nation-state; however, as the treasures in which the national spirit and fate are embodied, the symbolic function of the collection pieces has been redefined in terms of nationalist sentiment. The symbolic role of the national treasures is further shaped in the ritualized spatial configuration and visiting experience of the NPM, as I will describe later. But now let us go back to the founding of the NPM in the political framework of the Cold War, which is crucial to understand the museum's undertaking of integrating Taiwan into a larger Chinese cultural identity.

Between 1939 and 1947, the treasures were primarily stored in three Chinese inland cities and were all under the Nationalists' control: Anshun (Guizhou province), Leshan (Sichuan province), and Emei (Sichuan province). Following the end of World War II in 1945, the treasures had a reunion in Nanjing at the end of 1947 and were supposed to return to Beijing. However, the outbreak of the Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists in 1948 forced the Nationalist military to once again move the treasures, and this time, the treasures left the Chinese mainland.

The transfer of a selection of national treasures from Nanjing's Xiaguan wharf to Taiwan's Keelung harbor at the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949 served as a metaphor for the relocation of political authority. As the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party, and hereinafter referred to as the KMT) led by Chiang Kai-Shek experienced a string of bitter defeats in the Chinese Civil War with Mao Zedong's Communists, Chiang decided to retreat to Taiwan in 1948, and in 1949 he arrived in Taiwan from Zhoushan (Zhejiang province, China). Taiwan, in Chiang's view, was a springboard for the future retaking of the Chinese mainland. As the forerunner of the evacuation, staffs of the Beijing Palace Museum, the Preparatory Office of the National Central Museum in Nanjing (formally the Exhibition Office of Ancient Artifacts), the Academia Sinica, and National Central Library in Nanjing carefully chose four thousand crates of objects (almost twenty percent of the objects that were reunited in Nanjing) and shipped to Taiwan.[455] These included eighty crates of the Beijing Palace Museum's collection that had been displayed in the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* held by the Royal Academy of Arts at Burlington House in London from November 1935 to March 1936.[456] As the exhibition was chiefly organized by the Oriental

[453] Na, *Fujin yiwang hua guobao: Gugong wushi nian*, 172. Such deification of the Chinese national treasures, according to Shih Shou-Chien, helps to consolidate its status as the highest, see Shih, "Qingshi shoucang de xiandai zhuanhua," 12.

[454] Cited in Ma Heng 馬衡, "Kangzhan qijian Gugong wenwu zhi baoguan" 抗戰期間故宮文物之保管 [The Preservation of the Palace Museum's Collection during the Sino-Japanese War], *Zi Jin Cheng* 紫禁城 [*Forbidden City*], no. 3 (2009[1948]): 13.

[455] Elliott and Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures*, 95.

[456] The *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* was the first time that such a large amount of the Qing imperial collection had been shown overseas as a representation of Chinese national art. See Jane C. Ju, "The Palace

Ceramic Society (founded in London in 1921), Chinese porcelain comprised the largest category of objects within these eighty crates: mainly the products of the so-called Five Great Kilns of the Song dynasty (the Ru, Guan, Jun, Ge, and Ding kilns) and the Jingdezhen imperial kiln of the Ming and Qing dynasties (**Figures 5.1-5.2**).[457] Together, these pieces constitute the majority of the porcelain collection in the NPM today.[458]

Figure 5.1 View of *Gallery 4 Song Dynasty* in the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London, 1935. Collected in the Royal Academy of Arts, object number: 06/3265. © The Royal Academy of Arts

Museum as Representation of Culture: Exhibitions and Canons of Chinese Art History," in *Hua zhong you hua: Jindai Zhongguo de shijiao biaoshu yu wenhua goutu* 畫中有話：近代中國的視覺表述與文化構圖 [*When Images Speak: Visual Representation and Cultural Mapping in Modern China*], ed. Huang Ko-Wu 黃克武, 台北(Taipei): 中央研究院近代史研究所(Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2003), 477-507.

[457] Robert L. Hobson, "The Ceramics," *The Burlington Magazine* 68, no. 394 (1936): 3.

[458] Notably, the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London was effective in raising international attention and sympathy for the plight of Chinese resisting Japanese aggression. For the KMT, this was "an almost unimaginable public relations success." See Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 123. See also Jason Steuber, "The Exhibition of Chinese Art at Burlington House, London, 1935-36," *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1241 (2006): 528-536; and Ellen Huang, "There and Back Again: Material Objects at the First International Exhibitions of Chinese Art in Shanghai, London, and Nanjing, 1935-1936," in *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting*, ed. Vimalin Rujivacharakul (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 138-152.

Figure 5.2 View of *Gallery 8 Early Ming Dynasty* in the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London, 1935. Collected in the Royal Academy of Arts, object number: 05/3750. © The Royal Academy of Arts

The cross-strait relocation of the national treasures was obviously not just a matter of cultural protection, but also a matter of political claim. As the art historian Pierre Ryckmans argues:

> [T]he [Chinese] imperial collections never entirely lost their archaic role of legitimising political authority. […] Chiang Kai-shek, who was never particularly noted for his artistic inclinations, diverted considerable resources and energy in a time of acute emergency, in order to have the former imperial collections removed to Taiwan just before he had to evacuate the mainland. By doing this, it was generally considered that he had secured a fairly substantial support for his claim that he still was the legitimate ruler of all China.[459]

The KMT conceived the possession of the national treasures to be a legitimizing tool, not just vis-à-vis the Communists, but also in relation to the much more extensive framework of the Cold War. Although the ROC lost its mainland territory, it did not immediately lose its status as representing 'China' in the international arena. The historical conditions of the Cold War and the Korean War promoted the United States to recognize the KMT-led ROC in Taiwan as the sole legitimate Chinese government. In this context,

[459] Pierre Ryckmans, *The Chinese Attitude towards the Past, The Forty-Seventh George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1986), 6.

the treasures that the KMT transferred to Taiwan worked well with the goal of both the KMT and the American government to define the ROC in Taiwan "as a democratic, humanistic, and modern China in opposition to the Communist, oppressive, mainland China."[460] This was demonstrated most evidently in the touring exhibition *Chinese Art Treasures* in the United States from May 1961 to June 1962.[461] The exhibition eventually made American funds available for the founding of the NPM; The United States Agency for International Development granted $888,000 towards building of NPM.[462] During *Chinese Art Treasures*' tour, there were reports from some mainstream American publications, such as the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, discussing how the collection amazingly survived in the time of war and was eventually relocated to Taiwan. This also drew scholarly attention to the protection of the Chinese collection in Taiwan, thereby facilitating aid for the building of the NPM.[463]

Organized by the government of the ROC, *Chinese Art Treasures* as an act of artful diplomacy had two goals. First, it implied cultural competition with Japan. It sought to make Americans realize that, as Jiang Fucong, who later became the first director of the NPM, has put it: "*Zhongguo caishi zhe zhu wenhuashu de zhenggenzhugan, riben yiji hanguo he zhongnanbandao dou shi zhe zhu dashu de gengkongzhitiao*. 中國才是這株文化樹的正根主幹，日本以及韓國和中南半島都是這株大樹的梗控枝條。[China is the root of the [Eastern] cultural tree, while Japan, Korea, and Indochina are the branches of this cultural tree.]"[464]

Second, and more importantly, it aimed to define and defend the ROC in Taiwan as the real inheritor and guardian of Chinese high culture. This is demonstrated in the selection criteria for the objects on display. As the art historian Tan Danjiong, who participated in the organization of the *Chinese Art Treasures* exhibition, states: "*Minghua dadou shi yuanhua, zhenci dadou shi guanyao he yuyao*. 名畫大都是院畫，珍瓷大都是官窯和御窯。[Most of the selected paintings are the masterpieces of the imperial painting academics, and most of the selected porcelain is the product of the imperial kilns.]"[465] The political agenda of the exhibition is also demonstrated in the preface of the exhibition's catalogue:

> [I]n these troubling times […] a fuller understanding of Chinese art and culture by the American people, on whose shoulders largely rests the future of the free world, assumes a new significance. The exhibition

[460] Jane C. Ju, "Chinese Art, the National Palace Museum, and Cold War Politics," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Brzyski (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 118.
[461] The *Chinese Art Treasures* exhibition was hosted in five museums: The National Gallery of Art in Washington (May 28-August 13, 1961); The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (September 15-November 1, 1961); The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (December 1, 1961-January 14, 1962); The Art Institute of Chicago (February 15-April 1, 1962); and the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco (May 1-June 15, 1962). The exhibition was originally planned in 1937, as a follow-up to the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in London in 1935, but the plan was postponed due to the Sino-Japanese war in 1937.
[462] Elliott and Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures*, 104-105.
[463] Noelle Giuffrida, "The Right Stuff: Chinese Art Treasures' Landing in Early 1960s America," in *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures*, ed. Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 201-228.
[464] Jiang Fucong 蔣復璁, *Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong yu guoli Gugong bowuyuan* 中華文化復興運動與國立故宮博物院 [*The Chinese Cultural Renaissance and the National Palace Museum*] 台北(Taipei): 台灣商務印書館 (The Commerical Press Taiwan, 1977), 57.
[465] Tan Danjiong 譚旦冏, *Le le bu le le ji* 了了不了了集 [*Leave It Unsettle*] 台中(Taichung): 陳益鋒印刷出版社 (Chen Yifeng Printing Press, 1994), 868.

> [Chinese Art Treasures] may also serve as a reminder that the free Chinese are fighting to save their cultural heritage as much as to recover lost territories.[466]

The "free Chinese" here refers to people of the ROC who had retreated to Taiwan and were eager to recover their lost territories on the Chinese mainland from the Communist party. Indeed, as suggested, because the U.S. government recognized the ROC in Taiwan as representing China, the KMT kept the hope alive to retake the Chinese mainland.

The identification of Taiwan as a representative of Chinese culture was also taken up by the American museums hosting the exhibition. For example, the 1961 press release from the National Gallery of Art in Washington remarks:

> To the Chinese everywhere who are mindful of China's traditional influences, these art treasures represent an indelible link with their country's history and culture. […] When a preview of the present exhibit was opened to the public recently in Taipei (February 1961) thousands waited in line for hours to enjoy a brief reunion with their past.[467]

This statement advocates the treasures on display representing the long history of China and sketches how they have retreated all the way to Taiwan. Most of all, it identifies Chinese history as Taiwan's collective past, and thereby endorses the legitimacy of the Chinese Nationalist regime in Taiwan. The political affiliation of *Chinese Art Treasures* was flagged up to most Americans. For them, the exhibition's "ties to anti-Communist politics raised the show's profile, creating appeal on political, cultural, and artistic levels."[468]

Indeed, *Chinese Art Treasures* fulfilled its diplomatic goal of promoting and consolidating the legitimacy of the ROC in Taiwan. This is also attested to by the substantial financial aid from the U.S. government to build the NPM. One may reasonably argue that, at a time of intense Cold War confrontation, it was the ROC and the U.S. governments together that fostered a Chinese cultural identity in Taiwan: a cultural identity that remains today, and of which the NPM can best testify.

5-1-2 A Sinocentric Perspective and the Legitimacy of Power: The Political Burdens of the NPM

The political power that plays behind the founding of the NPM is seen in its architectural vocabulary, which conjures up strong senses of both nostalgia for and rivalry with the lost Chinese mainland (**Figure 5.3**). The building's configuration is a condensed representation of the Forbidden City. Passing through an archway with a plaque reading "*tianxia weigong* 天下為公 [The World is a Commonwealth Shared by

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[466] John Alexander Pope et al, eds., *Chinese Art Treasures* (Geneva: Skira, 1961), 8.
[467] The press release from the National Gallery of Art in Washington on April 1, 1961, "China's National Palace and Central Museums Art Treasures to be Seen in the United States National Gallery in Washington will Inaugurate Exhibition to be Held in Five Cities," 2, 4. Online at: https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/gallery-archives/PressReleases/1969-1960/1961/14A11_43874_19610401.pdf [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[468] Giuffrida, "The Right Stuff," 211.

All]," which is engraved in the handwriting of the ROC's founding farther, Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), one will then be greeted by a pair of Chinese stone lions and ceremonial columns on either side of the main avenue (**Figure 5.4**).[469] The designs of the stone lions and *huabiao* 華表 [ceremonial stone columns] are similar to those outside Tiananmen, the old front entrance of the Forbidden City (**Figures 5.5-5.6**). At the end of the avenue is a square Ding bronze vessel cast by the museum employees (**Figure 5.7**). Likewise, there are Ding vessels made in Qing Qianlong period standing outside *Tai He Dian* 太和殿 [Hall of Supreme Harmony], the largest hall within the Forbidden City. A Ding is usually considered an object of power and a symbol of national authority, as such a ceremonial vessel was typically enshrined and sanctified in the imperial period to prove the political legitimacy of the emperor.[470] Behind the Ding is a two-way stone staircase leading to a platform, where a statue of Chiang Kai-Shek was placed (between the museum's opening in 1965 and 2004) (**Figure 5.8**). These stone staircases, like others at the NPM, have balusters carved with the typical Chinese motif of swirling clouds. The architectural layout of the museum makes it, as the anthropologist Rubie Watson describes, "a shrine to China's high culture and to the Kuomintang Party that became the self-appointed guardians of that culture."[471]

Figure 5.3 View of the NPM, 2007. Wikimedia Commons Photo

[469] Sun Yat-Sen was the principle architect of the Wuchang Uprising (October 10, 1911) that overthrew the Qing Dynasty, although he was not in China but the United States when the revolution broke out. Sun then served as the provisional first president of the ROC and the first leader of the KMT.

[470] On the political metaphors of Ding bronze vessels from Imperial to Republican China, see Lillian Lan-Ying Tseng, "Monumentality and Transnationality: The Fascination with Gigantic Ding Bronze Vessels in Modern China," in *Art History and Fetishism Abroad. Global Shifting in Media and Methods*, eds. Gabriele Genge and Angela Stercken (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), 289-302.

[471] Rubie Watson, "Palaces, Museums, and Squares: Chinese National Spaces," *Museum Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (1995): 11.

Figure 5.4 Front view of the NPM with the plaque 天下為公 [The World is a Commonwealth Shared by All], 2007. Wikimedia Commons Photo

Figure 5.5 (left) Huabiao outside the NPM, 2007. Wikimedia Commons Photo
Figure 5.6 (right) Huabiao outside Tiananmen, 2006. Wikimedia Commons Photo

Figure 5.7 (left) Square Ding vessel in front of the NPM. © The NPM
Figure 5.8 (right) Statue of Chiang Kai-Shek in front of the NPM, 2002. Wikimedia Commons Photo

The museum is also presented as a shrine to political entitlement in the layout of its main building. The main building is crowned with palatial tiled roofs and elaborate *dougong* brackets in Chinese style. According to the architect of the NPM, Huang Baoyu, the building's symmetrical structure is deliberately designed to resemble the Meridian Gate, the largest gate of the Forbidden City, and its interior layout follows the configuration of the five-room *Mingtang* 明堂 [Hall of Light], a place of sacred ritual in imperial China.[472] The *Mingtang* was built to be a replica of the cosmos, with four side-rooms surrounding a central hall, where the emperor held the ceremony of worshipping Heaven to demonstrate his mandate to rule to the public. This further strengthens the sacredness of the NPM at the core of power.

To shape the museum in a classical Chinese style also serves an interest in nostalgia. For Huang Baoyu, the architectural design of the NPM is also meant to "comfort the nostalgia of the exiled Chinese mainlanders."[473] The sense of nostalgia is lingering when Huang relates the spatial experiences at the NPM to the Forbidden City in a somewhat sentimental tone:

> *Dang yangguang zi zuo shang fang ru she [Gugong bowuyuan] shi, ze ke huode 45du zhi yin ying, ren zai ying zhong, ke de ru beeping [Zi Jin Cheng] wumen qian zhi ganjiao.* 當陽光自左上方入射[故宮博物院]時，則可獲得 45 度之陰影，人在影中，可得如北平[紫禁城]午門前之感覺。[As the sunlight came out from the left-top of NPM, it would cause a 45-degree angle shadow. When people stood in the shadow, they would feel like standing in front of the Meridian Gate [of the Forbidden City] in Beijing.][474]

From this perspective, the NPM building embodies what James Clifford describes as a diasporic consciousness: "a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place."[475]

In addition to this nostalgic concern, the architectural representation of the museum also has political implications. Walking from the outermost archway to the museum's main building, situated on a lush hillside, is a continuous upward process over layered symbols of political power. Visiting this national and public museum today seems to recall, inevitably and ironically, a pilgrimage to the autocratic feudal monarchy in the past. Its architectural references and spatial organization embody what the art historian Carol Duncan describes as "the ritual character of the museum experience."[476] The shape of the NPM is so reminiscent of the Forbidden City that it informs us of both nostalgia for a lost political center in the Chinese homeland and the aspiration of re-defining the current political authority in Taiwan as the heir of Chinese cultural and political mandate.

The museum is a sanctuary of Chinese cultural and political orthodoxy. This is confirmed by the museum's semi-permanent exhibition of *The Relationship between Chinese and World Cultures* (1985-2002).

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[472] Huang Baoyu 黃寶瑜, "Zhongshan bowuyuan zhi jianzhu" 中山博物院之建築 [The Architecture of the Yat-Sen Museum], *Gugong jikan* 故宮季刊 [*The National Palace Museum Quarterly*] 1, no. 1 (1966): 72.

[473] Yi-Chih Huang, "National Glory and Traumatism: National/cultural identity construction of National Palace Museum in Taiwan," *National Identities* 14, no. 3 (2012): 214.

[474] Huang, "Zhongshan bowuyuan zhi jianzhu," 72. The English translation cited in Huang, "National Glory and Traumatism," 214.

[475] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 255.

[476] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.

Its placement as the first gallery of the museum, as an introductory setting, was politically motivated. At the time, the ROC had just painfully experienced diplomatic frustration in the 1970s, after the United Nations recognized the PRC as the only legitimate government over China and the government of the United States decided to break diplomatic relations with the ROC at the end of 1978. To reiterate and consolidate the legitimacy of the Nationalist government in Taiwan as a representative of China (no matter how quixotic it may sound), the exhibition straightened out the nation's rootedness in historical China with a chronological table from the Paleolithic through the twentieth century lining the walls of the gallery.[477] A similar chronological table is also seen in the exhibition's catalogue. This chronology suggests a common ancestry rooted in a mythological genealogy by referring to "the Age of the Yellow Emperor" as the one succeeding the Prehistoric era and preceding the period of Yao and Shun. The ages of the legendary rulers the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun were included here certainly not for their historical truth, as there is no proof that these heroic Chinese rulers of pre-dynastic time really existed. Rather, they are included for their symbolic function in constituting the orthodox lineage, whereby the ROC in Taiwan—positioned at the end of the chronology—is identified, or rather objectified, as the principal heir of these sage-kings' legacy.[478] To paraphrase the museum scholar Simon Knell, the exhibition provided "the scenography and stage for the performance of myths of nationhood."[479] The exhibition and its emphasis on a chronological order also reveals how a sense of historical continuity and the making of modern nation-states are inseparable. In his analysis of the politics of Chinese historical narratives in the early twentieth century, the historian Prasenjit Duara points out how the linear model of history itself "produced the nation as the self-same community progressing from ancient times to a modern future."[480] The exhibition embodies exactly Duara's argument.

The sacred origin, the myth of a continuous history, and unbroken bloodline featured in this exhibition further work to define the so-called Huaxia community. *Huaxia* (華夏, literally 'the illustrative Xia') as a category of self-identification is constructed based on a Sinocentric perspective.[481] It refers to

[477] The progression of the development of Chinese art, philosophy, and technology (three loose categories provided by the exhibition) on the top half of the chronological table is mirrored by contemporaneous developments in other places around the world on the bottom half. Accompanying this comparative visual reference in the gallery space were visual reproductions of, and material pieces from, the museum's collection and elsewhere. The exhibition's design was unsatisfactory, as its layout was patch-like and the chronological table can only offer a superficial and restricted, if not biased, overview. This restriction is demonstrated by the way its focus on world culture shifted roughly from Greece, Rome, Egypt, Persia, and India in the pre-dynastic period, to Europe and the Middle East in the middle ages, to the European maritime powers (i.e. Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and France) in the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, whereas Oceania, Africa, and America were left completely silent as if there is no culture in these regions at all.

[478] For more about how the mythological emperors of Yan and Yellow contribute to the building of a cultural and ethnic homogeneity in China, see Wang Ming-Ke 王明珂, "Lun panfu: Jindai yanhuang zisun guozu jiangou de gudai jichu" 論攀附：近代炎黃子孫國族建構的古代基礎 [The Ancient Foundations of Modern Nation-Building in China: The Case of 'the Offspring of Yan and Yellow Emperors'] *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 [*Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica*] 73, no. 3 (2002): 583-624.

[479] Simon J. Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," in *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, eds. Simon J. Knell et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 4.

[480] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5.

[481] The Xia dynasty is the first, and possibility mythical, dynasty in Chinese histography.

China as a civilized cultural-ethnic group in opposition to its cultural-ethnic outsiders. The boundaries of the Huaxia community has been shaped and strengthened since the Han dynasty (202 BC-AD 220) based on a mythological genealogy.[482] In accordance with this mythological genealogy, the Huaxia group is often referred to as 'the offspring of Yan and Yellow Emperors'.[483] In Imperial China, such a mythological genealogy was taken up to vindicate the mandate of the emperor. In this exhibition, it serves to reshape the boundaries of the Huaxia community to include Taiwan as a humanistic representative of China and exclude the Communist mainland China. In his postscript in the exhibition's catalogue, Qin Xiaoyi, the then director of the NPM (in office 1983-2000), refers to the Taiwanese as "the offspring of Yan and Yellow Emperors," encouraging them to see the Chinese national treasures as their own and thereby to take up the responsibility of protecting Chinese culture from being devastated by the oppressive Communist.[484] The visual reproductions of, and material pieces from, the museum's collection displayed in this exhibition were all incorporated in this identity-construction. Furthermore, as the exhibition was the first stop of any visiting tour in the museum for over fifteen years, its ideological claims may also deeply influence how audiences understand the objects displayed in the subsequent galleries: as a material expression that connects the ROC to a Chinese cultural orthodoxy stretching unbroken into the immemorial legend times (ca. 2700 BC).

The mechanisms of identity formation in the NPM were also driven by the purpose of de-Japanizing and re-Sinicizing Taiwan. Taiwan remained Chinese Qing territory until it was ceded to the Japanese empire in 1895.[485] The island was then retroceded to the ROC by Japan in 1945, at the end of World War II. Between 1937 and 1945, the Japanese government in Taiwan implemented the Japanization Movement (or the Kominka Movement). The important measures of the Japanization Movement included:

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[482] According to the anthropologist Ming-Ke Wang one of the reasons why the Huaxia identity took hold in the Han dynasty is that it was the first dynasty to publish systematic writings on history of China, such as *Shiji* (finished around 94 BC) and *Book of Han* (AD 111). These writings refer to Han people with certain surnames as the offspring of the legendary Chinese rulers in pre-dynastic times. From the Han dynasty onwards, the boundary of the Huaxia community has been reshaped and enlarged to include different social classes. See Wang Ming-Ke 王明珂, *Huaxia bianyuan: Lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 華夏邊緣：歷史記憶與族群認同 [*On Chinese borderlands: Historical memory and ethnic identity*] 台北(Taipei): 允晨文化(Yuncheng Wenhua Press, 1997): 290-311.

[483] Like the Yellow Emperor, the Yan Emperor was also a legendary Chinese ruler in pre-dynastic times.

[484] Qin Xiaoyi 秦孝儀, "Huaxia wenhua yu shijie wenhua zhi guanxi tulu ba" 華夏文化與世界文化之關係圖錄跋 [*Postscript of the Catalogue of The Relationship between Chinese and World Cultures*], in *Huaxia wenhua yu shijie wenhua zhi guanxi tulu* 華夏文化與世界文化之關係圖錄 [*The Catalogue of The Relationship between Chinese and World Cultures*], National Palace Museum 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院 (National Palace Museum, 1985), 10.

[485] Chinese mainlanders did not come to Taiwan in substantial numbers until the seventeenth century. At the time, the Ming court was in war with Manchu, who will later establish the Qing dynasty in 1644. Social upheaval forced some Chinese people (especially those who had lived in southeastern China) crossed the strait to Taiwan, an Island of the indigenous that was not under the jurisdiction of the Ming dynasty. Between 1624 and 1662, Taiwan was under Dutch rule. The Dutch subjugated Taiwanese indigenous people, who have lived in Taiwan since prehistoric times, and recruited Chinese laborers to reclaim land for farming, hence more Chinese mainlanders came to Taiwan. Since then, the territories of the Taiwanese indigenous people have been continuously marginalized. The Dutch rule was ended by Koxinga (1624-1662), a Chinese Ming loyalist who established the Kingdom of Tungning (1661-1683) to resist the Qing dynasty. After 1683, the Kingdom of Tungning was incorporated into the Qing Emperor and so was Taiwan. For more about the transformation of Taiwan's role from an indigenous island to a part of the Qing Emperor, see Hsu Wen-Hsiung, "From Aboriginal Island to Chinese Frontier: The Development of Taiwan before 1683," in *China's Island Frontier: Studies in the Historical Geography of Taiwan*, ed. Ronald G. Knapp (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii; The Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii, 1980), 3-28.

teaching the Taiwanese people (here includes both the descendants of the first wave of Chinese immigrants who landed on the island in the seventeenth century and Taiwanese indigenous people who have lived in Taiwan since the Neolithic era) Japanese and Japanese history; rewarding the Japanese-speaking Taiwanese families; replacing Taiwanese's Chinese names with Japanese names, etc. As Taiwanese people spoke Japanese and had inherited the Japanese lifestyle, they appeared, or were stigmatized, as the Other in the view of the Chinese mainlanders who moved to Taiwan between 1945 and 1949 (the second wave of Chinese migration to Taiwan) followed the KMT. The KMT's attitude towards post-war Taiwan was revealed in a statement by Chen Yi, the chief executive of Taiwan after Taiwan was returned to the ROC following Japanese surrender: "The Taiwanese were 'slaves' of the Japanese, and will therefore have to [undergo] complete re-Sinification before exercising full political-cultural rights."[486] In this political atmosphere, the NPM was managed as an important platform to Sinicize the cultural identity of Taiwan. Its collection was not only showcased in the museum but also printed in the school textbooks to show the splendor and achievements of Chinese arts and high culture.[487]

Thus far, I have discussed the transformation of the Qing imperial collection into a Chinese national treasure—as both a group of objects that the KMT selected to move out of Beijing and eventually reached Taiwan and a political symbol that represents the orthodox political linkage of the Chinese nation—and the ideological implications of the NPM's establishment and its early exhibition practices. This serves as the foundation for a further exploration of the Self-Other configuration embedded in the NPM's exhibitions and the political impetus behind the shifting perspectives of the museum's exhibition narratives as times changed. The NPM, as a grand political symbol, shapes the politics of identity in cultural terms. Its collection acts as an indicator of political legitimacy and the transformation of its exhibition narratives mirror the changing of Taiwanese self-awareness. How the NPM's collection not just equates with works of art from the Qing Palace, but also is a vehicle for shaping cultural identity is reflected in the ongoing debate over de-Sinicization and national identity, which I will discuss in the next section.

5-2 The Museum in the Tension between Chinese and Taiwanese Identity

In his book *The Anatomy of Exile*, the journalist Paul Tabori argues: "[T]wentieth-century Chinese history created immense exile communities of which, of course, the Nationalist establishment on Taiwan is the largest […and] one of the few modern examples of a viable exile Government establishing its authority for any length of time outside the original heartland."[488] This is, no doubt, not a coincidence, but a necessary result of certain mechanisms of power.

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[486] Edwin A. Winckler, "Cultural Policy on Postwar Taiwan," in *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, eds. Stevan Harrell and Huang Chün-Chiech (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 30.

[487] For more about the Nationalist government's policies aiming to de-Japanize Taiwan in which the NPM engaged, see Edward Vickers, "Re-Writing Museums in Taiwan," in *Rewriting Culture in Taiwan*, eds. Fang-Long Shih, Stuart Thompson, and Paul-François Tremlett (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 69-101.

[488] Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study* (London: Harrap, 1972), 228.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the Chinese nationalist discourse was cultivated in Taiwan via education, publication, art, and cultural activities.[489] As a ministerial-level cultural institution, the NPM was also an important tool for the Nationalist government to consolidate political authority and instill a Chinese identity in Taiwan. This, however, became contentious following the first party change, which occurred in 2000 when the Democratic Progressive Party (hereinafter referred to as the DPP), a local Taiwanese party, took hold of the presidency.

Compared to the KMT, the DPP was more committed to the construction of Taiwanese subjectivity, which exerts a great impact on the NPM's policy-making. The alterations in government since then have turned the museum into a battlefield of identity. This is most embodied in the controversy surrounding the construction of the NPM's southern branch, the NPMSB. Generally, because of the growth of Taiwanese self-awareness, the NPM is working on transforming to "win the love and recognition of the Taiwanese public."[490] Although the divisions between the various Taiwanese groups are not entirely disappearing, the vast majority of Taiwanese people today have an even stronger sense of Taiwanese self-identity, as I will explain more below. This urges the NPM, as a museum that looks just like a feudal Chinese imperial palace, to find ways to move beyond its traditional image as a guardian of Chinese culture. One of the ways this has been implemented is through reinterpreting its collection, including Chinese porcelain, from new perspectives, distinct from those of Chinese imperial taste.

5-2-1 The Rise of Taiwanese Identity

As the national treasures that embodies the national spirit of modern China, the display of the NPM's collection pieces carries not just aesthetic and art-historical value but also ideological claims that raise the issue of cultural identity. It has been commonly recognized that cultural identity is not a fixed essence, rather that it is dynamic and a matter of *positioning*. As Stuart Hall explains: "[I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[491] This is well exemplified in the NPM's special exhibition in 2003, *Formosa: Taiwan, Holland and East Asia in the Seventeenth Century* (hereinafter referred to as *Formosa*).[492]

Combined with collections borrowed from private collectors and other institutions, *Formosa* was the first Taiwan-focused exhibition at the NPM that did not privilege a Sinocentric perspective. Before this show, in the 1990s, the museum's Department of Rare Books and Documents had hosted several exhibitions that represented the past of Taiwan Sino-centrically by highlighting the strong kinship

[489] For more on the strategies and institutions that the Nationalist government applied to cultivate a Chinese identity in Taiwan in the twentieth century, see Allen Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Postwar Taiwan," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 31, (1994): 49-69.
[490] See 'History of the National Palace Museum': https://www.npm.gov.tw/en/Article.aspx?sNo=03001502 [Accessed January 20, 2021].
[491] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.
[492] The name *Formosa* was given in the early 1540s (possibly 1542) by Portuguese sailors, who sighted an uncharted island (i.e. Taiwan) on their way to Japan and called it *Ilha Formosa* ("beautiful island"). See Hsu, "From Aboriginal Island to Chinese Frontier," 10.

between the Qing court and its frontier province, Taiwan.[493] This emphasis followed the guidance of the then director Qin Xiaoyi, who asked these exhibitions to present the relationship between the central Qing court and the local Taiwanese in a positive light by showing how the former developed, modernized, and safeguarded the latter.[494] By comparison, *Formosa* was an attempt to take on Taiwan as the subjective position from which to represent its connections with the Netherlands and other Asian countries such as Japan and Indonesia. In this way, the exhibition resolves to emphasize the history of Taiwan as a trade center in the region of Asia rather than a peripheral province of mainland China.[495] As the association between Taiwan and the Qing China was greatly de-emphasized in this narrative, the exhibition caused considerable controversy.[496]

Formosa was indeed an effort to assert Taiwanese subjectivity by retelling the island's past. As the then museum director, Tu Cheng-Sheng (in office 2000-2004), argues in the exhibition's catalogue:

> *Taiwan buneng sangshi zhutixing; Taiwan wufa qieduan yu Zhongguo de guanxi, dan buneng lunwei bianchui, Taiwan yao zai geng da de shijie wangluo zhong xunzhao ziji de qiantu he weizhi*. 台灣不能喪失主體性；台灣無法切斷與中國的關係，但不能淪為邊陲，台灣要在更大的世界網絡中尋找自己的前途和位置。[Taiwan must not lose its identity. While Taiwan cannot be separated from mainland China, it cannot let itself become a mere outpost, either. Taiwan must define its own future and position in the larger global context.][497]

Formosa cultivated Taiwanese consciousness by re-presenting the past of Taiwan. The exhibition did not incorporate Taiwan into the Huaxia community through a fictitious ancestry (referring to Taiwanese as the so-called 'offspring of Yan and Yellow Emperors'); rather, it turned Taiwan from the periphery of a Sinocentric order into the center of the seventeenth-century maritime trade network in Asia. Appointed by the DPP to take over from Qin Xiaoyi as the museum director, Tu Cheng-Sheng was dedicated to re-

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[493] These exhibitions include *Qing Archival Materials on Taiwan* (1994-1995), *The Development of Taiwan's Modernization* (1999), and *Into the Wilderness: Taiwan During the 17th to 19th Centuries* (2002-2003).

[494] Fung Ming-Chu 馮明珠, "Qinggong dangan zhan zhi zaidi quanshi: Tan guoli Gugong bowuyuan Qingdai Taiwan shiliao zhan" 清宮檔案展之在地詮釋: 談國立故宮博物院清代臺灣史料展 [Local Interpretations of Qing Archive Exhibition: On the Exhibition of Qing Historical Materials of Taiwan at the National Palace Museum], *Bowuguan yu wenhua* 博物館與文化 [*Journal of Museum and Culture*] 1, (2011): 83-102.

[495] Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝, "Xu" 序 [Introduction], in *Fuermosha: Shiqi shiji de Taiwan, helan yu dongya* 福爾摩沙：十七世紀的台灣、荷蘭與東亞 [*Ilha Formosa: The Emergence of Taiwan on the World Scene in the 17th Century*], ed. Shih Shou-Chien 石守謙 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(The National Palace Museum, 2003), 2.

[496] In addition to the controversy of ignoring Taiwan under the Qing rule, the exhibition was also criticized for beautifying the Dutch colonial period and displaying too many Dutch objects that show more of a Dutch, rather than Taiwanese, perspective. It also provoked indigenous resistance for downplaying the indigenous history of Taiwan. One of the exhibition's curators, Lin Tien-Ren, attributed these defects to a lack of pertinent items in the collection in the NPM and other institutions in Taiwan. See Lin Tien-Ren 林天人, "Qingjing zhijian: fuermosha zhan de huigu yu shengsi" 情境之間: 福爾摩沙展的回顧與省思 [The Retrospection of 'Formosa: Taiwan, Holland and East Asia in the 17th Century'], *Dangan jikan* 檔案季刊 [*Archives Quarterly*] 3, no. 2 (2004): 26-53.

[497] Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝, *Taiwan de dansheng: Shiqi shiji de fuermosha* 台灣的誕生: 十七世紀的福爾摩沙 [*The Emergence of Taiwan: The Seventeenth-Century Formosa*] 台北(Taipei): 時藝多媒體(Media Sphere Communications LTD, 2003), 63. The English translation is cited from Vickers, "Re-Writing Museums in Taiwan," 21.

shaping the NPM's image, from the guardian of a unitary Chinese culture to the gateway connecting diverse Asian cultures.

As a historian, Tu criticized the idea of the Huaxia community that prevailed in the museum's exhibitions for presenting a biased view of history and even a tone of cultural chauvinism.[498] In a face-to-face conversation before their handover, Tu proposed that his vision for the museum is to diversify, while Qin argued in reply that

> *duoyuanhua yexu shi shijie bowuguan de qushi, dan yiyuan de Gugong yi yiyuan de Huaxia wenhua wei tezheng, zhe shi zhide jiaoao zhi chu, bu ying shi wei ruodian huo fuzhai.* 多元化也許是世界博物館的趨勢，但一元的故宮以一元的華夏文化為特徵，這是值得驕傲之處，不應視為弱點或負債。[diversification might be the trend in the museum world today, however, the NPM characterized by its presentation of a monolithic Huaxia culture should be something to be proud of, rather than being considered as a weakness or liability.][499]

These two directors' different attitudes towards the NPM articulate the change of roles assigned to the museum. Under Qin Xiaoyi, the museum was a tool to consolidate the political authority of the Nationalist government and to deny the legitimacy of the mainland Communists. However, the museum under Tu Cheng-Sheng corresponded with the turning point at which Taiwan's self-identity was changing from 'both Chinese and Taiwanese' to just 'Taiwanese' (**Figure 5.9**). This shifting identification left a question mark hanging over the museum and its collection: whose national museum and whose national treasures? This question, for Tu, could only be approached by bringing diverse perspectives to the museum's policies of collection, display, and interpretation.

The most problematic limitation of the NPM, in Tu's opinion, was its inherently Sinocentric orientation that excessively emphasized the uniqueness of Chinese culture. The Sinocentric orientation was not only privileged in the museum's exhibitions that promote a single, unified Huaxia identity (such as *The Relationship between Chinese and World Cultures* discussed previously). As an organizing principle, Sinocentrism was and still is suggested in the museum's *Organization Act*, which defines the NPM as "an institution dedicated to the organization, care, and display of ancient Chinese artifacts and works of art."[500] Obviously, the emphasis on *Chinese* objects confines the museum's possibilities. For Tu, exploring Chinese culture solely by Chinese objects was simply not enough; the museum needed to show its

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[498] Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝, "Gugong yuanjing" 故宮願景 [The Vision for the National Palace Museum], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 209, (2000): 12; Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝. *Xin shixue zhi lu* 新史學之路 [*The Road to New Historiography*] 台北(Taipei): 三民書局(San Min Book Co., LTD, 2004), 74-75.

[499] Cited in Tsuyoshi Nojima 野島剛, *Liangge Gugong de lihe* 兩個故宮的離合 [*The Separation of Two Palace Museums*]. 台北(Taipei): 聯經出版社(Linking Publishing Company, 2012): 56.

[500] For the full text of the National Palace Museum Organization Act, see 'Laws and Regulations Database of the Republic of China': https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=H0190006 [Accessed January 20, 2021]. There was a proposal to repeal the article that restrictively indicates the museum's collecting scope emphasizes "ancient Chinese artifacts and works of art" in 2007, and yet the proposition was rejected due to concerns around de-Sinicization. Although the museum's Organization Act did not change the scope of collecting, the museum issued a collection plan in 2006, which is committed to enlarging its collection to include objects from Taiwan and other Asian countries. See: https://www.npm.gov.tw/zh-TW/Article.aspx?sNo=04003731 [Accessed January, 2021].

audiences what was going on beyond the borders of historical China.[501] As such, he proposed enlarging the collection's scope to include objects from places other than China and broadening the interpretive perspective on the existing Chinese collection to emphasize cultural exchanges across borders.[502] The construction plan of the NPM's southern branch that Tu proposed in 2001 embodied his attempt to move the museum beyond its past nationalist devotion by de-centralizing its perspective to take in rich and diverse Asian cultures. Unlike the NPM, which embodied in its architecture the solemnity of an old-fashioned imperial palace, the NPMSB building is shaped in fluid curves inspired by the three Chinese calligraphy strokes: the thick ink, the half-dry, and the smearing (**Figure 5.10**).[503] This highlighting of fluidity in its architecture seems to echo the NPMSB's vision of reinterpreting the Chinese collection with a sense of mobility.

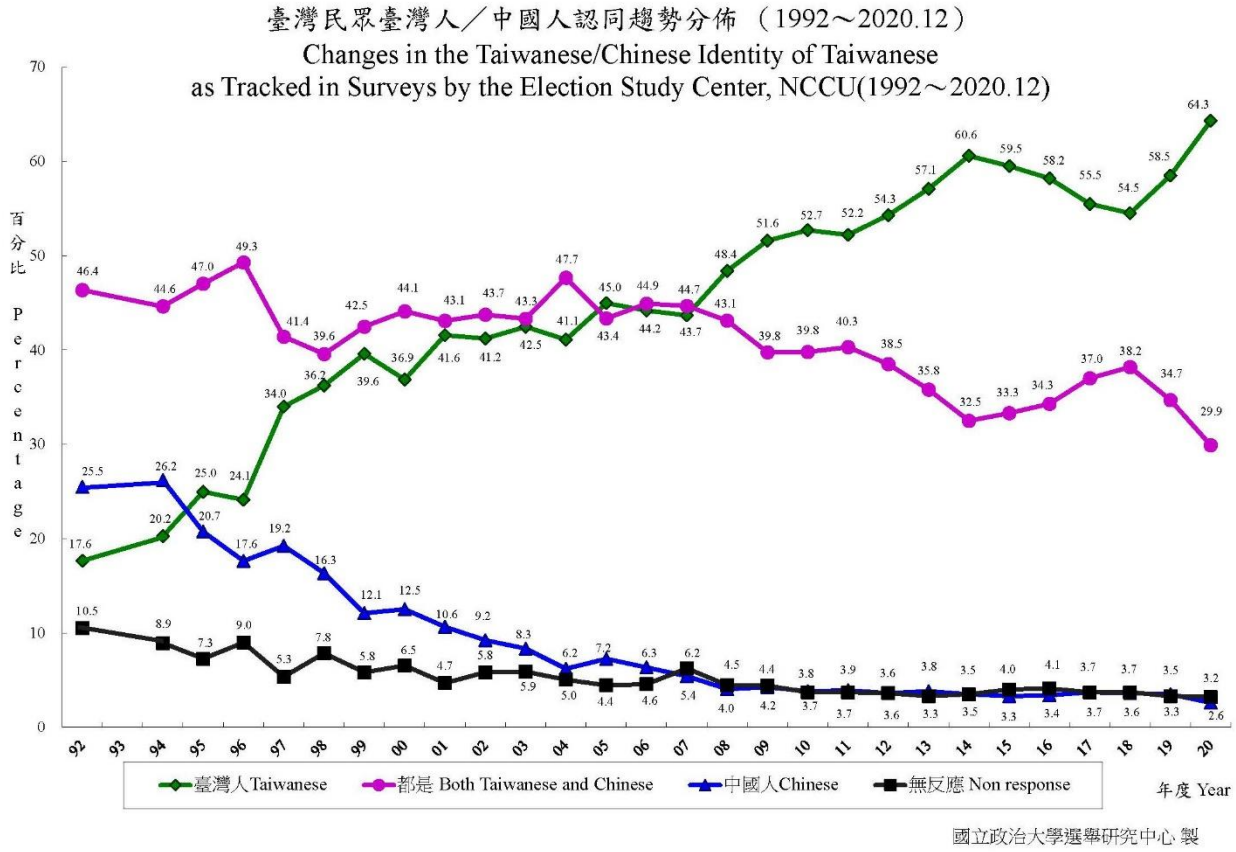

Figure 5.9 Diagram of changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese (1992- 2020) by the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University. This diagram shows that, after the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis (a series of missile tests conducted by the PRC in the waters surrounding Taiwan) and the 1997 Curriculum Reform in Taiwan (adding the 'Knowing Taiwan' textbook in junior high school), a growing number of people in Taiwan identify themselves simply Taiwanese but not Chinese. Such a separate Taiwanese identity continues to grow and reach a new peak in 2020, after the 2019 Hong Kong Protests

[501] Tu, "Gugong yuanjing," 12.
[502] Ibid., 12-14.
[503] The architecture of the NPMSB is designed by the Taiwanese architect Kris Yao. For more about the design concept, see the website of the KRIS YAO | ARTECH: https://www.krisyaoartech.com/en/projects/cultural/Palace-Museum-Southern-Branch [Accessed January 20, 2021].

Figure 5.10 View of the NPMSB. © The KRIS YAO | ARTECH

5-2-2 The Asian Orientation of the NPMSB

The calling into question of the monolithic nationalist boundaries and the Sinocentric perspective upheld in the NPM's exhibition narrative echoes the global approach to art history. As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, the global perspective in art history aims to break out of compartmental thinking of cultures rooted in nationalism and the Eurocentric binary of Us and Others. For the NPM, however, broadening its perspective in displaying and interpreting the collection is not to dismantle Eurocentrism but Sinocentrism. Especially, as the following section will show, the emphasis on the ongoing horizontal patterns of exchange between cultures in the NPMSB's exhibition practices makes a real promise of going beyond a pre-determined central-peripheral paradigm drenched in the discourses of Sinocentrism. However, it should be stressed here that Tu Cheng-Sheng's proposition of making the museum more diverse was not entirely based on what he calls an endeavor of "*qu zhengzhihua, huigui yishu de benzhi* 去政治化，回歸藝術的本質 [de-politicizing the museum to return to the essence of art.]"[504] Instead, his strong ideology is reflected in a statement he made right before the end of his tenure in the museum:

> *Duo nian lai Taiwan de guojia rentong cong 'Zhongguo' zhuan wei 'Taiwan, zhe ge yi Zhongguo wenwu wei zhuti de bowuguan de weilai gai zen me zou? Wo sui ti chu shijie zhuyi qudai minzu guojia zhuyi.* 多年來臺灣的國家認同從「中國」轉為「臺灣」，這個以中國文物為主體的博物館的未來該怎麼走？我遂提出世界主義取代民族國家主義。[Taiwan's national identity has been undergoing a gradual shift away from Chinese towards Taiwanese in recent years. So, what is the prospect for this museum [the NPM] with Chinese

[504] Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝, "Yishu, zhengzhi yu bowuguan" 藝術, 政治與博物館 [Art, Politics and Museums], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 228, (2002): 22. Tu's political ideology is clearly demonstrated; when he took the office over, the first thing he did was to dismantle the statues and portraits of Sun Yat-Sen and Chiang Kai-Shek and remove them from their original places in the museum. Yet, in 2010, two years after the KMT came back to power, the statue of Sun Yat-Sen was restored to its original position on the second floor of the museum. The relocation and restoration of this monumental installation in the NPM manifest how the museum has always been caught in the vortex of the competing political ideas in Taiwan.

> objects as the main body? In answer to this question, I propose to replace nationalism with cosmopolitanism.][505]

Tu's vision for the NPM, therefore, is not simply a matter of scholarly concern, moving the museum away from its anachronistic nationalist framework; it is also a political matter in that it corresponds with the changing national and cultural identity in Taiwan and, of course, with his personal stand for the rise of Taiwanese consciousness. The transformation of the NPM is certainly not based on a single director's thinking, but also in the changing socio-political climate in Taiwan and the rise of Taiwanese self-consciousness.[506] Furthermore, it must be noted that the specific scope of what Tu calls *cosmopolitanism* is in fact limited to *Asia* when fulfilled in the construction of the NPMSB, which sets out to be "the Gateway to Asia."[507] This is in part for the pragmatic reason that, today, it is almost impossible to create another museum with a collection as encompassing in scope as the British Museum. In part, the Asian orientation of the NPMSB also serves political interests, as I will explain below.

The word Asia has three referents in the NPMSB: a geographical region, an interpretive perspective, and a politicized rhetoric. Marked on a Eurocentric map projected in the NPMSB's introductory exhibition, *Understanding Asian Art*, Asia represents a geographical area from the Ural Mountains, Bosporus, and the Arabian Peninsula eastwards to the archipelagos of the western rim of the Pacific Ocean, including Japan, Taiwan, and islands of Southeast Asia. This geographical terrain matches the etymology of Asia which is speculated to be from the Akkadian *asu*, meaning "to go out, to rise," in reference to the sun.[508] Thus, Asia means "the land of the sunrise" as seen from Europe.[509] It seems that the NPMSB here does not seriously reflect on how the concept of Asia as a geographical region is historically constructed from a Eurocentric point of view.[510] To express the cultural heterogeneity within this geographical framework, the semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions unveiled together with the NPMSB's opening ceremony in 2015 focus on subjects that cut across territorial boundaries. These include

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[505] Tu Cheng-Sheng 杜正勝, *Yishu diantang neiwai* 藝術殿堂內外 [*Inside and Outside of the Palace of Art*] 台北 (Taipei): 三民書局 (San Min Book Co., LTD, 2004): 111.

[506] Tu Cheng-Sheng established the vision of the NPMSB to become a museum for Asian art, while Shih Shou-Chien, who succeeded Tu as the NPM's director (2004-2006), drew up specific plans for the museum's exhibitions and research on Asian art. See Shih Ching-Fei 施靜菲, "Shemeyang de Gugong nanyuan, keyi dingwei Taiwan zai Yazhou, guoji yishu wenhuazhong de jiaose" 什麼樣的故宮南院，可以定位台灣在亞洲、國際藝術文化中的角色？ [How to Position the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum in Asian Art and Culture?], *Duanchuanmei* 端傳媒 [*Initium Media*], September 13, 2018, https://theinitium.com/article/20180911-opinion-tainan-palace-museum/ [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[507] See the museum's website on the project of constructing the NPMSB: https://theme.npm.edu.tw/eng/projects.html [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[508] See *Online Etymology Dictionary*: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=Asia [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[509] Tsai Mei-Fen 蔡玫芬, "Yu Gugong yiqi tansuo Yazhou" 與故宮一起探索亞洲 [Exploring Asia with the National Palace Museum], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 301, (2008): 17. Although the museum acknowledges in its publications that Asia as a geographical concept is shaped from a European view, this point is not specifically indicated in the NPMSB's exhibitions.

[510] Although the NPM (and the NPMSB) does not invite a general reflection on the concept of Asia and its link with a Eurocentric worldview, its recent publications (e.g. exhibition catalogues and introduction articles) indicate a preference for the word *West Asia* over the *Middle East*. The former conveys more of a neutral geographical sense compared to the latter, which reflects more of a European standard. In this sense, it seems the museum has started to step away from a Eurocentric perspective.

textiles, Buddhist art, tea culture, jade, and blue and white porcelain: subjects that are considered as relevant mediums to show the fluidity of cultural exchanges in the Asian geographical region. Thus, the Asian geographical region in the museum refers specifically to the areas that are linked by trading networks, to which the museum's collection can be connected.

The shift from a Sinocentric to a pan-Asian interpretive perspective is especially evident in the museum's changing attitude towards previously ignored pieces in its original collection. As the art historian Shih Shou-Chien, who took over Tu Cheng-Sheng as the NPM's director (in office 2004-2008), argues:

> *Gugong de shoucang bufa qita guojia lidai de chaogongpin, liwu. […] Zhexie wenwu benlai jiuzai, zhishi dang women yong 'Han wenhua zhongxin' de yanjing qukan, jiuhui shierbujian.* 故宮的收藏不乏其他國家歷代的朝貢品、禮物。[…] 這些文物本來就在，只是當我們用「漢文化中心」 的眼睛去看，就會視而不見。[The museum's holding includes tributes and gifts from other countries collected in the past dynasties. […] They are already there, and yet in the view of Sinocentrism they become unseen.]"[511]

Funding restrictions and the time it would take to accumulate a collection of Asian objects forced the NPMSB to adjust its display strategy to focus more on exploring new meanings and values in the NPM's established collection.[512] For example, a nice collection of Islamic jades that found their way into the Qing imperial holdings as gifts can be interpreted from the perspective of their production in the Mughal Empire, instead of being neglected or approached merely from the perspective of the Qing emperors' appreciation.[513] An Asia-wide perspective also helps to approach the significance of cultural exchanges implied in the museum's Chinese collections in terms of regional interactions. In a later section I will elaborate how Asia as an interpretive perspective is practiced in the recent curatorial practices (both semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions) in the NPM and the NPMSB. For now, I return to the third referent of Asia: a politicized rhetoric; that is, a geopolitical term.

The Asian orientation of the NPMSB is politicized in two senses: its correspondence with Taiwan's diplomatic policy, and its confrontation with the quagmire of de-Sinicization. As mentioned, the NPM's establishment was the rewarding result of successful cultural diplomacy, and its overseas exhibitions since then may still be diplomatically motivated. The NPMSB, too, takes on the responsibility of cultural diplomacy following the diplomatic tactics of Taiwan under the DPP government, which calls for the development and reinforcement of multilateral, regional partnerships to loosen the past overemphasis on

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[511] See the report: Tsai Wen-Ting 蔡文婷, "Gugong xin shiye: Gugong bowuyuan yuanzhang Shih Shou-Chien zhuanfang" 故宮新視野: 故宮博物院院長石守謙專訪 [New Vision for the National Palace Museum: Interview with the Museum's Director Shih Shou-Chien], *Taiwan guanghua zazhi* 台灣光華雜誌 [*Taiwan Panorama*], October, 2005, https://www.taiwanpanorama.com.tw/Articles/Details?Guid=0bf95abe-e057-4f4b-83df-b229bd83a9e3 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[512] This does not mean that the NPMSB stops collecting objects from other Asian countries, but rather a change in the proportion of those acquisitions. Between October 2019 and May 2020, the NPMSB hosted the special exhibition, *Cherished Objects*, to show its new acquisitions of Asian Buddhist art, textiles, ceramics, jewelry, etc.

[513] See Teng Shu-Ping 鄧淑蘋, "Tansuo lishi shang de zhongya yuzuo" 探索歷史上的中亞玉作 [An Investigation of Central Asian Jades in History], *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 [*The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly*] 33, no. 3 (2016): 1-78.

the bilateral relation with China.[514] In addition to continually deepening collaborations with Japan and South Korea, the NPMSB's vision is particularly consistent with Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, which resolves to expand and enhance relations with Taiwan's South and Southeast Asian neighbors through trade, economy, education, culture.[515] In its 2018 annual report, the NPM also announced its subproject "New Southbound Policy Marketing and Media Promotion," which aims to encourage exchanges with the target countries (e.g. Thailand, Indonesia, etc.) of the government's New Southbound Policy.[516] This inevitably politicizes its Asian framework into close association with the Taiwanese national identity shift.

Back to the founding of the NPMSB. Although Tu Cheng-Sheng claims that his vision for a new museum branch dedicated to Asian arts and culture serves no political interests, maintaining the political neutrality of a museum which is itself a grand political symbol is almost impossible. Specifically, in the NPM's 2002 annual report, Tu himself declares bluntly that the Asian focus envisioned for the NPMSB is "*duiying yu waijiao shang de nanjin zhengce, bixu tongshi cong wenhua jiaoyu shang shi guoren dui Yazhou qita guojia de wenhua you geng shenke de renshi.* 對應於外交上的南進政策，必須同時從文化教育上使國人對亞洲其他國家的文化有更深刻的認識。[corresponding with the diplomatic Southbound Policy, to improve Taiwanese understanding to the cultures of other Asian countries via cultural education.]"[517] Indeed, the Asian framework underpinning the museum provides a diversified and fruitful approach to explore the meanings and values of its collection. Yet, the political roots of the museum inevitably engulf its Asian vision in the debate of de-Sinicization.

The NPMSB building is full of gouges made by political struggles, as seen in the constant reorientations of its mission and approach following the change of political climate. The most radical turn against the original Asian vision was in 2008, after the KMT was back to power and appointed Chou Kung-Shin as the new director of the NPM. Chou proposed changing the NPMSB into a theme park and floral museum. For Chou, there was no necessity to set up a new branch for the NPM to present Asian cultural exchanges; the museum, in her opinion, should keep its original foothold: that is, dedicated solely to representing Chinese culture as a unitary entity. In a 2008 interview with the Japanese journalist Tsuyoshi Nojima, Chou makes a stand:

> *Bowuguan de jingying buneng tai bo, Zhonghua wenhua cai shi Gugong de tese. Du xiansheng de xiangfa bushi duoyuanhua, ershi qu Zhongguohua. […] Yinwei Gugong yuanlai jiushi yi gong zhong shoucang wei zhu, bu keneng zai*

[514] The selected site of the NPMSB, Chiayi, a city in southwestern Taiwan, is also politicized. Chiayi was chosen not only based on the local appeal to balance cultural resources between Northern and Southern Taiwan; the decision was also very much related to Taiwan's political territory, as Chiayi has often been an important stronghold of the DPP.

[515] For example, in 2018, the NPMSB cooperated with the National Cheng Kung University to organize the international conference of *Southeast Asian Cultures and Religions*. Moreover, every year since 2017, the NPMSB has been staging a monthlong festival of Asian art and culture with a specific Asian country chosen as the subject: month of India in 2017; month of Singapore in 2018; month of Thailand in 2019. The festivals were co-organized with the representative offices of these countries in Taiwan. Accompanying these festivals were series of events such as lectures, films, and performances. The NPMSB also takes up the goal of being more inclusive to new immigrants by providing audio guides in Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, and Indonesian.

[516] National Palace Museum 國立故宮博物院, *2018 Nianbao* 2018 年報 [*Annual Report 2018*] 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(National Palace Museum, 2019), 166-167.

[517] National Palace Museum 國立故宮博物院, *2002 Nianbao 2002* 年報 [*Annual Report 2002*] 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(National Palace Museum, 2003), 74.

> *qu jiehe qita Yazhou de wenwu*. 博物館的經營不能太博， 中華文化才是故宮的特色。杜先生的想法不是多元化，而是去中國化。[…] 因為故宮原來就是以宮中收藏為主，不可能再去結合其他亞洲的文物。[The museum's management cannot be too broad, [as] what characterizes the National Palace Museum is Chinese culture. The idea of Mr. Tu [Tu Cheng-Sheng] was not diversification but de-Sinicization. […] Since the collection of the National Palace Museum is based on the [Qing] imperial holdings, it is impossible for the museum to make connection with other Asian artifacts.][518]

Chou's dogmatic insistence that Sinocentrism is the only tenable framework for the museum—which is itself a Sinocentric attitude—partly comes from her experience in the NPM; she joined the museum under Qin Xiaoyi in the 1970s and had served for nearly thirty years at this point. As such, she tends to uphold the traditional role of the museum as a guardian of Chinese culture. Although her shocking proposals of the theme park and the floral museum were quickly disavowed when they triggered fierce protest, and the NPM's southern branch returned to its original positioning, debates over de-Sinicization continue to this day.[519]

Obviously, to say that displaying Chinese objects from a broader Asian perspective is equivalent to de-Sinicization or a manifestation of cultural Taiwanese independence is in itself part of a certain political discourse. Such a political discourse, however, becomes untenable if we consider that China, as a cultural and geographical entity, is by no means excluded from a long history of cultural interaction in Eurasia. Instead of entangling the Asian perspective in ongoing political controversies, it is perhaps more productive to think of the potential for such a perspective to reform museum presentations.[520] The NPMSB, precisely because it is a branch of the NPM, carries a heavy political burden regarding identity. Its Asian orientation reflected in its collection, display, and interpretation strategies has a clear ideological impetus to reconfigure the function of the NPM's Chinese collection in Taiwan in ways that move beyond the ideology of Chinese cultural orthodoxy and towards a broader set of regional relationships. In a sense, the construction of the NPMSB deconstructs, or at least falters, the past function of the NPM as an important political tool for imposing a Chinese identity on Taiwan.

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[518] Cited in Nojima, *Liangge Gugong de lihe*, 220.

[519] For example, in 2018, the then newly appointed director of the NPM, Chi-Nan Chen, referred to the NPM as "a Chinese enclave and not a part of Taiwan," and thereby he threw the slogan of "Taiwanization of the NPM." See the news reports: Ann Maxon, "Palace Museum Should be More Local: New Boss," *Taipei Times*, July 17, 2018, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2018/07/17/2003696822 [Accessed January 20, 2021]. The notion of Taiwanization was soon labelled as de-Sinicization, and was too assertive and misleading to leave space for further interpretation. In 2019, Wu Mi-Cha succeeded Chen as the museum's new director and was also confronted with the issue of de-Sinicization. Wu carefully stated that it is impossible for the museum to be de-Sinicized as most of its collection came from China. See Shirley Lin, "Palace Museum: No Way to Erase Collection's Link to China," *Radio Taiwan International*, October 31, 2019, https://en.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/2002122 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[520] Bringing a regional/interregional, rather than national, perspective to express identities based on cultural crossover rather than a culturally isolated context has seen developments in the Asian museum world. An example is seen in the Kyushu National Museum in Japan which opened in 2005 with the semi-permanent exhibition *The Cultural Exchange Exhibition: Ocean Ways, Asian Paths*. As illustrated in its title, the objective of the exhibition is to capture a sense of connection and transmission in the formation of Japanese culture by drawing on the historical networks of trade and exchange that link Japan to other Asian countries, particularly, but not exclusively, China and Korea.

As mentioned above, the collection in the NPM is considered not merely as Chinese works of art from the Qing imperial collection; it is also identified as a group of national treasures that reflects a national spirit and recalls a connection with the lost mainland. The history of the NPM's collection is inseparable from the modern Chinese history of war, division, and diaspora, thus giving the collection an indelible political overtone and even a nostalgic quality. As such, bringing an Asian perspective into the museum's display, for some, becomes a change of fundamental attributes, a rejection of the museum's Chinese roots. Indeed, given that the historical background of the NPM's building and its role as a subordinate of the highest administrative body of the Taiwanese central government, it is almost impossible for the museum to be de-politicized. It is also imaginable that, considering the fragility of the China-Taiwan relationship today, the debates around the ownership of the NPM's Chinese imperial collection will be ongoing. However, the historical and political burden of the museum cannot and should not hinder its progress and prospects.[521] More importantly, the development of an Asian orientation in the museum is driven by more than a change in identity politics in Taiwanese society; it is also intellectually driven, providing a richer perspective for interpretation through an expansion of spatial scale.[522]

Looking for more diverse perspectives to explore the multiple meanings of collections and to express the fluidity of cultural boundaries and identities is a major tendency in the museum world today. Following this tendency, applying a broader regional perspective to de-centralize the bounded and even biased Sinocentric point of view, is a fruitful approach to make the most of the NPM's collection. In the following, I will focus on the porcelain display in the NPM and the NPMSB to show how the application of an Asian perspective allows such a polysemous object as Chinese porcelain to tell its many stories and enables the issue of cultural exchange to be explored from a pluralistic view.

5-3 Potential Asian Perspectives

The NPM has over 25,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain and ceramics, the great majority of them from the Qing imperial collection in the Forbidden City, the Mukden Palace, and the Chengde Mountain Resort.[523] The NPM is especially proud of its collection of the largest group of the rare Ru-ware porcelain with light

[521] In May 2020, the *Journal of Cultural Studies* in Taiwan published by the National Chiao Tung University Press, *Router: A Journal of Cultural Studies* (volume 30), released a specially themed issue on the transformation of the NPM and the Asian orientation of the NPMSB. The articles in this special issue agree that the museum must move beyond the existing political constraints and explore new strategies of display and interpretation that could deepen understandings of its collection. See especially: Wang Shu-Li 王舒俐, (2020) "Mishi zai rentongjiaolu zhong de 'Taipei' 'guoli' gugong bowuyuan" 迷失在認同焦慮中的「台北」「國立」故宮博物院 [Lost in the Politics of Identity: "Taipei," "National" Palace Museum], *Wenhua yanjiu* 文化研究 [*Journal of Cultural Studies*] 30, (2020): 69-82; Hsu Ya-Hwei 許雅惠, "Huigu yu qianzhan: tan gugong de dingwei" 回顧與前瞻：談故宮的定位 [Review and Prospect of the Positions of the National Palace Museum], *Wenhua yanjiu* 文化研究 [*Journal of Cultural Studies*] 30, (2020): 83-91; and Shih Ching-Fei 施靜菲, "Tuodiao zhengzhi de jinguzhou, zhuanxiang zhuanye" 脫掉政治的緊箍咒，轉向專業 [Breaking Free of Political Shackles and Moving Toward Professionalism], *Wenhua yanjiu* 文化研究 [*Journal of Cultural Studies*] 30, (2020): 92-105.

[522] See Shih Ching-Fei 施靜菲, "Shemeyang de Gugong nanyuan, keyi dingwei Taiwan zai Yazhou, guoji yishu wenhuazhong de jiaose."

[523] The Mukden Palace was the palace of the early Qing emperors before they moved their capital to Beijing. Chengde Mountain Resort was the summer palace for the Qing dynasty emperor.

bluish-green glaze from the Northern Song Dynasty (21 pieces out of a less than 100 pieces currently surviving); exquisite Ming porcelain in blue and white and *Doucai* (斗彩, a very fine and rare kind of porcelain painted in underglaze blue and overglaze enamels of which the NPM has more than ninety percent of the existing pieces); and a considerable collection of Qing porcelain with painted enamels from the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong periods (1662-1795). These official-kiln pieces possess clear registration numbers which helps to trace the original location at which each piece was once stored or displayed in the Qing palaces.[524] Moreover, a portion thereof was evaluated, titled, inscribed, and archived by the Qing emperor Qianlong, which, according to the museum, "is an indication of the high quality of this imperial collection."[525]

The formation of the porcelain collection in the NPM explains the two preferred narrative frameworks structuring many of its past porcelain exhibitions. First, the artistic and technical development of the imperial-kiln porcelains in various periods of the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties; and second, the Qing imperial taste for porcelain. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the practice of adopting a broader perspective to display and interpret Chinese porcelain in terms of cultural exchange has been developed in the exhibitions at both the NPM and the NPMSB. Specifically, this transformation in perspective is seen in the emphasis on the transmission of visual designs across cultural-geographical boundaries, and on the construction of a more diverse approach to presenting the trade of Chinese porcelain.[526]

5-3-1 Moving Visual Vocabularies

In 2008, the NPM launched a special exhibition to debut the Asian vision that would anchor the NPMSB once its construction was complete: *Exploring Asia: Episode One of the NPM Southern Branch*. The exhibition was divided into areas with six "vibrant themes," as the museum described it, to map out the patterns of cultural transmission and interaction stretching across the Chinese, Indian (and Southeast Asia), and Islamic cultural spheres.[527] These included the themes of Asian scriptures, Buddhist sculptures, fabrics and textiles, blue and white porcelain, tea cultures, and Western trends in Asian culture. Each topic has objects from different places grouped together to show the patterns of exchange through the ages via trade, diplomacy, and pilgrimage. For example, under the topic of "A Moving Aesthetic: Asian Blue and

[524] Yu Pei-Chin 余佩瑾, ed., *Tuanni huanhua—yuancang taoci jinghuazhan* 摶泥幻化—院藏陶瓷精華展 [*The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum*]. 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(The National Palace Museum, 2014), 13.

[525] Fung Ming-Chu 馮明珠, "Qianyan" 前言 [Preface], in *Tuanni huanhua—yuancang taoci jinghuazhan* 摶泥幻化—院藏陶瓷精華展 [*The Magic of Kneaded Clay: Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum*], ed. Yu Pei-Chin 余佩瑾 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(The National Palace Museum, 2014), 6.

[526] This change in the perspective of interpreting and displaying the NPM's Chinese porcelain collection is also related to the development in the fields of art history and archeology in mainland China. As the rich archeological discoveries in kiln sites and tombs, the NPM's material advantages are getting days off. This reality has prompted the NPM and other academic institutes in Taiwan since the 1990s to develop research in the cultural history of trade ceramics. See Shih, "Taiwan de yishushi yanjiu," 15.

[527] National Palace Museum, "Exploring Asia-Episode One of the NPM Southern Branch," *Taiwan News*, December 4, 2008, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/803262 [Accessed January 20, 2021]; see also Tsai, "Yu Gugong yiqi tansuo Yazhou," 16-25.

White Porcelains," pieces of Ming and Qing porcelain carrying vestiges of Islamic and Indian inspirations were combined with Chinese-style products of porcelain and stoneware from Vietnam, Thailand, and Japan. Most pieces of porcelain seen in *Exploring Asia* were again displayed using a similar regional logic in one of the NPMSB's opening exhibitions: *Radiating Hues of Blue and White* (December 28, 2015-April 10, 2016).[528]

Ming blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen imperial kilns comprises a significant portion of the NPM's porcelain collection. Since the 1970s, the museum has organized seven special exhibitions with published catalogues dedicated to Ming porcelain. These exhibitions included *Ming Cheng-hua Porcelain* (1977), *Ming Hsuan-te Porcelains* (1980), *Early Ming Porcelain* (1982), *Selected Imperial Porcelains of the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (1997), *Selected Hsuan-te Imperial Porcelains of the Ming Dynasty* (1998), *Cheng-hua Porcelain Ware* (2003), and *Longquan Celadon of the Ming Dynasty* (2009).[529] Blue and white porcelain was displayed in these exhibitions. Obviously, porcelain of the Xuande (Hsuan-te, AD. 1399-1435) and Chenghua (AD. 1447-1487) eras was a recurrent theme of display. The Xuande period is usually considered as the heyday of Ming porcelain production, and the Chenghua period is well-known for its *Doucai* ware. These exhibitions were typically organized based on shapes and decorations to feature the exquisite craftsmanship reflected in the period-styles of the showpieces, and to illustrate the potential influences on visual styles between the preceding and succeeding eras. Based on this existing paradigm of display, *Radiating Hues of Blue and White* steps forward to show more about the appropriation and adaption of Ming blue and white porcelain in Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and Iran. As indicated in its catalogue, the exhibition sought to present how "blue and white porcelain can be seen as a cultural thread that joins these countries together."[530]

So, how does *Radiating Hues of Blue and White* present blue and white porcelain as a medium of cultural interchange? In addition to the classic high-quality Jingdezhen products for court use during the early-mid Ming dynasty, the exhibition also included quite a few export products from Chinese folk kilns and products from Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Iran that have been acquired by the NPM and the NPMSB as purchases and gifts over the last decade. The selected pieces of Asian porcelain were not simply regarded as imitations of Chinese porcelain but as works with their own characteristics. For example, the exhibition included four barbed-rim dishes; two are fifteenth-century Vietnam stoneware and two are early-Ming porcelain.[531] The point here was not only to show how the Vietnamese products are modelled after the Ming ones, but also to emphasize the local creativity: one of the Vietnamese barbed-rim dishes

[528] *Exploring Asia* was an overture to the NPMSB. In addition to blue and white porcelain, the themes of the NPMSB's opening exhibitions overlapping with those of Exploring Asia included another three: Buddhist arts, textiles, and tea culture. *Radiating Hues of Blue and White: Ming Dynasty Blue-and-White Porcelains in the National Palace Museum Collection* was a special exhibition, while these three other themes organize as the NPMSB's semi-permanent exhibitions and remain to this day.

[529] For the list, referring to Fung, "Qianyan," 6-7.

[530] Tsai Mei-Fen 蔡玫芬 and Weng Yu-Wen 翁宇雯, eds., *Lan bai huiying: Yuancang Mingdai qinghuaci zhan* 藍白輝映: 院藏明代青花瓷展 [*Radiating Hues of Blue and White: Ming Dynasty Blue-and-White Porcelains in the National Palace Museum Collection*] 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(National Palace Museum, 2015), 21.

[531] The object numbers of the two Vietnamese stoneware dishes: 購瓷 291; 購瓷 191. The object numbers of the two Ming porcelain dishes: 故瓷 16610; 故瓷 6630.

has a green overglaze and golden luster that are characterized by the exhibition as a typical Vietnamese style.[532]

In this exhibition, Ming porcelain was approached not solely from the perspective of production, but also from the perspective of its reception in neighboring Asian countries. Compared to the NPM's past exhibitions on the same subject, *Radiating Hues of Blue and White* was indeed much more diverse in terms of both interpretative angles and object selections. However, in attempting to express how technological and stylistic transfer across territorial boundaries, the exhibition did, nevertheless, create more of a sense of unidirectional influence than it did a sense of mutual exchange; there was not much information about how the manufacturing of Ming porcelain (both official and folk kilns) might in turn have clear traces of inspirations from other Asian countries. The storyline of the exhibition also fosters a sense of one-way traffic; the exhibition is divided into four sections, the first three organized in chronological order throughout the Ming dynasty, and the last section dedicated to porcelain and ceramics from Vietnam, Japan, Korea, and Iran. This narrative organization is easy to perceive as conveying a one-way diffusion. Of course, the limitation here is primarily the gaps in the collection; the museum currently has few satisfying pieces that could clearly capture the reciprocal nature of the blue and white aesthetic dynamics. Perhaps, the exhibition's English title, *radiating*, already suggested a sort of one-way pattern of influence from the center (the Ming China) to the periphery (neighboring Asian countries).

The sketching out of an Asian perspective through china display practices can be found not just in the NPMSB, but the NPM as well.[533] In 2017, a new semi-permanent exhibition on Ming porcelain was opened at the NPM entitled *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous: Porcelains from the Yongle Reign (1403-1424) of the Ming Dynasty* (2017-2020) (hereinafter referred to as *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous*). Under this title, which appears a bit hackneyed (the grouping of porcelain based on a specific period to reflect the achievements of imperial arts and crafts), the exhibition's narrative is nevertheless organized in the way that highlights the artistic and cultural exchanges between Ming China and the Islamic world.

Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous has three sections. The first introduces the development of Yongle porcelain styles and techniques with a focus on three representative types: red glaze, sweet-white glaze (a kind of white glaze notable for its lustrous character created in Jingdezhen kiln during the Yongle period), and underglaze blue. The second draws attention to the inspirations Yongle porcelain took from West Asia, reflected in its shapes and decorations. The third looks at the Qing porcelain from during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns made in imitation of the Yongle style. The exhibition, therefore, is performed in both horizontal and vertical dimensions: that is, showing both horizontal circulations of materials and motifs that cut across cultural borders and a vertical inheritance of styles between the

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[532] Weng Yu-Wen 翁宇雯, "Lan bai huiying: Yuancang Mingdai qinghuaci zhan" 藍白輝映: 院藏明代青花瓷展 [Radiating Hues of Blue and White: Ming Dynasty Blue-and-White Porcelains in the National Palace Museum Collection], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 394, (2016): 81; see also Shih Ching-Fei 施靜菲, "Yijun tuqi de Yuenan qinghuaci—Jian jie Gugong xin cangpin" 異軍突起的越南青花瓷—兼介故宮新藏品 [The Rise of Vietnamese blue and white porcelain: New Collection in the National Palace Museum], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 308, (2008): 60-75.

[533] The distinction between the positioning of the NPM and its southern branch—the NPM dedicated to Chinese arts and culture while the NPMSB sets up a gateway towards Asia—proposed during the construction of the NPMSB is now getting blurred, as these two institutions basically share the same collection.

Chinese dynasties. So, how does the exhibition demonstrate its emphasis on "multicultural exchange that took place [in the Yongle years]" in the gallery space, considering that all the pieces on display are Ming and Qing porcelain?

Objects from regions in West Asia are mostly missing from the museum's collection.[534] Hence, as an alternative, the exhibition shows Ming porcelain juxtaposed with visual reproductions of Islamic manuscript paintings to show how Ming porcelain was transported westward via the Silk Road and was reused and displayed in the fifteenth-century Timurid palace interior.[535] For example, a reproduction of the fifteenth-century painting from *Fatih Albums* (also known as the *Yaqub Beg Albums*, now collected in the Topkapi Saray Library in Istanbul), with Chinese blue and white vases in the process of being transported to West Asia, is provided in the exhibition together with four globular vases for audiences to compare their similar decorations of lotuses and dragons (**Figures 5.11-5.13**). Another beautiful visual reproduction offered here is the miniature, *Tahmina Comes into Rustam's Chamber* (c. 1434, now collected in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum), with a pair of pear-shaped *Yuhuchun* bottles and a pair of *Meipings* vases (**Figures 5.14-5.15**). In the gallery, the picture is combined with a similar *Yuhuchun* bottle. In the exhibition's catalogue, the picture is juxtaposed with an image of a *Meiping* vase to show how such a vase originally served as a wine vessel in China but was reused as a jardinière in the Timurid palace. Also seen in the exhibition are photos of Islamic metalwork and pottery to show audiences how they inspired the shapes of Ming porcelain (**Figure 5.16**). These rich visuals are closely combined with Ming porcelain and the texts attached to these images guide audiences to look at the cultural and artistic interchange embodied in Ming porcelain. This arrangement perhaps makes up for the lack of relevant pieces in the museum's collection.

Figure 5.11 Showcase with four globular vases and a reproduction of the fifteenth-century painting from *Faith Albums* in *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous*. © The NPM

[534] In its collection plan, the NPMSB specifically requires metalwork and glassware from West Asia that could help to portray the exchange of the visual characteristics of porcelain and ceramics. See: https://south.npm.gov.tw/ActivitiesDetailC006110.aspx?Cond=1aa9e1a3-8023-46ee-87dc-f36dc9e1f9a2 [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[535] The Timurid Emperor (1370-1507) was a Persianate Turco-Mongol empire. In its heyday, the Emperor's territory covered Central, West, and part of South Asia.

Figure 5.12 The fifteenth-century painting from *Fatih Albums*. Scroll fragment. Collected in the Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul, H. 2153

Figure 5.13 Detail of Figure 5.12

Figure 5.14 Showcase with a bowl, a *Yuhuchun* bottle, and a reproduction of the miniature *Tahmina Comes into Rustam's Chamber* (c. 1434) in *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous* © The NPM

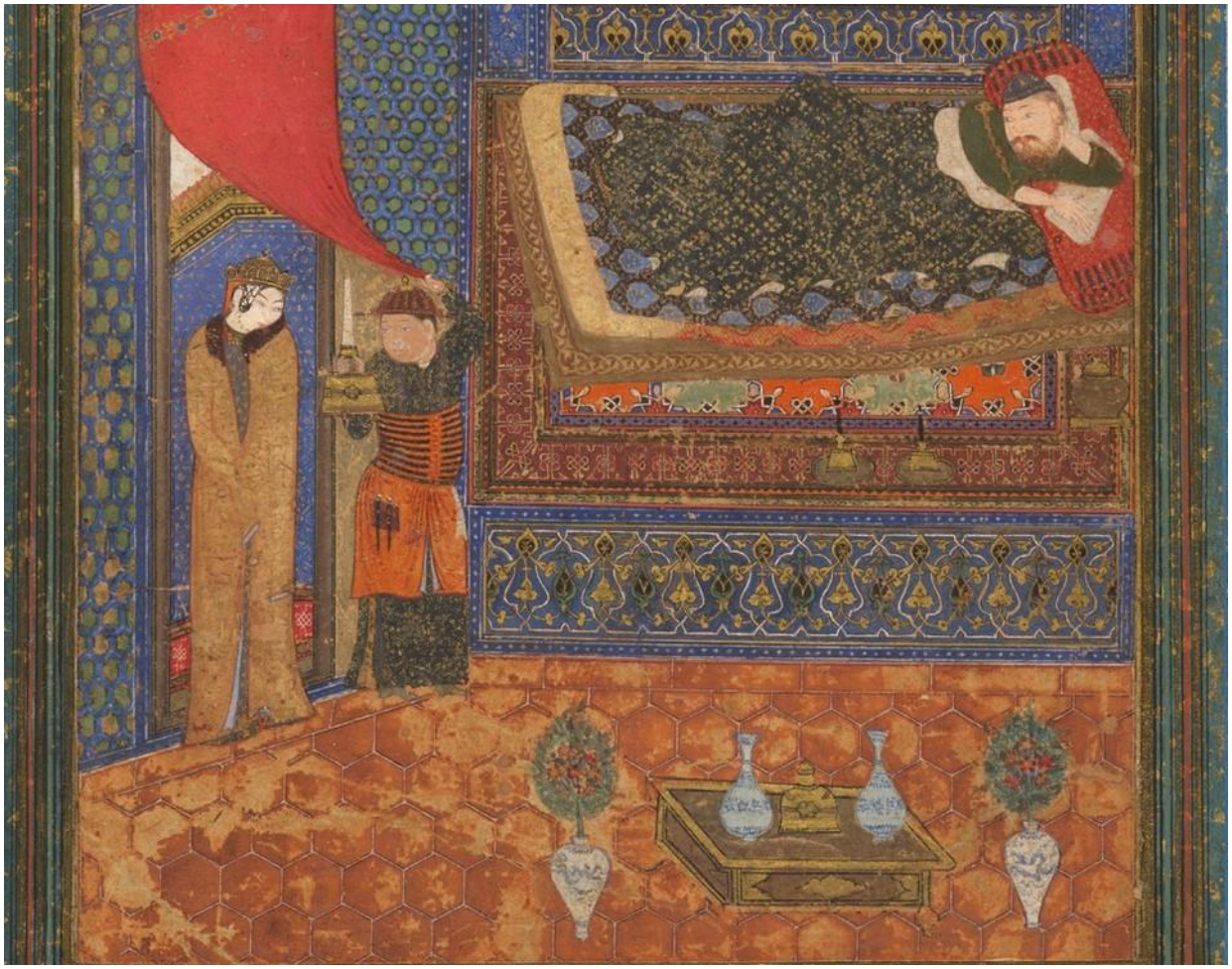

Figure 5.15 *Tahmina Comes into Rustam's Chamber* (c. 1434) (detail). Manuscript folio. Collected in Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Mrs. Elise Cabot Forbes and Mr. Eric Schroeder and Annie S. Coburn Fund. Object number: 1939.225

Figure 5.16 Showcase with pieces of Ming porcelain and photos of Islamic metalwork and pottery in *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous*. © The NPM

As an Asian perspective is developing in the NPM and the NPMSB, how to balance a clear storyline and the complex patterns of exchange across the Asian region becomes a compelling issue. In 2019, the NPMSB hosted a special exhibition called *The Coordinates of Clay: Ceramics in the National Palace Museum Collection* (hereinafter referred to as *The Coordinates of Clay*). This was quite an ambitious show in two senses. First, it presented three-hundred pieces of ceramics and porcelain from China, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Korea, and Japan; this number is two to three times greater than that in the porcelain exhibitions discussed previously. Second, the production period of the exhibits spanned more than thousands of years, including a late-Neolithic clay pot from Thailand and a five-colored vase exemplifying the Kutani ware of early twentieth-century Japan. The diversity of the exhibition was marketing-oriented. At first, it was planned to display just 150 pieces from the NPMSB's collection, but it was later decided to add pieces from the NPM to make the exhibition a feast for the eyes and thereby to attract more visitors.[536] As the largest exhibition on porcelain and ceramics that the museum has ever hosted, *The Coordinates of Clay* brought the NPMSB nearly 150,000 visitors.

In attempting to celebrate the richness and diversity of the museum's growing collection of porcelain and ceramics, the expanded scope of objects on display did nevertheless complexify the exhibition's narrative. Such complexity is clearly reflected in the overview of the exhibition:

> [The exhibition] opens with Chinese wares from the imperial official kilns during the long period of peace and prosperity under the reign of Emperors Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-1735), and Qianlong (1736-1795) in the Qing dynasty, presenting the culminating brilliance of centuries of skills, resources, experiences, and creative energies within Chinese ceramic culture. It goes on to illustrate the parallels in glaze, decoration, shape, and other elements between Chinese ceramic culture and its neighboring counterparts. It selects representative pieces to showcase the diverse styles and regional characteristics of ceramic

[536] See the report: Lan Yu-Chi 藍玉琦, "Dongya qi guo taoci, jin shou yandi: Gugong cezhanren daoshang 'Nitu de zuobiao: Yuancang taoci zhan'" 東亞七國陶瓷，盡收眼底：故宮策展人導賞 '泥土的座標—院藏陶瓷展 [A Panorama View of Ceramics from Seven Countries: The Curator's Guide to 'The Coordinates of Clay: Ceramics in the National Palace Museum Collection], *Diancang* 典藏[*ARTouch*], August 6, 2019, https://artouch.com/exhibition/content-11507.html [Accessed January 20, 2021].

> cultures in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Korea, and Japan. A display of artistic richness and cultural diversity, 'The Coordinates of Clay' demonstrates how ceramic cultures in East Asia emulate, exchange, and intersect with each other.

This quotation reveals the exhibition's core problem: namely, a miscellaneous presentation. It shows that the exhibition was mapped with a group of different 'coordinates', including chronological period, geographical area, and visual styles of color, decoration, and shape. In the exhibition itself, objects were arranged according to different categories. Some pieces were grouped together in a chronological order based on the place of production; some based on ornaments (e.g. a showcase with a fifteenth-century Vietnamese porcelain dish in combination with a Qing porcelain dish that both are decorated with lotuses); some based on colors (e.g. a showcase with celadon from China and Thailand); and some based on shapes (e.g. a showcase with eleven pieces of *kendi* from different places). Interspersed between these were other showcases dedicated to different themes, including one with pieces of enamel porcelain from the Qing Qianlong reign, which made the exhibition even more dazzling.

The Coordinates of Clay did try to map out the multicultural delights of porcelain. However, the lack of a clear and coherent narrative structure made this presentation potentially confusing. The exhibition was full of miscellaneous types of porcelain and ceramics, stunning and yet overwhelming. Its big picture, the story, was a bit fuzzy as there were too many kinds of objects and too many categories organizing them. This reminds us that, when museums are attempting to move beyond a traditional narrative built with the specified edges of nation-states, cultural-geographical areas, or imperial-reigns and shift attention to exchanges across boundaries, a lean, lucid narrative structure would be apt.

Bringing an Asian perspective into displays enables the NPM and the NPMSB to explore diverse approaches to reinterpret their collections. Such a perspective highlights regional connections instead of the Self-Other division constructed in line with the boundaries of the national or even ethnic (e.g. Huaxia) community. The development of a regional framework also suggests a rethinking of the subjects predominant in many past exhibitions of the museum: the Qing emperors, and especially the Emperor Qianlong.

5-3-2 Showing Cultural Exchange in an Interregional Framework

This section aims to further illustrate how an Asian perspective enables the NPM to approach stories of cultural exchange in a different way. The past exhibitions on cultural exchange at the NPM primarily focused on the artistic and technical exchanges between the Qing and European courts with missionaries acting as mediators. However, as mentioned above, the changing socio-political atmosphere in Taiwan and the rise of Taiwanese self-identity make the presentation of new narrative perspectives an urgent issue for the NPM. It is not hard to imagine that the Qing Emperors' aesthetic taste is a quite remote exhibition topic for Taiwanese people today, especially for the youth generation. Exploring cultural exchange within the East Asia region where Taiwan is located is practiced in recent exhibitions in the NPM and the NPMSB to produce a more diverse, and potentially more attractive, narrative. The following describes such a transformation.

In the past exhibitions at the NPM, a recurrent subject is that of Qing imperial aesthetic taste. In 2002, the museum hosted the special exhibition *Emperor Ch'ien-Lung's Grand Cultural Enterprise* (2002). It was the first exhibition in the museum that focused on the connoisseurship of one specific emperor.[537] The objects on display were diverse, including portraits of Qianlong and his family, poems and paintings he created, and objects he collected and commissioned. These reinforce the image of Qianlong, not just as an emperor but also as a passionate art connoisseur and collector. In 2009, the museum hosted another exhibition called *Harmony and Integrity: The Yongzheng Emperor and His Times*. Similarly, this exhibition on Yongzheng sets out to portray the image of an emperor, with the material objects he used, collected, and commissioned, as not just a controversial and even brutal ruler, but also an art lover. The following years have seen the blossoming of a series of exhibitions on the aesthetics of Emperor Qianlong, including: *Obtaining Refined Enjoyment: The Qianlong Emperor's Taste in Ceramics* (2011-2012); *The All Complete Qianlong: A Special Exhibition on the Aesthetic Tastes of the Qing Emperor Gaozong* (2013-2014); and *Story of a Brand Name: The Collection and Packaging Aesthetics of Emperor Qianlong in the Eighteenth Century* (2017-2018).[538]

These exhibitions dedicated to exploring the imperial taste inform us on two points. First, the Emperor's ownership of things is strengthened in these exhibitions. This makes the objects on display a visual consolidation of the ideal image of the Emperor. Second, Qianlong's aesthetic taste as reflected in his patronage and collection has been a predominant topic. This, on the one hand, is related to the background of the NPM's collection; the museum's collection is mostly inherited from the Qing imperial collection which was majorly shaped by the Qianlong Emperor.[539] On the other hand, this also reflects how Qianlong, as an art collector who diligently sought completeness, has deeply influenced the presentation of Chinese art in the museum through his aesthetic taste. As Craig Clunas points out, "surviving into museum collections to this day, the enormous store of cultural riches amassed by the Qianlong emperor has sometimes come to seem as if it is Chinese culture, and the material excluded by him has been correspondingly marginalised, or has not been preserved."[540] Based on the series of exhibitions pivoting around Qianlong's taste, it seems that the long-standing impact this emperor left on the formation of knowledge and connoisseurship regarding Chinese art is inherited, advocated, and even glorified by the NPM.

The glorification of Emperor Qianlong's image is not only reflected in the rhetoric of the titles of these exhibitions, such as 'grand' cultural enterprise and the 'all complete' Qianlong. Moreover, these

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[537] The exhibition *Emperor Ch'ien-Lung's Grand Cultural Enterprise* also marked the germination of research on Qianlong's collection and his ways of organizing works of art in Taiwan. According to the museum's current General-affairs deputy Yu, Pei-Chin, the exhibition lays the foundation for the subsequent exhibitions on the aesthetics of the Qing court at the NPM. See the report: Wang Yi-Wen 王怡文, "Zhuanfang Gugong Yu Pei Jin, tan 'pinpai de gushi: Qianlong huangdi de wenwu shoucang yu baozhuang yishu' cezhan xinlu" 專訪故宮余佩瑾，談'品牌的故事: 乾隆皇帝的文物收藏與包裝藝術'策展心路 [Interview with Yu Pei-Chin: The Curatorial Process of the Exhibition 'Story of a Brand Name: The Collection and Packaging Aesthetics of Emperor Qianlong in the Eighteenth Century'], *Diancang* 典藏[*ARTouch*], January 12, 2018, https://artouch.com/view/content-3234.html [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[538] This exhibition re-approached Qianlong's taste for arts and his image-building from a novel perspective with more attention paid to the ways he stored, organized, and displayed collection pieces. Hence the exhibition had the objects displayed together with their custom-made cases and stands.

[539] Shih, "Qingshi shoucang de xiandai zhuanhua," 4-7.

[540] Craig Clunas, "Picturing Cosmic Grandeur," in *The Qianlong Emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City*, ed. Hongxing Zhang (Edinburgh: National Museum of Scotland, 2002), 15.

exhibitions do not take a critical stand to such a glorified image. For example, the exhibition *Obtaining Refined Enjoyment* gathered a group of porcelain and ceramics engraved Qianlong's poetries to show how these items served as a medium that carries an ideal self-image of the Emperor. However, inscribing his own ruminations and poems on porcelain, ceramics, calligraphy, and paintings and so forever change these objects' appearance (if not destroy them) not just reflects Qianlong's life-long commitment to connoisseurship, but also the Emperor's potentially arrogant nature. Thus, it is not hard to understand why the art historian Michael Sullivan describes the Emperor rather unflatteringly as "a voracious art collector, a niggardly and opinionated connoisseur, an unstoppable writer of inscriptions and stamper of seals who was determined, as a function of his imperial role, to leave his indelible mark upon China's artistic legacy."[541] Yet, such an opposite image of Qianlong has rather disappeared in the NPM's previous exhibitions on promoting the Emperor's aesthetic taste. These exhibitions, to some extent, confirm the conventional image of the NPM as a guardian of imperial treasures that sought to advocate the dominant aesthetic taste set by the Qing emperors.

The museum's exhibitions on cultural exchange have often been approached from the perspective of the Qing emperors as well. Between 2006 and 2010, the NPM hosted a semi-permanent exhibition called *Treasures from an Age of Prosperity: The Reigns of Emperors K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng, and Ch'ien-lung, 1662-1795*. The exhibition had a section dedicated to European influences on the manufacturing of Chinese imperial art following the prosperity of maritime trade and the coming of Christian missionaries. The representative works in this section were porcelain with painted enamels employing European painting techniques (e.g. chiaroscuro), composition, and decorations. Another exhibition that used similar imperial perspective to show cultural exchange is *Emperor Kangxi and the Sun King Louis XIV: Sino-Franco Encounters in Arts and Culture* (2011-2012). Combining objects borrowed from the Palace of Versailles and the Beijing Palace Museum, this blockbuster exhibition also explored how missionaries acted as a bridge linking the two imperial courts, and how the artistic and technical exchanges through them inspired new products in both the Qing and French courts. Enameled porcelain, as a typical object embodies a Sino-European exchange in visual techniques and styles, was again the highlight.

As the museum's collection originated in the Qing court, exploring the meanings of objects from the perspective of the Qing emperors has become a paradigm. This certainly does not mean that the NPM's collection bears no information regarding the issue of cultural exchange without demonstrating links with Europe, but the museum adheres to the existing framework of Qing imperial taste. This inevitably leads to a rather single-story and reduces the potentially diverse meanings of the museum's collection pieces. As mentioned, following the rise of Taiwanese self-identity, sticking to a single narrative of Qing imperial taste is easily to reinforce the image of the museum as a Chinese enclave in Taiwan. Broadening its exhibition perspective and narrative framework seems to be imperative for the museum's transformation to engage more with the local community. Through collaborations with museums overseas, recent exhibitions in the NPM and the NPMSB have seen attempts to explore the history of cultural exchange from more diverse perspectives and within a regional framework in which Taiwan plays a role. Below I focus on two exhibitions as examples: *Expedition to Asia: The Prominent Exchanges between East*

[541] Michael Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 140.

and West in the 17th Century in the NPM (December 20, 2018-March 10, 2019; hereinafter referred to as *Expedition to Asia*); and *The Beauty of Interchange: Selections from Japan's Kobe City Museum* in the NPMSB (June 6-September 8, 2019; hereinafter referred to as *The Beauty of Interchange*). Both exhibitions are collaborations between the NPM and overseas museums; *Expedition to Asia* is co-organized with the Rijksmuseum and *The Beauty of Interchange* with the Kobe City Museum in Kobe, Japan.[542] These partnerships enriched the variety of the objects on display.

Expedition to Asia and *The Beauty of Interchange* both take the East Asian seas as the spatial framework of narrative to portray cultural and artistic exchanges across China, Japan, and Europe during the late Ming and Qing dynasties.[543] So, instead of a single story of the Qing Emperors' taste and the contact between the Qing and European courts, these two exhibitions present the issue of cultural exchange within an interregional framework. This interregional framework enables the exhibitions to unfold a rich picture of cultural crossovers which is hardly highlighted from the perspective of the Qing court. For example, the previous exhibitions on cultural exchange in the NPM that were organized through the imperial perspective often took enameled porcelain to exemplify a two-way exchange between China and Europe. By comparison, the East Asia regional frameworks in *Expedition to Asian* and *The Beauty of Interchange* enable cultural exchange to be expressed through a variety of porcelain products.

In *Expedition to Asia*, audiences can see works from Delft, Japan, and Persia imitating Chinese blue and white kraak in combination with Chinese export porcelain infused with European and Japanese visual elements. Moreover, the exhibition includes some pieces of Chinese porcelain originated in the NPM's collection, but rarely put on display in the museum's previous exhibitions that focused on Qing imperial taste. Yet, in an interregional context, these objects are quite telling in enhancing the sense of dynamics in the presentation of trade and exchange. An example here is a pair of porcelain bowls with lanterns decoration, one from the late Ming period and another from early Qing (**Figures 5.17-5.18**). As far as I could understand from the NPM's collection database, these two bowls have not been displayed under the theme of cultural exchange (the Qing bowl has even never been shown). According to the exhibition catalogue, their composition is reminiscent of Ming export kraak porcelain and thus suggests that the Ming imperial kilns may produce items with the style imitating Ming porcelain made for overseas markets, and this style continued to the Qing dynasty.[544]

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[542] Wang Ching-Ling 王靜靈, "Huangjin shidai de dongxi jiaoliu—'yazhou tanxianji—shiqi shiji dongxi jiaoliu chuanqi' tezhan" 黃金時代的東西交流—「亞洲探險記—十七世紀東西交流傳奇」特展 [East-West Exchange in the Golden Age: The Special Exhibition 'Expedition to Asia: The Prominent Exchanges between East and West in the 17th Century'], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 431, (2019): 40-49; Chu Lung-Hsing 朱龍興, "Piaoyangguohai lai kanni—guanlan 'jiao rong zhi mei' tezhan" 飄洋過海來看你—觀覽「交融之美」特展 [Floating across the ocean to see you—The Special Exhibition of 'The Beauty of Interchange'], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 [*The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art*] 435, (2019): 4-25.

[543] It should be noted that *Expedition to Asia* and *The Beauty of Interchange* both emphasize their narrative framework of "the East Asia region," but this framework refers specifically to Northeast Asia, where the focus lies in the interchange between China, Japan, and Europe via maritime networks (without Korea). Both exhibitions do not extend their attention to Southeast Asia.

[544] The object number of the Ming bowl: 故瓷 009178; the Qing bowl: 故瓷 010004. Referring to the exhibition's catalogue, Yu Pei-Chin 余佩瑾, ed., *Yazhou tanxian ji: Shiqi shiji dong xi jiaoliu chuanqi* 亞洲探險記: 十七世紀東西交流傳奇 [*Expedition to Asia: The Prominent Exchanges between East and West in the 17th Century*] 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(National Palace Museum, 2019): 238-239.

The porcelain display in *The Beauty of Interchange* also draws attention to multidirectional communication. For example, there is a set of three dishes with harbor views made in the Netherlands, Japan, and China (**Figures 5.19-5.21**). According to the exhibition catalogue, they show how the pattern designed by the Dutch painter Frederik van Frijtom (c. 1632-1702) was taken by the VOC merchants to order similar products in both Japan and China and, interestingly, how the lotus-leaf like rim, originally a Japanese style, was imitated by both Dutch and Chinese craftspeople.[545] By comparison, although the NPM's past exhibitions set from the perspective of the Qing emperors did explore the theme of cultural exchange, much emphasis was placed on how the Sino-European exchange in the Qing dynasty inspired the Qing imperial craftsmanship to produce new products (e.g. enamel porcelain).

Figure 5.17 (left) Ming Bowl with lanterns decoration, Wanli reign (1573-1620). Collected in the NPM. Object number: 故瓷 009178
Figure 5.18 (right) Qing bowl with lanterns decoration, Qing dynasty. Collected in the NPM. Object number: 故瓷 010004

Figure 5.19 (left) Dutch Delft dish with harbor view design, Late 17th century. Collected in the Museum Prinsenhof Delft
Figure 5.20 (middle) Japanese dish with harbor view design. 1680-1690. Collected in the Museum Prinsenhof Delft
Figure 5.21 (right) Chinese dish with harbor view design. 1680-1690. Collected in the Museum Prinsenhof Delft

[545] Huang Yong-Tai 黃永泰, Peng Zi-Cheng 彭子程, and Zhou Wei-Qiang 周維強, eds., *Jiaorong zhi mei: Shenhu shili bowuguan jingpin zhan* 交融之美: 神戶市立博物館精品展 [*The Beauty of Interchange: Selections from Japan's Kobe City Museum*] 台北(Taipei): 國立故宮博物院(National Palace Museum, 2019), 108-109.

Compared to a Sinocentric perspective, an interregional framework can better stage the rich picture of artistic exchange. This is perhaps best illustrated by the famous porcelain pattern called *Parasol Ladies*. Porcelain dishes with the same motif from China and Japan are seen in both the exhibitions—*Expedition to Asia* also shows the original design drawing by the Dutch painter Cornelis Pronk (1691-1759) (**Figures 5.22-5.29**). Bringing these together, it is easy for audiences to see that the Chinese products generally follow the Dutch design. However, in the case of the Japanese piece, two Japanese women wearing kimonos, with hairstyles popular at the time, and holding an oil-paper umbrella have replaced the Chinese women in the Dutch design. Such a dynamic process as this transmission and localization of the same motif in the workshops of different places is readily expressed in an interregional framework, whereas it may be left unseen under the imperial perspective.

Taking on an interregional perspective further foregrounds the unique position of Taiwan, both geographical and historical, along East Asian sea routes. In *Expedition to Asia*, for example, the historical documents with their pages open to audiences recording the tripartite power struggle in Taiwan and its surrounding islands.[546] Those struggling were the Qing court, the Ming loyalists resisting the Qing dynasty, and the Dutch envoys who contested between the two forces, looking for profitable opportunities. The exhibition also displays porcelain fragments from the VOC-ship *De Witte Leeuw* and pieces made for European markets from both the Jingdezhen official kilns and the Fujian folk kilns in Southeastern China (**Figures 5.30-5.31**). Combined with *De Witte Leeuw* shipwrecks are porcelain shards excavated from the *Zeelandia* (a Dutch fortress built in the town of Anping in the southeast of Taiwan) and the *Fengguiwei Fort* (a Dutch fortification built in Penghu, an archipelago nearby, and now part of Taiwan). Also included here are two pieces of the so-called Anping pots, named after the town where most comparable pots have been discovered (**Figure 5.32**). Similarly, *The Beauty of Interchange* provides maps made between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and in various mediums, such as screen, paper, ceramic, and porcelain. The exhibition catalogue specifically indicates the positions of Taiwan in some of these maps.[547]

Through displaying objects excavated from Taiwan and maps with Taiwan's position specified, these exhibitions emphasize the role of Taiwan as a trading hub situated in East Asia. Potentially, this contributes to deepening the resonance of Taiwanese audiences with the contact and interaction between cultures that happened in this region. Furthermore, this prompts us to rethink the identity conflicts which have so long haunted the NPM.

The East Asian region as a narrative framework seems to provide a more inclusive approach to loosen the rigid binary opposition between Chinese and Taiwanese identities. The development of an interregional framework is, of course, not all of sudden, but is based on ongoing academic research. From the NPMSB's founding proposal approved in 2001 to today, curators of the NPM and other closely related

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[546] The historical documents here refer to: *Qindingguoshi Nichen Liezhuan* 欽定國史逆臣列傳 [*Collected Biographies of Mutinous Officials*], compiled by Qing Guo shi guan 清 國史館 [The State Historiography Institute, Qing dynasty], and now collected in the NPM (故殿 030240); and *Taihai Shichalu* 臺海使槎錄 [*Records from the Mission to Taiwan and Its Strait*], Written by Huang Shujing 黃叔璥 (1682-1758), Qing dynasty, manuscript copy from the *Ski Quanshu* (Wenyuange edition) Qianlong reign (1736-1795), Qing dynasty 清乾隆間寫文淵閣四庫全書本, and now collected in the NPM (故庫 012839-012842).

[547] See Huang, Peng, and Zhou, *Jiaorong zhi mei*, 32-35, 52-53.

scholars during these two decades have committed to explore the possibility of broadening the perspective in staging cultural exchange that can move beyond the traditional perspective from the Qing emperors.[548]

Figure 5.22 Design drawing for a plate with a lady with a parasol (ca. 1734-1736) by Cornelis Pronk. Watercolor. Height: 19 cm; width: 16 cm. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: RP-T-1967-18

[548] The NPM has hosted a series of lectures and symposiums that help to cultivate a broader, regional perspective in exploring the meaning of objects, including: *What is Asian Culture? A Point of View through Exchange of Material Evidence around the Sea Route* (2008); *Confluence: Exchanges in the Making of Asia* (2009); *Stimulation and Reanimation: Cultural and Artistic Exchanges between Asia and Europe* (2015); *The Conversion of Connoisseurship of on the Imperial Antiquities* (2018).

Four porcelain dishes with Parasol Ladies in *Expedition to Asia*:

Figure 5.23 (left) Chinese dish with parasol ladies design in overglaze enamels and gilded, late 18th century. Collected in the NPM. Object number: 南購瓷 000129
Figure 5.24 (right) Japanese dish with parasol ladies design in underglaze blue. Arita ware. Edo period, 1730-1740. Collected in the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka. Object number: 32365

Figure 5.25 (left) Japanese dish with parasol ladies design in polychrome colors. Arita ware. Edo period, 1700-1730. Collected in the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka. Object number: 32353
Figure 5.26 (right) Japanese dish with parasol ladies design in polychrome colors. Arita ware. Edo period, 1730-1740. Collected in the Museum of Oriental Ceramics, Osaka. Object number: 32298

Three porcelain dishes with Parasol Ladies in *The Beauty of Interchange*:

Figure 5.27 (left) Chinese dish with parasol ladies design in overglaze enamels and gilded. Jingdezhen ware. Qing dynasty, late 18th century. Collected in the Kobe City Museum
Figure 5.28 (right) Chinese dish with parasol ladies design in underglaze blue and white. Jingdezhen ware. Qing dynasty, ca. 1736. Collected in the Kobe City Museum

Figure 5.29 Japanese dish with parasol ladies design in overglaze enamels and gilded. Arita ware. Edo period, early 18th century. Collected in the Kobe City Museum

Figure 5.30 (left) Chinese *klapmuts* made for European markets. Jingdezhen ware. 1600-1650. Collected in the Rijksmuseum. Object number: AK-RBK-15798-M
Figure 5.31 (right) Chinese export dish with flowers and birds. Zhangzhou kilns, Fujian province, early 17th century. Collected in the NPM. Object number: 贈瓷 000310

Figure 5.32 View of *Expedition to Asia*. A: The showcase with two Anping pots and porcelain fragments excavated from the *Zeelandia* and *Fengguiwei Fort*. B: The showcase with porcelain fragments from *De Witte Leeuw*. © Goldilocks Production

Today, not only the NPMSB but also the NPM are engaging in using an Asian perspective to construct exhibitions and to convey different meanings of its existing collection (such as *Pleasingly Pure and Lustrous* discussed previously). Since the NPM's collection was primarily inherited from the Qing court and the Asian collection of the NPMSB is still developing, actively cooperating with museums overseas also helps to present objects from an interregional, rather than a Sinocentric, perspective. As discussed above, the past exhibitions on Taiwan hosted in the NPM under the directors Qin Xiaoyi and Tu Cheng-Sheng often sought to either emphasize or downplay the relationship between China and Taiwan. *Expedition to Asia* and *The Beauty of Interchange* eschew falling into the trap of such an either-or; the interregional frameworks enable these two exhibitions to explore cultural exchange from a more pluralistic view. Such a pluralistic view is exemplified in the exhibitions not only in terms of the mobility of artistic techniques and styles across different places but also in terms of how people from different places *see* each other. Both the exhibitions provide rich visual materials (including book illustrations, paintings, prints, and engravings) that show how the Chinese landscape, palace interior, and people were represented in the eyes of the Dutch and, in turn, how the Dutch were represented in the eyes of the Chinese and Japanese.

Bringing in an interregional perspective to portray cultural exchange, *Expedition to Asia* and *The Beauty of Interchange* allow us to see the heterogeneous nature of cultures in the East Asia region. Focusing on the mobility of artistic ideas across this region, they also manage to avoid equating cultural exchange with Sino-European relationships. Taking on Asia as an interregional framework of interpretation, the display of cultural exchange in the NPM and the NPMSB might have the potential to move beyond a point (the Qing court) and a line (the bilateral relations between the Qing court and Europe), and towards an area (the rich cross-fertilization among Asian countries). Nevertheless, what needs to be considered here is that both *Expedition to Asia* and *The Beauty of Interchange* are temporary exhibitions, so how to evolve long-term cooperation and coordination with museums overseas will be a key issue for future work.

The prerequisites for developing an interregional framework of museum presentation is certainly the corresponding academic major. Today, many art history institutes in Taiwan have begun to move beyond the existing framework of Chinese art and to shift part of their research focus to material and cultural exchange in Asia. The NPM and the NPMSB have the potential to contribute to the cultivation of professionals in the field of global/interregional art history based on their original rich Chinese collection and the continued accumulation of a collection of Asian objects. Also helpful is the various forms of cooperation with museums overseas, including both short-term loans and exhibitions and long-term research projects.[549]

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the NPM's collection is principally inherited from the Qing dynasty court, and thus the imperial aesthetic taste has provided a paradigm of display and interpretation. Hence, even some of the museum's collection pieces were the products of interregional exchange, they were left unseen and kept offstage in a Sinocentric exhibition narrative. It is not to say that the museum has to entirely abandon the perspective from the Qing emperors. Such a perspective can

[549] For example, in 2017, the NPM and the Museum of Oriental Ceramics in Osaka, Japan became 'sister museums. This enables the two museums to share their collection pieces and to develop the possibilities for long-term research cooperation.

still be applicable; after all, a museum can and should incorporate diverse perspectives. However, without an ongoing expansion and exploration of new approaches to display and interpretation and an ongoing reflection on these approaches, the museum will inevitably lose its vitality, if not become obsolete. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill reminds us: "it is always possible to take an individual object and place it in a new framework or see it in a new way. The lack of definitive and final articulation of significance keeps objects endlessly mysterious."[550] Similarly, the openness to re-interpreting its collection within a wider interregional framework can keep the NPM fresh and interesting, and prevent itself from being marginalized as a remote feudal palace in the wave of the rise of Taiwanese self-identity.

Conclusion: Beyond a Binary Opposition

In this chapter, I have discussed the correspondence between the changing positionings of the NPM and the rise of Taiwanese self-identity. Compared to the case studies in the previous chapters, the NPM shows a more complex Self-Other configuration because of the intimate and yet remote relationship between China and Taiwan.

The changing perspectives that I have traced regarding the role of the museum and its collection are historically specific, in accordance with particular views of the Self at distinct historical moments. Before 2000, the museum was managed to construct Communist China and Japan as the Other, and encouraged Taiwanese people to identify themselves as the protectors and the true inheritors of the Chinese cultural orthodoxy. The political role of the museum is further confirmed by its collection background; the museum inherited not only the tangible holdings from the Qing court but also the intangible prescriptive association between object-possession and power-possession established in the imperial China period. However, after 2000, the change of political atmosphere in Taiwan brought a considerable re-configuration of the Self-Other relationship. The blossoming of Taiwanese self-awareness underlaid the transformation of the mission and vision of the NPM. The development of the NPMSB has constituted perhaps the most concrete manifestations of the contested transition of Taiwanese self-identification from pan-Chinese to Taiwanese. The controversy of de-Sinicization revolving around the museum reflects essentially an identity crisis. Yet, de-Sinicization is an oversimplified term that even stigmatizes what the museum really strives for today: that is, to avoid the narrow framing of Sinocentrism.

As I have outlined, the East Asia interregional framework adopted in the recent exhibitions at the NPM and the NPMSB contributes to the exploration of the displayed objects' varied meanings in terms of cultural exchange. Bringing an Asian perspective to bear in the china display, for example, highlights issues such as the transmission of techniques and the localization of specific decorative motifs. This provides an approach to reading Chinese porcelain beyond the recurrent frameworks of high craftsmanship and imperial connoisseurship. Furthermore, through collaboration with overseas museums to enrich the variety of the displayed objects, certain exhibitions exemplify how an interregional

[550] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 115.

framework may also contribute to transcending the binary opposition of Chinese and Taiwanese identities.

The cultivation of an Asian perspective in the museum's strategies of collection and display marks a starting point from which the museum can begin to articulate the fluidity of cultural boundaries and identities. With the ongoing expansion of the NPM's (and NPMSB's) collections accompanying deepening research into cultural and artistic exchange in the region of Asia, the museum shows real promise when it comes to transcending its former nationalist and Sinocentric pretensions.

CONCLUSION

The work presented in the previous chapters throws light on the performative qualities of the museum display of Chinese porcelain. Evidence for this research has been drawn from two sources: primary sources from museum archives and curators; and secondary literature from various fields, which provided conceptual tools to underpin my close readings of museum displays and exhibitions. Bringing together these sources, this dissertation has presented a group of case studies to explore the underlying ideological potential of the apparently apolitical presentations of Chinese porcelain in museums. It has revealed how the techniques of display work together to construct narratives, and examined the spatial narratives produced by specific viewing orders as well. It has traced the shifting values and meanings of Chinese porcelain in changing museum settings and considered the juxtaposition of porcelain with other objects from different places as a cultural practice that can manifest ideologies related to the shaping of various Self-Other configurations.

In the British Museum, the drawing together of Chinese Ming pilgrim flasks with other objects in the galleries of China, India, West Asia, and Europe maps out the extensive circulation and exchange of things, styles, and techniques. This allows china to be identified as not only Chinese but also Indian, Persian, and European. Such a scheme of juxtaposition helps the museum to make its statement about global connectedness—a loosening or transcending of Self-Other boundaries—with a more coherent display throughout the galleries. In the Rijksmuseum, the multiple values attached to the pieces of Chinese porcelain on display contribute to the development of Dutch self-affirmation and national identity. The museum's Asian Pavilion, on the one hand, signifies the importance of the museum's Asian art collection in that it acquires a special, exclusive gallery space; while, on the other hand, the obvious difference between the museum's main building and the Asian Pavilion in terms of building style and object organization, perhaps, undesirably, raises an awareness of Self-Other differentiation. The underlying narrative of the Dutch domestication of Asian goods found in the Rijksmuseum's exhibition *Asia > Amsterdam* indicates a process of re-identification in which *they* (Asian material objects) were gradually embedded in *our* (Dutch) material culture; ultimately, *they* have become part of *us*. Such a message, comparatively, is not so evident in its twin exhibition, *Asia in Amsterdam*, at the PEM. The exhibition *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the MET stages the process of exoticization. Its strategies of display enact a conceptual boundary that fixes the identity of Chinese porcelain and other Chinese collection pieces shown as a stereotypical Orientalist Other, readily mysterious, erotic, and effeminized. Compared to the aforementioned case studies, the National Palace Museum in Taiwan is deeply rooted in a more complex Self-Other configuration because of the intimate and yet remote (if not increasingly hostile) relationship between China and Taiwan. The museum's innovative policies of collection, display, and interpretation are correlated with the development of Taiwan's self-identity, from both Chinese and

Taiwanese to just Taiwanese. This redrawing of Taiwan's boundaries of cultural identity has a great impact on the museum's policy-making and self-positioning.

Although the discursiveness of museum display has been broadly acknowledged, few studies have adopted an object-focused approach to closely examine the effects intended in and produced through the way an object is put on display. This study has been an attempt to fill this gap by analyzing the performative aspects of selected semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions featuring Chinese porcelain. It seems to me that an object-focused approach is needed because, as this dissertation has sought to demonstrate, it enables the performativity of museum display to be measured in the context of various political and ideological forces. Methodologically, this dissertation has also shown that a close reading of museum displays in combination with conceptual tools from relevant disciplines is productive, even necessary, in order to better grasp and elucidate the artificiality of museums and the performativity of display. At the same time, to provide more dynamic, contextualized readings, contact with and publications from the curatorial side of things are equally important sources of reference.

This dissertation has adopted an object-based perspective and a case-study format to examine the performativity of museum display which, of course, has its limitations. The most obvious one of these is the small size of the sample: evidently, many important exhibitions of Chinese porcelain are not discussed in this thesis. As I have mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation was not intended to be a comprehensive exploration of porcelain display in the museum world, and my case selection was purposeful and restricted. Nevertheless, this selection was not just a limitation; it also served to narrow down the study to a manageable scope.

In the following, I recapitulate the main points that have been made over the previous five chapters and seek to outline areas for future research. I then draw the themes of this dissertation together to further consider the performativity of museum display in conjunction with the idea of showing framing.

Overview and Outlook

The notions of object biography, the global lives of things, and transculturation were used in the first chapter as conceptual tools to analyze the current distribution of Ming pilgrim flasks in the British Museum's China, India, Middle East, and Europe galleries. The wide-ranging trajectories of Ming porcelain make it a class of objects with often shifting identities, based on changing ownership and location. This chapter proposed that the trans-border arrangement within the British Museum maps out the narrative of transculturation. This narrative enables one to perceive the cultural-geographical boundaries that the gallery walls stand for as existing but traversable. The trans-border arrangement of Ming pilgrim flask and the underlying narrative of transculturation, I argued, constitute a narrative of transculturation that helps to move the museum beyond its centuries-old Enlightenment idea of universality.

The trans-border arrangement of Ming porcelain performs a blurring or transcending of the dominant, deterministic museum categories based on cultural-geographical division. It shows the potential of the museum to incorporate alternative spatial parameters to break apart such established spatial units as nation-states, regions and empires. It is here that such a scheme of arrangement is tied to

an increasingly global understanding of art history and material culture over the last three decades or so. As mentioned, the global turn in art history moves away from thinking of categories such as art, style, period, and nation as fixed and essential, placing more emphasis on material transfer and technical exchanges across existing cultural-geographical boundaries. This chapter discussed how trans-border thinking not only opens up new interpretative approaches to museum collection, but also promotes a rethinking of the imperialist metaphor of museum-as-map by revealing a more dynamic and fluid understanding of cultural identity in the postmodern world.

Of course, the British Museum is not the only museum that seeks to make a more coherent and interconnected display to emphasize cultural connection and exchange or to challenge the classification and display of objects based merely on their places of origin. For example, the seas and oceans filigreed with interregional trading networks have come to be a useful framework for museums to thaw monolithic categorization, as I briefly discussed in this chapter.[551] It is imaginable that there are other schemes of display, other approaches to reconsider the spatial qualities of museums in line with trans-border thinking. This leaves room for further research, aiming to identify innovative ways to move museums beyond culturally-bounded categorization as well as to investigate the effects produced by such movement. Moreover, how the digital space of the museum—which is not my focus here—can be engaged in promoting narratives of transculturality and understandings of the polysemous nature of collection pieces is another area that might be addressed in future research.

The second chapter traced the process through which Chinese porcelain has been imbued with decorative, historical, aesthetic, art-historical, and symbolic values through its display in the Rijksmuseum from the 1930s to today. I drew on the idea of the 'extended self' proposed by Russell Belk, the idea that part of one's self-identity is defined by one's possessions, to carry out a critical assessment of the effects occasioned by two schemes of juxtaposition: Dutch portraits with Chinese porcelain, and Dutch mapped landscapes with Chinese porcelain. I discussed how these schemes of juxtaposition are performative in that they make china an important factor in Dutch self-fashioning. This chapter also considered the effects that are both intended in and unintentionally generated through the contrasts in architectural style, interior design, and object arrangements between the museum's main building and its annex Asian Pavilion.

This chapter showed the interplay between the collection history and presentation history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum. As discussed, Chinese porcelain has been collected by and displayed in the galleries under the museum's Departments of Sculpture and Applied Art, History, and Asian Art. Each department's mission impacts the way Chinese porcelain is displayed and interpreted. The connections between the performativity of display and the collection histories and departmental structures of museum are worthy of future inquiry. Specifically, in terms of the Rijksmuseum, what deserves further attention are the institution's recent efforts to move a bit beyond its deeply-rooted patriotism. The museum is now managing to engage in conversations about decolonization in the museum world. An evident example of this is that the museum will host a major special exhibition in Spring 2021, *Slavery*. For the very first time, the museum will hold an exhibition dedicated to revisiting the Netherland's colonial past, and will do so by incorporating more diverse perspectives and voices

[551] For related exhibition practices, see Chapter 1 of this thesis, especially the section 1-3.

instead of retaining a Dutch-oriented point of view. Could this exhibition and the accompanying activities mark a new orientation that deviates from the museum's Dutch-centric positioning? Also, how will the Rijksmuseum's new developments bring new meanings and values to its collection pieces? These questions are left for future research.

Focalization was conjured up in the third chapter as both a narrative strategy employed by museums and an analytical tool that I applied to explore the potential ideologies of two museum exhibitions: *Asian > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the PEM. The two co-organized exhibitions share the same topic and overlapping objects. However, as I have shown through comparing their overall narrative structures and adopting focalization as a method of analysis, *Asia > Amsterdam* suggests a process of Dutch domestication of Asian goods, while *Asia in Amsterdam* brings more attention to the moral cost of the seventeenth-century Dutch presence in Asia. This chapter demonstrated how focalization can be a fruitful tool to analyze ideological overtones and reveal possible subjective interpretations of a museum exhibition. As Mieke Bal notes: "The significance of certain aspects cannot be viewed unless [they are] linked to focalization."[552] More extensive analysis of how the strategies of display create specific forms of focalization and thereby impact the messages produced would be an interesting direction for further investigation.

In the fourth chapter, I argued that the display strategies in *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the MET make the Chinese objects on display, including blue and white porcelain, into fetishized surfaces serving Orientalist stereotypes. This chapter revealed how the displayed Chinese objects are here reduced to a set of surface patterns that signify exoticness, mystery, and Chinese-ness, indiscriminately. It also demonstrated how Chinese porcelain in the exhibition is gender-coded, the porcelain body becoming a metonymy for female skin and flesh. This recalls an Orientalist gender paradigm: that is, the Orient as feminine and effeminized. This chapter demonstrated how a misleading scheme of arrangement can lead to a disparity between curatorial intentions and the resulting effects of a display.

Two observations in this chapter provide possible avenues for further research. The first regards the ideological dimension of sensory experience provided in museums. In this chapter, I proposed that the rich sensory experience the exhibition provides to its audiences—a dramatic lighting scheme and carefully designed juxtaposition together promote the textural details of the displayed objects, thereby inviting an embodied spectatorship—acts as more than just a visual feast for hungry eyes. Rather, this special sensory experience has an ideological underpinning in that it reflects the exhibition's proposition of an avowedly "less-politicized" Orientalism based on pure aestheticism. I argued that such a viewing experience potentially runs the risk of reducing the rich meanings of Chinese decorations to a set of surface patterns that can only evoke exoticism. From this perspective, the sensory experience the exhibition creates carries an undercurrent of Said's Orientalism. How techniques of display create specific sensory experiences that serve certain ideological interests is an area for more consideration.

The second area that could be expanded upon is the gender coding of museum objects. In this chapter, I analyzed the overt association of china/China and femininity through the exhibition's techniques of display, including the object arrangement, lighting scheme, and selected film clips played.

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[552] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997[1985]), 171.

The issue of how a material object becomes a material expression of certain gendered qualities in a given social and cultural context has been examined in the fields of archaeology, art history, and material culture. It seems relevant to expand this field of research to museum studies, to see how the agency of display works to construct certain gendered identities. Upon which objects? For what purposes? Occasioning what intended and/or unintended effects? This would help us to understand how the gender coding of objects is not only generated by their physicality and usage in a given cultural context, but also enacted by the way they are displayed in museums.

Finally, chapter five compares the changing strategies of display and interpretation of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan with the Taiwanese self-consciousness as it has developed over the last decades. The historical background of the museum and the source of its collection make it a strong political symbol. Hence, the performativity of the museum's display and its produced effects need to be understood in the context of the broader political relationship between Taiwan and China, and in relation to diverse aspects of the changing national and cultural identity in Taiwan. The effects of the museum's use of a pan-Asian interregional framework to move beyond a Sinocentric one needs further assessment as this strategy continues to be put into practice. Identifying other cases in the museum world that also suggest a correspondence between changing display strategies and changing formations of national and cultural identities is another area requiring more attention.

Overall, this study has drawn on close readings and theoretical materials to explore how display techniques affect the meanings and values attributed to Chinese porcelain. Display techniques are presented here as the coordination between spatial configurations, object arrangements, label and installation designs, and the institutions' visions and the exhibitions' objectives. Woven throughout the chapters is the idea that display techniques can *act* upon Chinese porcelain, making the object a medium through which multiple Self-Other configurations are expressed. Specifically, the display techniques that I focused on make various such covert processes visible: transculturation (dissolving the monolithic ideas of the Self and the Other from a transcultural/global perspective), appropriation (making objects from other cultures major contributors to Self-affirmation), differentiation (enhancing the conceptual boundaries between the Self and the Other), domestication (de-exoticizing the Other and re-identifying it as part of the Self), and exoticization (stereotyping and fetishizing images/objects of a given Other, identifying it as quite different from the Self). As mentioned in the introduction, the case studies presented here provide points of reference with which to assess the performativity of the ostensibly ideology-free china displays. The case studies showed us how a biographical approach to the porcelain display creates a transcultural narrative in association with today's reflection on (art) historical discourses; how the lighting and juxtaposition of Chinese porcelain and objects from other places changes the way china is perceived and identified; and how the collection history and the socio-political context of a porcelain collection are crucial for understanding the changing policies in display and interpretation imposed on the collection; in a word, the case studies together showed us the agency of display.

Showing Framing

The museum world is changing fast. During the several years that I have been writing this thesis, many changes have taken place just in the museums involved in my case studies. For example, since the end of 2015, the Rijksmuseum has been devoted to a critical assessment of the terminology it has used up until this point, trying to remove the digitalized titles and descriptions of some collections that are deemed to be racially offensive;[553] inspired by the experience of curating *Asia in Amsterdam*, the PEM opened its reinstalled Asian Export Art Gallery in 2019, with more emphasis on the moral costs behind the dazzling Asian export products; and the MET shared its anti-racism plan in 2020, after the outbreak of the Black Lives Matter protests;[554] These developments offer a glimpse of the rapidly changing museum world, which itself resonates with the wider transmutations underway in the present world. However, if one considers the scholarly efforts to de-naturalize the museum over the past few decades, efforts to reveal the institution's ideological dimension with such concepts as 'new museology' (1989), 'the discourse of the museum' (1996), 'the power of display' (1998), 'the agency of display' (1998), and 'performing museology' (2000), then perhaps the museum world is not changing so rapidly.[555]

Despite the fact that the performativity of display has been a recurrent motif in museum studies, the calculated, constructed nature of display remains largely off-stage in museum settings. In a general sense, the acts of framing behind the process of exhibition-making—the tension between salient and silent, included and excluded, and visible and invisible—are invisible in museums. For example, exhibition catalogues, which have long been an important medium for presenting pioneering art-historical studies, tend to present the displayed objects as they are, without referring to/documenting the design of the installations within which these objects are *framed*.[556] Images in catalogues often represent objects in an apparently *unframed* composition, instead of showing how these objects are actually staged in gallery spaces in relation to other objects. What is often overlooked here, and perhaps in other kinds of texts produced by museums (e.g. wall texts), is information about how objects are displayed to perform certain messages in line with certain ideological predispositions. Could this mean that museums in

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[553] See the Rijksmuseum's website 'Terminologie': https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/onderzoek/terminologie [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[554] See the MET's website "Our Commitments to Anti-Racism, Diversity, and a Stronger Community:" https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2020/the-mets-plans-for-anti-racism [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[555] Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989); Mieke Bal, "The Discourse of the Museum," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 145-157; Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum as Catalyst," Keynote speech presented at *Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge*, ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Museum Association and Swedish Travelling Exhibitions/Riksutställningar, September 29, 2000 at Vadstena, Sweden. Online at: https://www.coursehero.com/file/41546651/vadstenapdf/ [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[556] For more about the absence of frames (e.g. painting frames and architectural frames) in photographic reproductions of objects in museums' catalogues, and how this absence greatly changes the way we see and understand meanings of objects, see Barbara E. Savedoff, "Frames" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3 (1999): 345-356. For more about how art museums' exhibition catalogues contribute to propelling art-historical inquiry, see Bai Qianshen 白謙慎, "Yishushi yanjiu zhong de tulu—cong 'gudian de fuxing' tan qi" 藝術史研究中的圖錄—從《古典的復興》談起 [Catalogues in Art History Research—Talking from *Renaissance of Classics*], *Xin meishu* 新美術 [*Journal of the National Academy of Art*] 9, (2019): 21-30; see also Charles W. Haxthausen, ed., *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2002).

general still tend to view themselves as ideologically-neutral vehicles for the transmission of useful, and (seemingly) unmediated and incontrovertible information to their audiences? Could the display itself be displayed?[557]

This dissertation has endeavored to present the pervasive ideological framing in museums; even the most seemingly apolitical porcelain display can be made to evoke certain political overtones. It has sought to demonstrate that the manner of its display is the essential precondition enabling Chinese porcelain and the constellations it forms with other objects to express discursive meanings. Perhaps, if the museum indeed sees itself as a performative agency, or, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, "a technology in its own right—a set of skills, techniques, and methods," the institution can adopt a more reflexive and critical stance in relation to its own acts of framing, making arguments, and inviting interpretations.[558] In pursuing a critical and revisionist approach to art historical scholarship, Kitty Zijlmans proposes that "art history must be more willing to show its colours. […] it should expose the particular frame of reference that is being deployed and the concept of art that is implicitly present."[559] Similarly, as a unique medium, with its own narrative mechanism and performative quality, the museum can, presumably, provide audiences an opportunity to more critically and analytically engage with displayed objects and the display *per se*—it can show more actively and publicly, more of its underlying ideological colors, or, framing.

[557] The Amsterdam-based, Dutch contemporary art venue *Framer Framed* provides an interesting example to show how exhibition environment can become a dialogic platform that brings together curators, audiences, source communities, artists, and academics to rethink the role of art and the politics of curatorial practices and institutional frameworks. See the website of *Framer Framed*: https://framerframed.nl/en [Accessed January 20, 2021].

[558] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum as Catalyst." Similarly, Mieke Bal calls on museums to foreground their "metamuseal function" by showing their "ideological position of framing" to audiences. Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 579.

[559] Kitty Zijlmans, "Pushing Back Frontiers: Towards a History of Art in a Global Perspective," *International Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2003): 203.

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SUMMARY

This dissertation explores the performative qualities of the museum presentation of Chinese porcelain. It focuses specifically on the display of porcelain from the Ming and Qing dynasties in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period which is marked by intensified cultural interaction via overseas trade. This object-based approach enables, on the one hand, an intensive analysis of what different techniques of display do to the same kind of object, and on the other, a more extensive set of connections between the resulting effects and the institutional and socio-political contexts of different museums. This study explores the capability of porcelain display to generate a body of surplus meanings with ideological overtones beyond informational content and the underlying Self-Other configurations. It also investigates how certain effects that the display performs are connected with specific viewing experiences. To illustrate these issues, it presents six case studies and provides close readings of the narrative framings built around Chinese porcelain, as well as the spatial narratives constructed by the positioning of objects and specific viewing orders in gallery spaces. The first two case studies are semi-permanent displays in two prominent national museums: The British Museum in London and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Following these two cases are three high-profile temporary exhibitions: the co-curated exhibitions *Asia > Amsterdam* (2015-2016) at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* (2016) at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem; and *China: Through the Looking Glass* (2015) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The final case study is a national museum that, compared to the institutions of the previous case studies, has a more confrontational attitude towards Chinese heritage: The National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan.

These case studies are carefully chosen in order to propose points of reference that add to the existing literature on the interplay between the performativity of museum display and the changing meanings, values, and identities of objects on display. The multiple placements of Ming vases in the British Museum's China, India, and Europe galleries show how the transformation of the museum's narrative scheme and spatial configuration can yield new interpretations of objects. The Rijksmuseum case study demonstrates the importance of the museum's Chinese porcelain collection history and departmental organization in exploring the relationship between showing china and showing an ideal Dutch self-image. Comparing the way porcelain is presented in *Asia > Amsterdam* and *Asia in Amsterdam* exemplifies the importance of focalization, as both a narrative technique and an analytical tool, in probing the subjectivized viewing experience and the accompanying ideologies in the exhibitions. The analysis of *China: Through the Looking Glass*, including its catalogue's image layout, its object arrangement, and its installation design, reveals how techniques of display may produce effects that are quite the opposite of the exhibition's initial purpose. The National Palace Museum case study illustrates how the museum manages to respond to ever-changing Taiwanese views on the Chinese imperial collection through broadening its existing exhibition perspective and collection policy. By combining close readings of the meaning-producing aspects of the selected display schemes and conceptual tools from the fields of research that are relevant to underpin my readings, this study attempts to de-naturalize these ostensibly immediate and ideology-neutral porcelain displays and exhibitions.

Chapter 1, 'Trans-Bordering: The Trans-Border Arrangement of Ming Pilgrim Flasks and the Narrative of Transculturation in the British Museum', revolves around the concepts of trans-border arrangement, object biography, and transculturation, and their significance to a critical theme in the British Museum today: cultural connectivity. This chapter distinguishes narratives of the oneness of the world based on Enlightenment universality from a narrative of transculturation based on the global biographies of objects. In the British Museum, the narrative of transculturation is mapped out through trans-border arrangement. Trans-border arrangement represents, in museum space today, the historical circulation of material objects across cultural-geographical boundaries. It is conceived through categorizing and displaying objects based on their life histories—their transfer, gifting, collection, consumption, and appropriation—rather than just their places of origin. This display scheme closely parallels the concerns of the global turn in art history that blossomed in the late 1990s, and it prompts reconsideration of the metaphor of museum-as-map rooted in nineteenth-century imperialism and colonialism. This chapter explores how the combination of Ming pilgrim flasks with other objects in the museum's galleries dedicated to China, India, and Europe maps out an extensive circulation and exchange of things, styles, and techniques. It explains how this arrangement allows Ming flasks to be identified as not only Chinese but also Indian and European. The trans-border arrangement of the Ming pilgrim flasks in the British Museum provides a promising example, showing the potential of the museum to be a place where different narrative frameworks (chronological and synchronic, cultural and transcultural) can coexist and complement each other. It demonstrates how museum presentation can explore and redraw the existing boundaries of art-historical categorization through the application of a transcultural perspective, a perspective that entails a loosening or transcending of Self-Other boundaries.

Chapter 2, 'Self-Fashioning: The Multiple Values of Chinese Porcelain in the Rijksmuseum', traces the process through which the collection history of Chinese porcelain in the Rijksmuseum has attached multiple values to china. With archival photos and old gallery guides, this chapter shows how the museum's changing display schemes from the 1930s to today have given its fine collection of Chinese porcelain decorative, historical, aesthetic, art-historical, and symbolic values. For the Rijksmuseum, the 1930s was a significant time, marked by a major reconfiguration in terms of spatial organization and display perspective, which helped cultivate a clear narrative of Dutch national development. This reconfiguration also marked the beginning of appropriating Chinese porcelain into a token of Dutch civic pride and national prestige. Drawing on the idea that collecting and possessing objects can act as a strategy for constructing selves as owners, this chapter demonstrates the incorporation of Chinese porcelain in Dutch self-fashioning with specific reference to two schemes of juxtaposition that are seen in the museum of the twentieth century and today: Dutch portraits and Chinese porcelain; and Dutch mapped landscapes and Chinese porcelain. This chapter also discusses how the separation of today's Asian Pavilion—an annex of the Rijksmuseum—from the museum's main building, as well as their contrasting architectural and interior styles, inevitably produces a spatial narrative that raises an awareness of difference.

Chapter 3, 'Focalization: Comparison of the Exhibition Narratives of *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the Peabody Essex Museum', reveals how these two co-organized exhibitions, which sought to present the transformative impacts of Asian luxuries on Dutch styles of life

and artistic creation in the seventeenth century, highlight different messages partly because of their distinctive use of focalization. Focalization, as both a narrative technique and an analytical tool notably used in literary and visual narratology, enables a better understanding of the communicative conception of vision in a narrative. In particular, this chapter draws on the cultural theorist Mieke Bal's focalization theory to propose that an instance of internal focalization is found in the gallery of *Asia > Amsterdam* where Chinese porcelain is combined with Dutch still-life paintings. This scheme of juxtaposition, plus a specific viewing order between them, promotes an embodied viewing experience which is filtered by the subjective sensory impressions of the Dutch artists: a viewing experience that draws audiences to see the visual and material qualities of porcelain as if through the eyes of Dutch artists. Compared to such a Dutch-grounded internal focalization, *Asia in Amsterdam* at the PEM tends to employ external focalization in an attempt to provide its audiences a less Dutch-centric narrative, allowing audiences to see both the flourishing of the Dutch East India Company's Dutch-Asian trade and the accompanying human cost. The concept of focalization enables this chapter to articulate the underlying narrative of the Dutch domestication of Asian goods in the Rijksmuseum's *Asia > Amsterdam* exhibition: that is, a process of re-identification in which *they* (Asian material objects) were gradually embedded in *our* (Dutch) material culture; ultimately, *they* have become part of *us*. Such a message, comparatively, is not so evident in its twin exhibition, *Asia in Amsterdam*, at the PEM.

Chapter 4, 'Fetishization: Stereotypes and Exoticism in *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art', shows how the exhibition's display techniques may backfire, undermining its intention of deconstructing Orientalism. This chapter explores the ideological reach of the exhibition by analyzing the framing and layout of images in its catalogue and the arrangement of objects in its galleries. The exhibition fascinates audiences' eyes with combinations of Chinese objects (including blue and white porcelain) and haute couture. These groupings are not necessarily based on designers' ideas, but are instead the curators' invention. The installation design transforms, or reduces, the Chinese objects on display into a set of "fetishized surfaces"—a term borrowed from the art historian Kobena Mercer—given the power to evoke exoticism. From this perspective, the exhibition maintains, if not intensifies, a fixed Self-Other boundary where China, as a cultural Other subjected to the Orientalist imagination, is readily mysterious, erotic, and effeminized. Additionally, an Orientalist stereotype is engendered in the exhibition through feminine gender-coding of china and China (as a cultural entity). Drawing on the historical connection between Chinese porcelain and femininity, widely explored by art historians and literary scholars, this chapter gives a metonymic reading of the object layout in the exhibition's Chinese porcelain gallery to reveal the implied gender-coding, in which porcelain becomes a metonym for female skin and flesh.

Chapter 5, 'Repositioning: The Politics of Identity as Constructed by the National Palace Museum in Taiwan', analyzes the multiple configurations of the Self and the Other suggested in the museum's semi-permanent displays and temporary exhibitions in terms of transfer and transformation. The transfer referred to is the transfer of the Qing imperial collection from mainland China to Taiwan between late 1948 and early 1949, following the second Chinese Civil War (1946-1950) between Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government and Mao Zedong's Communists. The relocation of the imperial collection served to denote the relocation of political legitimacy. The transformation referred to is the museum's shifting

self-positioning based on changing political frameworks: from the international situation during the Cold War in the second half of the twentieth century to the complex contemporary relationship between China and Taiwan. Focusing on some recent exhibitions at the National Palace Museum (NPM) and its southern branch (NPMSB), this chapter explains how the changing perspectives of showing the Qing imperial (porcelain) collection in the NPM and the NPMSB—from a Sinocentric perspective towards a pan-Asian interregional framework—correspond to the dynamic political relationship between China and Taiwan, shifting from the mid-twentieth century up to today. This chapter ends by proposing that a monolithic conception of both Chinese and Taiwanese identity is ineffective in addressing the issue of how to (re)interpret the NPM's collection in ways that could enrich its meaning and deepen its connection with Taiwan. Rather, it argues that broadening the scope of exhibitions to include more diverse perspectives and explore cultural exchange is a fruitful approach to making the most of the museum's collection today.

The conclusion recapitulates the complex ideological aspects explored in the previous case studies. It outlines possible areas for future research on the performativity of museum display, and demonstrates the importance of museums encouraging more critical and analytical engagements with displayed objects and display *per se* by foregrounding their acts of framing.

SAMENVATTING

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de performatieve aspecten van museale presentatie van Chinees porselein. Het richt zich specifiek op het tentoonstellen van porselein uit de Ming en Qing-dynastieën in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, een periode die wordt gekenmerkt door toenemende culturele interactie via overzeese handel. Deze object-gerichte benadering is gebaseerd op een uitgebreide analyse, waarin wordt besproken hoe verschillende tentoonstellingstechnieken hetzelfde object kaderen. Ook laat het duidelijk de verbanden zien tussen de beoogde effecten van die kaderingen en de institutionele en sociaal-politieke contexten van de verschillende musea. Dit onderzoek bestudeert hoe tentoongesteld porselein ideologisch beladen betekenissen genereert; deze betekenissen gaan verder dan de informatieve inhoud en onthullen onderliggende Zelf-Ander configuraties. Dit argument wordt aanschouwelijk gemaakt aan de hand van zes casussen. Het onderzoek biedt een nauwkeurige analyse van de narratieve kaders aangaande het porselein, de ruimtelijke verhalen die worden geconstrueerd door de plaatsing van objecten en de specifieke kijkvolgorde in galerieruimtes. Deze casussen zijn zorgvuldig gekozen en thematiseren aspecten over de wisselwerking tussen performatieve tentoonstellingen en de verschuivende betekenissen, waarden en identiteiten van tentoongestelde objecten; hiermee wordt ook de bestaande literatuur aangevuld en verdiept. Het onderzoek beoogt betekenis te geven aan de schijnbaar neutrale porseleintentoonstellingen door een diepgaande analyse van betekenis-producerende tentoonstellingstechnieken te onderbouwen met een conceptueel begrippenapparaat uit relevante onderzoeksgebieden.

Hoofdstuk 1, 'Trans-Bordering: The Trans-Border Arrangement of Ming Pilgrim Flasks and the Narrative of Transculturation in the British Museum', betreft de concepten 'transborder arrangement,' 'de biografie van het object,' en 'transculturaliteit,' en wat deze concepten betekenen voor culturele verbindingen – een kritisch thema in het hedendaagse British Museum. Dit hoofdstuk maakt een onderscheid tussen verhalen over de vermeende eenheid van de wereld, gebaseerd op het universalisme volgens de Verlichting, en verhalen over transculturaliteit gebaseerd op de mondiale biografieën van objecten. In het British Museum wordt het verhaal over transculturaliteit aanschouwelijk gemaakt door een 'grensoverschrijdende rangschikking': de objecten worden gecategoriseerd en tentoongesteld op basis van hun biografie (dus hun 'reis' door tijd en plaats), en niet slechts op basis van hun plek van herkomst. Deze tentoonstellingsvorm reflecteert de thema's die geassocieerd worden met het mondiale perspectief in de kunstgeschiedenis, dat eind jaren negentig van de twintigste eeuw tot bloei kwam. Ook bevraagt deze aanpak de metafoor van het 'museum-als-routekaart', een idee dat is geworteld in negentiende-eeuws imperialisme en kolonialisme. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien hoe een uitgebreide circulatie en uitwisseling van dingen, stijlen en technieken in kaart worden gebracht door de Ming-pilgrimflessen te combineren met andere objecten tentoongesteld in de galerijen over China, India en Europa. Zo wordt het mogelijk om Ming-porselein niet alleen te zien als Chinees, maar ook als Indiaas en Europees. Deze 'grensoverschrijdende rangschikking' laat zien dat het museum een plek kan zijn waar verschillende narratieve kaders (chronologisch en synchroon, cultureel en transcultureel) naast elkaar kunnen bestaan en elkaar kunnen aanvullen. Deze ordening illustreert ook hoe museale presentatie de bestaande grenzen

van kunsthistorische categorisering kan verleggen door de toepassing van een transcultureel perspectief—een perspectief dat leidt tot een versoepeling of overstijging van de grenzen tussen Zelf en Ander.

Hoofdstuk 2, 'Self-Fashioning: The Multiple Values of Chinese Porcelain in the Rijksmuseum,' beschrijft het proces waarin de collectiegeschiedenis van Chinees porselein in het Rijksmuseum Amsterdam meerdere betekenissen aan het porselein heeft toegeschreven. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien hoe de veranderende tentoonstellingstechnieken vanaf de jaren dertig van de twintigste eeuw tot nu van de bijzondere collectie Chinees porselein hebben geleid tot het toekennen van allerlei decoratieve, historische, esthetische, kunsthistorische en symbolische betekenissen. De periode 1930-1939 was een belangrijke tijd voor het Rijksmuseum. Deze periode wordt gekenmerkt door een belangwekkende herindeling van de ruimtelijke organisatie en het perspectief, waarmee een samenhangend verhaal over de ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse natie werd nagestreefd. Deze herindeling markeerde ook het begin van het toe-eigenen en interpreteren van Chinees porselein als een symbool van Nederlandse burgertrots en nationaal prestige. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien hoe Chinees porselein in de Nederlandse zelfpresentatie is opgenomen, en verwijst specifiek naar twee vormen van het tegenover elkaar plaatsen van objecten. Beide vormen zijn te zien in het museum, zowel toen als nu: Nederlandse portretten en Chinees porselein, en Nederlandse landschappen en Chinees porselein. Dit hoofdstuk bespreekt ook hoe de scheiding tussen het hoofdgebouw van het Rijksmuseum en het huidige Aziatisch paviljoen (een bijgebouw), evenals hun contrasterende architectuur- en interieurstijlen, onvermijdelijk een (ruimtelijk) verhaal produceert dat een besef van verschil oproept.

Hoofdstuk 3, 'Focalization: Comparison of the Exhibition Narratives of *Asia > Amsterdam* at the Rijksmuseum and *Asia in Amsterdam* at the Peabody Essex Museum', onthult hoe deze twee gelijktijdig georganiseerde tentoonstellingen een verschillende boodschap hebben, mede door hun typisch gebruik van *focalisatie*. In beide tentoonstellingen wordt getracht om de diepgaande invloed van Aziatische luxegoederen op Nederlandse levensstijlen en zeventiende-eeuwse artistieke creaties te tonen. Een vergelijking tussen de manier waarop porselein wordt gepresenteerd in *Asia > Amsterdam* en *Asia in Amsterdam* illustreert het belang van focalisatie als verteltechniek en analytische methode in het onderzoek naar de subjectieve kijkervaring. Het focalisatieconcept stelt ons in staat om het onderliggende verhaal over de Nederlandse domesticatie van Aziatische goederen in *Asia > Amsterdam* te bespreken: dat wil zeggen, een proces van heridentificatie waarin *zij* (Aziatische, materiële objecten) geleidelijk werden opgenomen in *onze* (Nederlandse) materiële cultuur; uiteindelijk zijn *zij* een deel geworden van *ons*. Deze boodschap is minder duidelijk aanwezig in PEM's tweelingtentoonstelling *Asia in Amsterdam*.

Hoofdstuk 4, 'Fetishization: Stereotypes and Exoticism in *China: Through the Looking Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art', illustreert hoe tentoonstellingstechnieken een averechts effect kunnen hebben en de intentie om het oriëntalisme te bekritiseren juist ondermijnen. Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt het ideologische bereik van de tentoonstelling door de analyse van de lay-out van de catalogus en de manier waarop de objecten daarin zijn opgenomen, evenals de rangschikking van objecten in de galerieën. De tentoonstelling verleidt het publiek met combinaties van Chinese objecten (waaronder porselein) en *haute couture* om te laten zien hoe het eerste het laatste inspireert. Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt de ideologische nuances van zo'n tegenover elkaar plaatsing en beargumenteert dat het

tentoonstellingsontwerp weliswaar visueel boeiend is, maar ook porselein en China (als een cultureel gegeven) feminiseert en tot fetisj maakt. Op die manier bewerkstelligt het tentoonstellingsontwerp juist een oriëntaalse Zelf-Ander tweedeling.

Hoofdstuk 5, 'Repositioning: The Politics of Identity as Constructed by the National Palace Museum in Taiwan', analyseert de verschillende Zelf-Ander configuraties in de displays en communicatie over de overdracht van de objecten van China naar Taiwan. Deze configuraties zijn impliciet aanwezig in de semi-permanente en tijdelijke tentoonstellingen van het museum. De genoemde overdracht betreft de verplaatsing van de keizerlijke Qing-collectie van het Chinese vasteland naar Taiwan. Dit vond plaats tussen eind 1948 en begin 1949 na de Tweede Chinese burgeroorlog (1946-1950) tussen de nationalistische regering van Chiang Kai-Shek en de communistische van Mao Zedong. De verhuizing van de keizerlijke collectie symboliseerde ook de verschuiving van politieke legitimiteit. In die transitie zien we ook de identiteit van het museum veranderen als gevolg van de veranderende politieke kaders: van de internationale situatie tijdens de Koude Oorlog in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw naar de complexe hedendaagse relatie tussen China en Taiwan. Dit hoofdstuk legt de focus op enkele recente tentoonstellingen van het National Palace Museum (NPM) en zijn dependance in het zuiden van het land (NPMSB). Dit hoofdstuk legt ook uit hoe het tentoonstellen van de keizerlijke Qing-collectie (porselein) in het NPM en het NPMSB – verschuivend van een sinocentrisch naar een pan-Aziatisch interregionaal perspectief, en van het midden van de twintigste eeuw naar nu – parallel verloopt aan de dynamische, politieke relatie tussen China en Taiwan.

In de conclusie worden de ideologische dimensies die in de bovengenoemde casussen zijn onderzocht nog eens langsgelopen en worden aanbevelingen gedaan voor mogelijk toekomstig onderzoek naar de performativiteit van museum-display. Ook wordt het belang benadrukt van musea die een kritischer en analytischer engagement stimuleren met zowel de tentoongestelde objecten als de display zelf, door hun manieren van '*framen*' meer op de voorgrond te stellen.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Pao-Yi Yang (Kaohsiung, 1988) holds a bachelor's degree in Chinese literature from the National Central University, Taiwan, where she was awarded a Merit Scholarship and several alumni scholarships. Yang obtained a master's degree in Chinese literature at the National Taiwan University in 2013. Her master's thesis, "On the Relationship between Writing Culture and Script Structure of the Chu Bamboo Slips in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC)," analyzed diachronic changes in styles and structures of the Chinese Chu bamboo-slip characters during different stages of the Warring States Period. Between 2006 and 2013, Yang received several awards, including the Research Creativity Award from the National Science Council in Taiwan and the Phi Tau Phi Scholastic Honor Society of the Republic China (Taiwan). She acted as a teaching assistant for classes on Chinese Paleography at the National Taiwan University in 2011, and a year later worked as research assistant in the Department of Painting and Calligraphy at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan. Additionally, she worked with publishers to help edit and translate novels and texts on Chinese history and literature. In 2014, Yang received the Taiwan Government Scholarship to Study Abroad and started her Ph.D. on the museum display of Chinese porcelain at Leiden University. During her Ph.D., Yang published essays and reviews on Chinese art, museum histories, and exhibition designs in peer-reviewed journals and magazines including *Journal of Museum and Society* and *Curator: The Museum Journal*. She also translated curatorial articles in the catalogue of the ARTFEM II, *Natura*, Women Artists 2nd International Biennial of Macau SAR in 2020. Broadly, Yang's research interests include the museum presentation of Chinese objects, museum histories as reflected in changing display strategies, and the interplay between exhibition narratives and viewing experiences.

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